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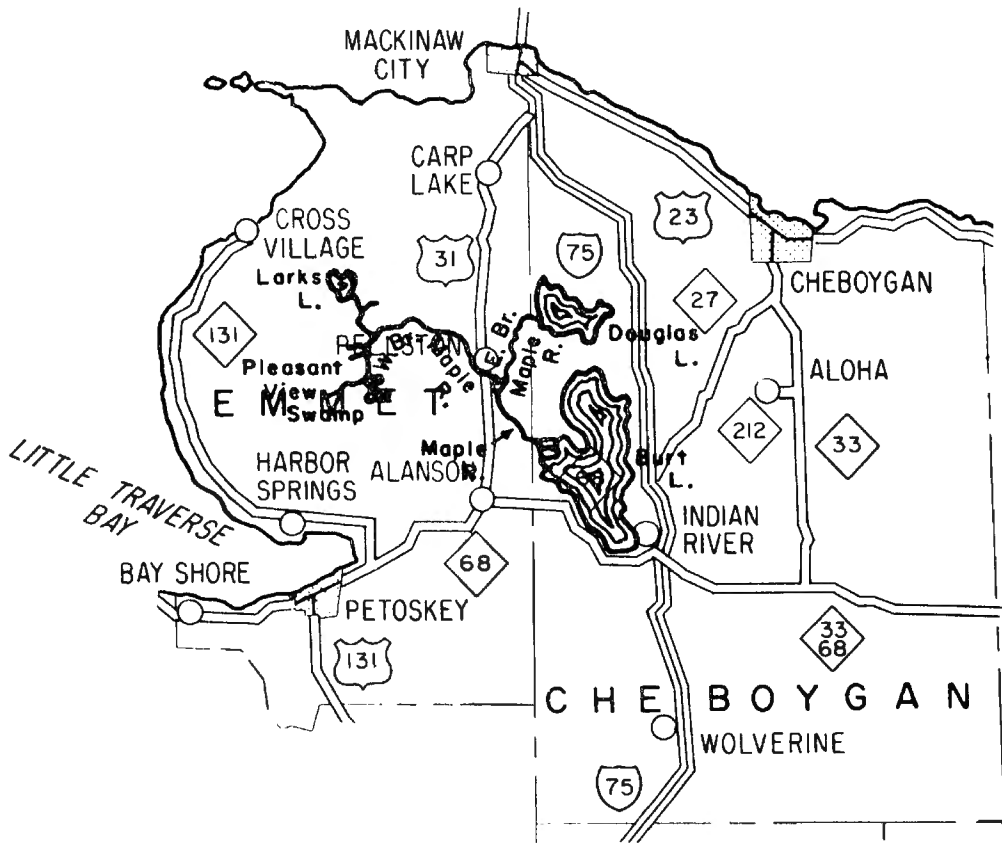
SERIES: THE TROUT STREAMS OF MICHIGAN

NO. 2 THE MAPLE RIVER

William J. Mullendore, Special Assistant For Public Affairs

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One of the northern Lower Peninsula's better brook trout streams, the West Branch of the Maple River originates as the outlet of several small pothole lakes in the Pleasantview Swamp area of Emmet County. Augmented by several small tributary creeks, it meanders southeastward to cross Highway US-31 south of Pellston. Half a mile east of the highway, it is joined by the East Branch (the outlet of Douglas Lake), and from there the mainstream flows on down into Burt Lake.

A 60-acre impoundment just below the junction of the two branches marks the lower limit of the high quality brook trout water on the West Branch. The privately-owned impoundment holds a mixture of stocked rainbow trout and warmwater fish. The East Branch is marginal for trout, offering some fishing in spring and fall but dropping off during the summer when the source water from Douglas Lake warms up.

The lower mainstream at one time provided good fishing for brown trout and for spring and fall migrations of rainbows from Burt Lake. In recent years, however, this stretch has become badly silted and sanded from several ill-advised private development projects, and the fishing has deteriorated. Complicating the problem is a swampy delta at the Burt Lake mouth, where the river spreads into many small shallow channels which many believe discourage rainbow runs from the lake except in years of high water. Past attempts by stream improvement crews to confine the river to a single deep channel failed when spring floods washed out the structures. Dredging has been suggested recently as one possibility to create a permanent channel.

The West Branch of the Maple, where the good brook trout fishing is to be found, winds along a course of alternating swamp, farmland, and forest country. The bottom is generally sandy with stretches of gravel and some mucky spots which can give trouble to an unwary wader. Width varies from 20 to 40 feet, and depth is surprising with many holes five feet or more deep. Current is generally slow. Most portions can be canoed, albeit with difficulty.

Streamside brush challenges fly-fishermen on most of the West Branch, but the skillful fly-rodder who is patient, picks his spots and doesn't mind occasional hang-ups in the trees can get in his licks. However, at least 75 percent of the total fishing effort is exerted by early-season wormers and spin-fishermen. Angling pressure drops off sharply by mid-summer, although good catches can be made until season's end by the angler who knows the river, its trout, and the techniques required to take them.

Brook trout up to three pounds have been caught in the Maple but fish of that size are, of course, extremely rare. A 13-incher

is a bragging brookie for the stream and the average "keeper" runs about 8 inches. There are enough good-sized trout in the stream, however, that a conservation-minded angler can self-impose a 10-inch minimum size limit and reasonably hope to bring in at least a couple of fish on most days.

The West Branch of the Maple is peaceful, scenic, and fun to fish if you don't mind coping with brush. However, portions of it are beginning to show damage from large-scale beef cattle grazing which is developing into a major agricultural industry in the watershed. The animals trample the banks, destroy streamside vegetation, and provide a source of enrichment which is manifested in increasingly lush growth of water weeds. In the minds of many who fish the Maple, this threat is much more serious and immediate than the possibility of pollution from oil drilling which has recently been raised in the public mind. Steps should be taken soon to fence cattle away from this fine little river.