

## Trout stream shored up

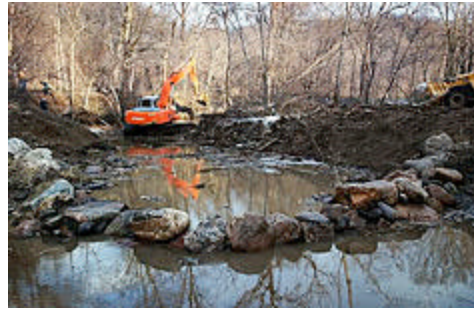
By John Cross

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In south-central Minnesota, there are acres of lakes and miles of river where one can wet a line for panfish, catfish, walleye, bass and northern.

But the places you can wet a line for trout? In corn and soybean country, waters cold enough, clear enough to support trout can be measured in mere feet.



**John Cross**

A backhoe works downstream from a rock cross vein that was constructed as part of an erosion control/trout habitat improvement project on sections of Seven Mile Creek that run through the Nicollet County park of the same name.

Seven Mile Creek midway between St. Peter and North Mankato is a good example. The tiny creek that meanders through the Nicollet County park of the same name has been designated as a trout stream since the mid-1980s. The stream is stocked annually with fingerling brown trout by the Department of Natural Resources.

By stocking fingerlings instead of adults, by the time the trout reach catchable size, they are close to a wild and wary trout that one is going to find in southern Minnesota.

And while the stream wanders through two miles or so of countryside, it is the final 2,000 feet of the creek's life before it empties into the Minnesota River where natural springs provide the necessary cold water and habitat to support finicky brown trout.

And even that habitat in that stretch was less than ideal. "Because of the bank erosion in some areas, trout habitat quality was moderate at best," said Own Baird, a fisheries specialist with the DNR's Fisheries Division.

Moderate habitat notwithstanding, electro-fishing the unassuming little creek earlier this fall produced some impressive results. In less than a 1,000 feet of stream, more than 130 brown trout ranging from 3 to 12 inches and a handful of larger fish were captured.

Recent improvements to a section of the stream that were completed this week promise to prevent further erosion damage during high-water periods and improvements to trout habitat.

"Instead of just rip-rapping the stream, we tried to tie in trout habitat improvements with erosion control ... piggy-backing the two projects into one," said Kevin Kuehner, project coordinator for the Brown, Nicollet and Cottonwood counties Clean Water Partnership.

"There is a lot of public access to the site," Kuehner said. "We hope to include interpretive trails ... let it be a demonstration project for other counties to see."

Funding for the project that will cost from \$15,000 to \$20,000 comes from the sale of the DNR's Trout and Salmon stamp required of all trout and salmon anglers, the Clean Water Partnership and mitigation money received by Nicollet County from the Alliance Pipeline project.

Improvements to about 700 feet of stream include the regrading and sloping of stream banks and the construction of three "j-hook weirs" and "rock cross vanes" - water-control structures that will redirect water from stream banks along with creating better trout habitat.

Rip-rapping typically costs \$50-\$100 a linear foot; the limited approach of strategically located water-control structures used on Seven Mile Creek came out to about \$15 a linear foot.

The structures were constructed of 117 tons of boulders that were removed from a Mankato street construction project this past summer. The availability of the natural stones was fortuitous, Baird said, because they look more natural than the locally available red quartzite typically used for conventional rip-rapping.

The result, Baird said, has been the improvement of fish habitat in the three pools that previously existed within the park. Water swirling around the five newly created rock water-control structures during high-water periods eventually will scour out additional pools as well.

The last boulders were put into place by heavy equipment on Monday and remaining work to establish streamside vegetation will continue next spring.

Baird said initial streamside revegetation efforts will include grasses, but trees such as basswoods also will be planted to eventually provide shaded seclusion in the tiny stream for wary brown trout.

Or to snatch the backcast of unsuspecting trout anglers.

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