

To trout, fallen trees alike

Crew adds artificial logjams to key Housatonic tributary

BY STEVE BARLOW
REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

SALISBURY — To Tracy Brown's way of thinking, wood is good. The trout she adores apparently agree with her.

For the past two weeks, Brown, the Northeast restoration coordinator for Trout Unlimited, has watched one of her pet projects finally become reality after years of planning.

A four-man crew from Pennsylvania has completed work on three of 24 sites designed to improve trout habitat along a 6-mile stretch of Salmon Creek, a tributary of the Housatonic River.

"People see wood — trees, branches — in the river and think flooding, so you clear it out," said Brown.

Actually, those trees and branches can have beneficial effects. Natural logjams slow

the current during times of high water, reducing erosion and creating deeper pools where fish, especially trout, like to hang out during the dog days of summer.

Salmon Creek meanders through a landscape of farms and grazing cattle as bucolic as anything in Vermont, but it lacks enough natural canopy to produce the downed limbs and trees that turn into logjams.

The Trout Unlimited project is installing man-made logjams in the stream to mimic what should occur naturally, and planting native trees and bushes that will eventually take over the job.

It is expected to cost around \$1.2 million. About half will be paid for by a \$617,260 federal grant from a fund set up by General Electric to compensate for its historic pollution of the Housatonic.



Workers from Riverlogic Solutions of Wellsville, Pa., install logs as part of the trout habitat restoration project on Salmon Creek at a site off Farnum Road in Salisbury.

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Trout Unlimited is trying to raise private donations and obtain other public grants to cover the rest.

On Thursday, workers from Riverlogic Solutions of Wellsville, Pa., finished constructing what's known as a roughened log toe at one bend of the creek on Whippoorwill Farm off Farnum Road.

Gary Ocain, of Clover Hill Forest in Cornwall, supplied some 80 oak trees, all harvested locally, which were sawed up into sections. Some of those, measuring 12 inches in diameter, were pounded 7 feet deep into the soil.

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A latticework of 20- to 25-foot tree sections, many of them ripped from the ground to preserve their root wads, was then built around the posts and cabled together.

"That holds the bank, so there's a lot less erosion," explained Malcolm MacLaren, a retired biology teacher whose family has owned the farmland since the 1800s. "In the spring during high water, a foot or two or three of bank will fall into the water. This will stop or slow that process."

The trees' root wads also provide shade and cover during warm spells when trout swim upstream seeking cooler water.

"We've been doing water temperature monitoring, and the temperatures have been over 75 most of the summer in the deepest pools we can find," said Brown. "That's at the stress level for brown trout and dangerous for brook trout."

Soil was pushed on top of the man-made logjam, and fast-growing willows, dogwoods and alders were planted. Maples and oaks should eventually arise to restore the natural state.

Similar work was done at another site on the Whippoor-



The completed roughened log toe jam with root wads will stabilize the creek bank as part of the trout habitat restoration project on Salmon Creek at this site off Farnum Road in Salisbury. Engineer George Fowler of Woitdt Engineering, Binghamton, N.Y., designed the artificial logjams.

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will Farm. Boulders were also dropped there to create riffles that increase the amount of oxygen in the water, another bonus for trout.

Farmers Allen and Robin Cockerline lease the land from MacLaren for a herd of 80 grass-fed beef cattle. The sites are fenced off to keep the cows away.

Work was also done along the creek at White Hollow Farm on Route 118, but is wrapped up for this season. The entire project should take several years to complete.

Trout Unlimited officials first envisioned this in 2007 and have been working with

11 landowners, design engineers and government permitting agencies ever since.

Work will recommence next summer, but Brown has already seen results. The state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection has been sampling fish populations for three years as part of the project. Its latest electrofishing was done a week ago at Whippoorwill Farm.

"They netted two brook trout," said Brown. "We had never had brook trout before. We knew they were in the stream in the headwaters, but to have them show up here already was pretty awesome."