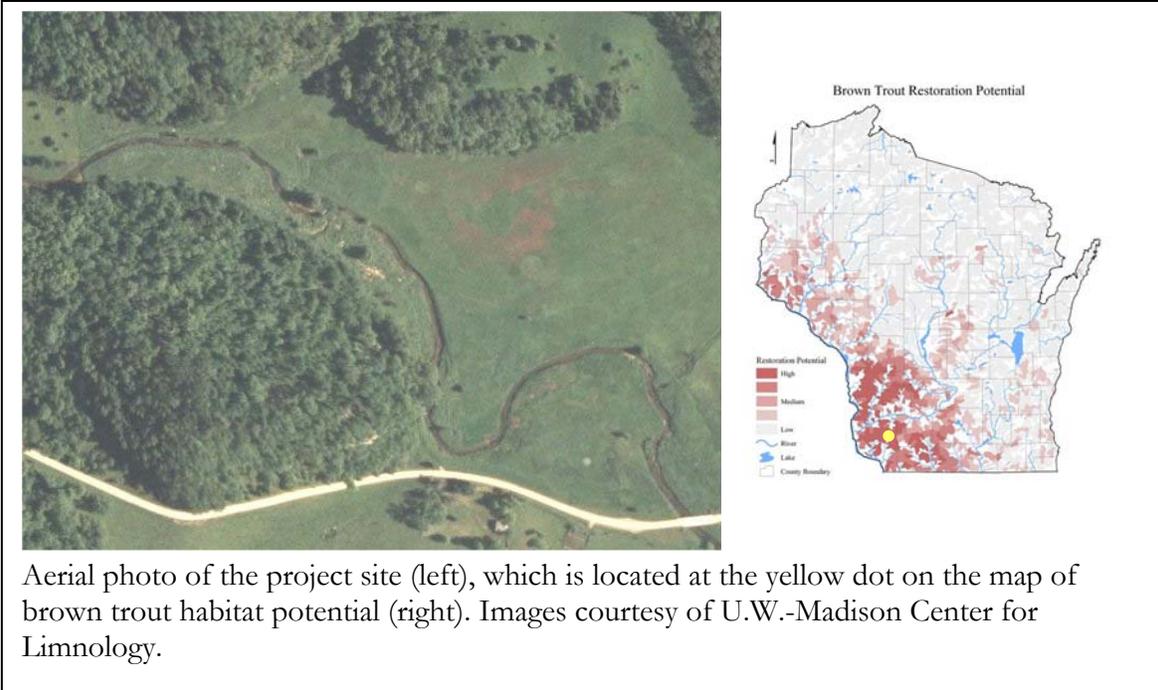


Harry and Laura Nohr Chapter of Trout Unlimited Blue River Habitat Improvement Project Report for 2008



Report Prepared by the
Project Committee
Harry and Laura Nohr Chapter of Trout Unlimited

Partners in the 2008 Blue River Project:

James and Rose Sime
Steve and Susan Carpenter

Alliant Energy
Dave Roh Excavating
Riverside Sawmill
Top Tie

Spring Creek Partners
Madison Fishing Expo
Grant County Conservation Fund
Trout and Salmon Foundation

Badger Fly Fishers
Blackhawk Chapter of Trout Unlimited
Elliott Donnelly Chapter of Trout Unlimited
Harry and Laura Nohr Chapter of Trout Unlimited
Lee Wulff Chapter of Trout Unlimited
Southwest Chapter of Pheasants Forever

Wisconsin State Council of Trout Unlimited
Trout Unlimited Driftless Area Restoration Effort
Trout Unlimited Embrace-a-Stream Program

Grant County Land and Water Conservation Department
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
Natural Resource Conservation Service, Grant County
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Background

The Harry and Laura Nohr Chapter of Trout Unlimited undertakes habitat improvement projects as a part of its mission “to conserve, protect and enhance the cold water streams of Southwest Wisconsin”. In 2003, the Board of the Harry and Laura Nohr Chapter approved a plan to improve the habitat of the Blue River and its tributaries within the Snowbottom Natural Area.

The Snowbottom Natural Area (SNA) contains sandstone cliffs rising to 300 feet above the floodplain of the Blue River as it meanders northward from Military Ridge toward the Wisconsin River. The 20,900 acres of SNA (including a roadless area of 4255 acres) "covers a diverse and spectacular landscape encompassing some of the most significant remaining pine relicts in Wisconsin"¹. In addition to the pine relicts, important plant communities include many types of prairies, savannas and southern Wisconsin forests. Because of its complex topography and multiple exposures, slopes and soils, the SNA supports several rare plant species and community types, as well as remarkable cold-water resources.

The Blue River and its tributaries within SNA comprise a significant concentration of Wisconsin's spring creeks. Spring creeks hold a high diversity of aquatic life and have high potential for maintenance or restoration of Wisconsin native brook trout populations. All told, 11 stream miles are designated "exceptional" and 6.5 stream miles are designated "outstanding"¹.

Because of the importance of the Blue River and its tributaries as cold-water resources in a matrix of lands with unusually great potential for conservation, the Harry and Laura Nohr Chapter has focused on habitat restoration along these streams. This report addresses the work on the main stem of the Blue River conducted in 2008 on the reach downstream (north) of the Bluff Road Bridge, on lands owned by James and Rose Sime and by Steve and Susan Carpenter.

¹ Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. 2002. Snowbottom State Natural Area Feasibility Study and Environmental Assessment. WDNR, Madison, Wisconsin.

Stream Conditions Before the Project

Prior to the project, the stream held trout but the habitat was in poor condition. Some runs were silted in, in places the river had broadened, and some banks were deeply cut and heavily eroded. These conditions are illustrated in the photos below, from December 2006 (photos by Steve Carpenter).



Student Interns at UW-Platteville, supported by the Harry and Laura Nohr Chapter of TU and advised by Professor Kris Wright, sampled the fish, invertebrates and habitats in the stream before the project began. The interns will continue to sample ecological features of the stream in future years, to evaluate effects of the project.

Project Activities

The 2008 Blue River Project restored habitat along 3500 feet of the Blue River. Deeply incised stream banks were tapered. Approximately 6000 cubic yards of streambank soil were removed and spread on an upland area on top of degraded soil, in order to re-establish native prairie on that site using soil that would have otherwise eroded into the stream. Approximately 2100 tons of rock were added to armor stream banks and improve habitat. Riffle-pool topography and sinuosity of the stream were improved. Structures added to improve fish habitat included lunger structures, vortex weirs, cross-logs, boulder retards and root wads. In addition, habitat structures were added for turtles and amphibians, and a snake hibernaculum was installed. The vegetation of the land around the stream banks is being restored to native prairie and savanna by the landowners. As a part of the project, prairie seed was sown on the site, along with a cover crop of annual grasses. The landowners added a substantial amount of prairie seed after the project work was completed. In addition, the landowners are committed to the mowing, weed control, reseeding and burning that will be required to establish and maintain native vegetation on the site.

A few photos of work along the stream during September 2008 are shown below. (photos by Steve Carpenter)



The project involved a significant amount of volunteer effort and also engaged the local community. Members of the Harry and Laura Nohr Chapter of Trout Unlimited contributed more than 1000 hours of volunteer labor to the project during 2008 and will contribute more time in the future for management of the vegetation. On 27 September 2008, more than 50 local landowners and friends

of the Harry and Laura Nohr Chapter gathered to celebrate the progress of the project at the third annual Blue River Celebration.

A few photos after the work was completed, while the area was greening up during October and November 2008, are shown below. By November 2008, brown trout were observed spawning throughout the restoration area. (photos by Steve Carpenter)



Conclusion

The Blue River is among the most popular and significant of the many gorgeous trout streams of Southwestern Wisconsin. Generations of wise landowners have preserved the remarkable landscape of Snowbottom Natural Area. In the present day, strong commitment of landowners to conservation ensures that the picturesque geology and diverse plant communities of the Blue River will persist into the future. As a result, the Blue River and its tributaries are a remarkable cold-water resource. There are enough miles of trout water of sufficient flow to accommodate many anglers. The streams offer diverse management practices. Some reaches provide the opportunity to catch the trout of a lifetime under trophy-preserving catch-release regulations. Other reaches offer trout for breakfast under regulations that allow sustainable harvest. The 2008 Blue River Project has improved habitat and angling opportunity as well as opportunities for enjoying the native plants and animals of Wisconsin. The Harry and Laura Nohr Chapter of Trout Unlimited is proud to have sponsored this project, and deeply grateful to our many partners listed in this report. As with every stream conservation program, partnerships among landowners, businesses, anglers, county and state government, and the national TU organization are essential for the success of the Blue River Habitat Restoration projects.