Maine Rivers:

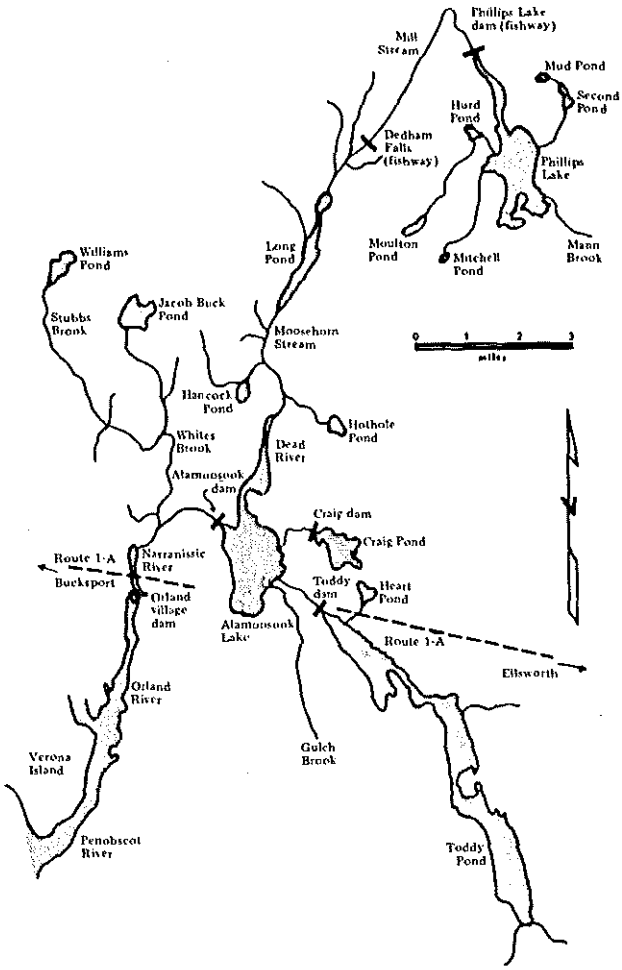
THE ORLAND

By Ron Brokaw
Assistant Regional Fishery Biologist

THE ORLAND RIVER drains about 113 square miles of forest and agricultural land in Hancock County. The west branch of the drainage, originating at the Mill Stream outlet of Phillips Lake, flows about 11 miles before joining the east branch from Toddy Pond at Alamoosook Lake. The Orland River (also called the Narramissic at this section) then flows several miles from the outlet at Alamoosook to tidewater at the village of Orland. Approximately 3 miles further downstream, the Orland joins the eastern channel of the Penobscot River near Verona Island.

One of the more notable features of the Orland River drainage is the high quality commercial alewife fishery that has existed for many years at Orland. Some town records pertinent to alewives date back to the period from 1905-1910. Records maintained by the Department of Marine Resources dating to 1949 reveal that the peak catch at Orland occurred in 1951 when 1,246,120 pounds of alewives (representing 36 per cent of the statewide catch) were landed. In recent years, the catch at Orland has generally ranked among the top 3 in the state. In the 6 year period from 1971 to 1976, commercial alewife landings at Orland averaged 412,580 pounds with a dollar value ranging from $4,600 to $27,000. The Orland River catch averaged 15 per cent of the total statewide landings during this period. The first group of stragglers usually arrives in Orland in late April. During most years, the run peaks between May 7-May 14. Those adult alewives, which are allowed to continue their journey up-river to perpetuate the run, spawn primarily in Toddy Pond and Alamoosook Lake.

Another feature of the drainage is the presence of the Craig Brook National Fish Hatchery on the shores of Alamoosook Lake. This hatchery is a major producer of young Atlantic salmon. Each year, adult Atlantic salmon captured in fishway traps on several rivers in Maine are transported to Craig Brook where



they are stripped. The fertilized eggs hatch and grow into smolts which are subsequently stocked in a number of Maine rivers to supplement the runs of wild salmon.

No rainbow trout or largemouth bass are present in any waters of the drainage. A person looking for a wilderness trout pond type of angling experience should go elsewhere. None of the streams or rivers offer any significant white-water canoeing opportunities. Now that these "negatives" have been mentioned, it is time to devote our attention to some of the attributes of the Orland River drainage. Perhaps the best manner to accomplish this is to discuss briefly the fisheries and other recreational opportunities afforded by the more prominent waters of the region.

ALAMOOSOOK LAKE in Orland provides good habitat for smallmouth bass and white perch. Juvenile alewives constitute a good forage fish for these two species in the summer and early fall months. Some hefty brown trout in the two to four pound class are occasionally caught in the lake, and both brown trout and brook trout exist in several tributaries.

Scenic Craig Pond in Orland provides excellent

NOTE: Some information in this article was obtained from the report, *Orland River Drainage (1956)* by Keith A. Havey, former regional fishery biologist for the Grand Lakes Region.

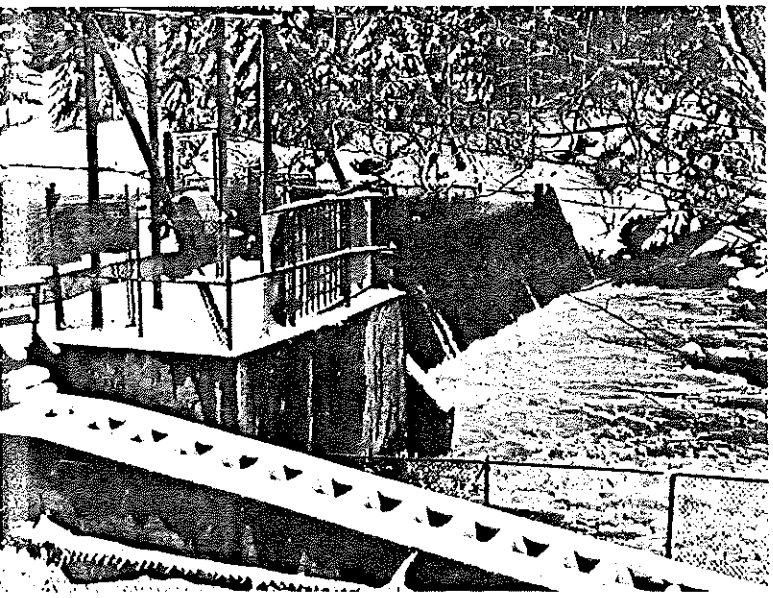
Gene Bouchard of Penobscot with a nice brown trout caught at Heart Pond, Orland, on the next to last day of the 1977 ice fishing season.

habitat for cold-water game fish. Most of the pond is quite deep, but even the deepest section contains plenty of dissolved oxygen so critical to the well-being of fish such as trout, salmon, and togue. A limited fishery for good size wild togue (most fish creeled weigh in excess of five pounds) exists along with sporadic fisheries for salmon and brook trout. The latter two fisheries are dependent upon stocking programs conducted by the federal hatchery system. The Craig Brook National Fish Hatchery obtains its water supply from this pond. During the summer, a popular public beach and swimming area attracts sun worshippers and swimmers.

Heart Pond in Orland is presently managed for brown trout. An experimental brown trout stocking program was initiated in 1971. Returns to anglers thus far have been spotty, but a number of 15 to 20 inch specimens have graced anglers' creels. Although the pond is quite small (only 73 acres), it contains some water that is 69 feet deep. A highly unusual characteristic of this pond is the presence of a small, wild, togue population. Togue generally inhabit considerably larger bodies of water. Some salmon are caught from time to time.

Jacob Buck Pond in Bucksport is presently managed for landlocked salmon. This species was originally planted in 1971, and some good salmon fishing ensued in the following years. However, recent data collected by netting and a winter creel census conducted by Mr. Stephen Smith of Bucksport indicate that the growth rate of the stocked salmon has significantly declined. Only 36 per cent of the salmon observed during the 1976 census were of legal size. The census revealed that white perch and pickerel were the dominant species caught by anglers. The stocking rate will be reduced from 500 fall yearling salmon to 250 commencing in the fall of 1977 in an attempt to improve salmon growth to an acceptable level. It is hoped that such a step will ultimately provide a better fishery for salmon.

Moulton Pond in Dedham contains suitable habitat for trout. This pond was reclaimed in 1966 and produced some good brook trout fishing in the following years. A number of complaints were received in the early 1970s concerning the deteriorating trout fishery. Check netting by fishery biologists in 1973 verified the presence of four additional species. Tremendous numbers of stunted white perch from four to six inches were observed. This discovery prompted the decision to terminate brook trout stocking.



Dam and fishway at the outlet of Alamoosook Lake, Orland River.

PHILLIPS LAKE in Dedham is one of the two most prominent and popular bodies of water in the drainage. This lake has one of the most heavily developed shorelines in the Grand Lakes Region. Clear water and the lake's proximity to the Bangor-Brewer area make it an attractive spot for summer recreationists. Swimming, water skiing, and picnicking on several islands are popular warm weather pursuits of campowners and visitors.

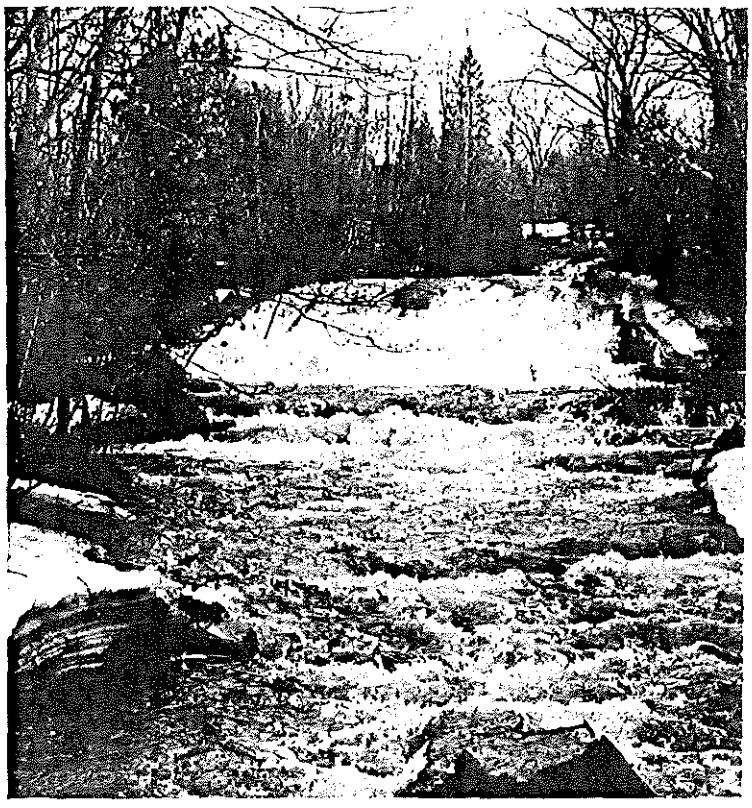
Unfortunately, the quality of salmon and togue angling in Phillips Lake has drastically declined in recent years. Numerous complaints from concerned anglers prompted a resurvey (still in progress) of the lake in 1975 and 1976 to determine the current status of the various fish populations. Intensive netting verified the legitimacy of angler complaints, as very few cold-water game fish and smelts were collected. Available information indicates that the smelt population has declined to an extremely low level. The paucity of this critical forage species is a principal factor in the poor growth rate exhibited by stocked salmon and togue. Another negative factor which has contributed to the decline in the cold-water sport fishery is the increasing abundance of smallmouth bass. These fish will prey on stocked salmon, thereby adversely affecting survival rates.

Fishery biologists have initiated two management procedures at Phillips Lake in an effort to improve the salmon fishery. Smelt eggs were stocked in the spring of 1976 (at least two additional stockings are planned) in an attempt to help the smelt population "bounce back." Also, instead of stocking 2,500 4-to-6-inch spring yearling salmon, 850 6-to-8-inch fall yearling salmon will be released beginning in 1978. It is hoped that the larger fish will be more able to withstand pickerel and bass predation. Anglers wishing to co-operate with the Department by reporting catches of marked salmon and togue are urged to write to the Fish and Wildlife Office on Water Street in Machias for further information. Voluntary census information supplied by co-operative fishermen is frequently a valuable asset to the fishery manager.

Toddy Pond is the other principal recreational area within the drainage. This long, narrow body of water sprawls over parts of four towns in western Hancock County. It provides significant fisheries for salmon, togue, smallmouth bass, and white perch. An occasional trophy brown trout is creeled. The majority of cold-water fish are captured in the northern basin or "Upper Toddy," as this is where the deep water is located. Both "Middle and Lower Toddy" are relatively shallow with virtually no water more than 30 feet deep. The pond supports a good bass population with a fair percentage of the sporty bronzebacks weighing in the 1½-to-2½-pound bracket. Anglers who concentrate on catching a stringer of delicious white perch for the dinner table frequently meet with success. All in all, Toddy Pond is currently providing good angling opportunities for both the deep-water lead line troller and the spin caster or bait fisherman.

A NUMBER OF brooks, streams, and beaver flowages within the drainage contain the usual complement of native brook trout. Gulch Brook, a tributary to Alamoosook Lake, supports both brook and brown trout. In the Orland River itself, downstream from the dam at the outlet of Alamoosook, some nice brown trout from 1½ to 3 pounds are occasionally brought to the landing net. Most of these fish are probably "drop-downs" from either Toddy or Alamoosook although it is possible that a small, sea-run brown trout fishery may still exist. Some sea-run brown trout were captured coincidentally with alewives in the 1950s and 1960s.

While the Orland River drainage can not lay claim to any unique or particularly outstanding characteristics (other than its commercial alewife fishery), it nevertheless does provide the angler with a varied array of lakes, ponds, brooks and streams in which to wet a fly or dunk a worm. The absence of any significant industry or large population centers bodes well for the continued pollution-free nature of the drainage. With a little bit of searching, one is sure to find some spot within the drainage that will satisfy about any angling appetite. ■



Mill Stream, the outlet of Phillips Lake, just below Route 46 in Dedham.