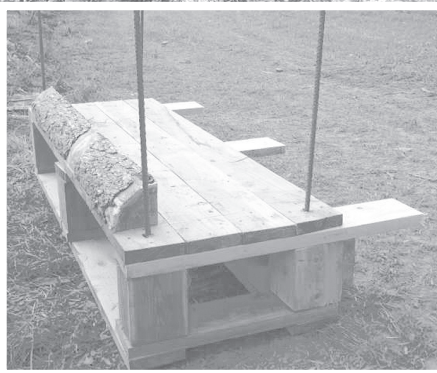




Lunkers are lined up along the creekbank, weighted down with rocks and ready to be covered. A total of 57 lunkers were placed. Inset: A lunker ready to go, complete with rebar to hold it down. Each creates an artificial undercut bank to serve as habitat for adult trout.



Habitat improvement project completed on North Wiscoy

Better trout habitat and more stream access makes a win-win situation for fishermen

Since the 1920s, Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) fish population studies all had the same recommendations for the North branch of Wiscoy Creek — “purchase public access and improve habitat for adult trout.” In July of this year they were finally able to do just that.

According to Region 9 Fishery Biologist Scott Cornett, a \$38,000 grant from the Great Lakes Habitat Restoration Initiative, and in-kind services performed by many other entities, enabled stream work on a 2,100-foot section of the creek that sits at the Eagle and Wethersfield town line off Route 362 in Bliss.

Most anglers are familiar with fishing the South end of the Wiscoy, where trout habitat improvement projects took place in years gone by, and stocking is not needed due to sufficient natural reproduction. The North branch, where plenty of wild brown trout reproduce naturally, has not been stocked in at least 50 years.

The goal of this project was to substantially increase the habitat for adult trout on the North Branch, reduce the amount of stream dominated by alder, improve anglers’ ability to fish the stream, and begin the process of reforesting the stream bank areas.

In this 2,100-foot section of the stream, electro-fishing surveys had collected 451 yearling and older wild brown trout, yielding an adult trout population estimate of 471 trout (1,183 per mile) within the section. The vast majority of these fish were yearling trout, with very low numbers of larger fish. Just a quarter-mile upstream, where a private landowner had done extensive habitat improvement work (permitted by the DEC), they found 6,475 yearling and older wild brown trout per mile — six times the abundance within the future habitat improvement section.

The improvement project began with the planting of

1,100 shade trees provided by the DEC tree nursery in Saratoga. Then crib-type structures called “lunkers” were anchored along the stream banks, held in place by rebar. The areas where the structures were deepened to approximately two feet, and the stream width was narrowed by up to a third of its original distance. A new stream bank was then constructed over the top of the lunker to create an artificial undercut bank. A total of 57 lunkers were installed, creating over 450 feet of overhead trout cover.

Some additional cover will be installed in coming weeks and hundreds of shade trees were be planted there next spring. The project’s effectiveness will be evaluated in upcoming years, as it is expected that it will take several years for the trout population to reach its full potential there.

A footpath easement from Route 362 to the stream can be used to fish this section. Cornett reminds readers that maps of public fishing areas for the North Branch, main Wiscoy Creek and Trout Brook can be found on the DEC website, [dec.ny.gov / docs/fish_marine_pdf/wiscoy.pdf](http://dec.ny.gov/docs/fish_marine_pdf/wiscoy.pdf).

A cooperative project by DEC, USFWS, Wyoming County Soil and Water Conservation District and Trout Unlimited, with over 600 man-hours of volunteer time committed to the project, Cornett says the volunteers made all the difference.

“We absolutely could not have pulled it off without the help of dozens of people volunteering in many capacities,” he said. “Thanks to their help, we were able to complete the construction in the allotted two weeks in spite of the heat.”



DEC Fishery Biologist Scott Cornett credits volunteers for the swift completion of the project. The fishing organization Trout Unlimited alone provided over 600 man-hours of volunteer labor.



Hundreds of shade trees will be planted next Spring to finalize the project. It is expected that it will take several years for the trout population to reach its full potential there.