

Restoring the Onion River, Silver Springs Restoration, Wisconsin

Initiated in 2002, the mission of the Onion River Restoration Project is to restore the Onion River watershed to a quality self-sustaining wild trout fishery. A component of this project, the Silver Springs Restoration, involved the removal of 13 small dams at an abandoned fish farm and subsequent restoration of the stream channel and riparian areas.

What is being done and why?

Although the larger Onion River project is considered in progress and completion of the entire project is not expected until 2011, the Silver Springs Project was undertaken to restore the headwaters region of the Onion River back to a functioning ecosystem that would provide habitat for native brook trout to reproduce. Restoration of the site after dam removal, which took an ecosystem approach, involved creation of a new channel for the stream complete with spawning gravels and habitat for organisms, as well as planting the riparian zone with native trees, shrubs, and grasses. Early monitoring results show that the site is being utilized by trout, and other native plants and organisms are returning to the site.

Who is involved?

The Onion River project consists of a partnership between the Lakeshore Chapter of Trout Unlimited and the Wisconsin DNR. The Silver Springs project was initiated when property in the Onion River's headwaters came up for sale, allowing the Wisconsin DNR to eventually take ownership. The project is funded by the Wisconsin DNR Trout Stamp Program, a grant from the Great Lakes Protection Fund, Trout Unlimited, and the Sheboygan County Conservation Association.

Where can I see the results of this project?

Contact the director of the Onion River Project, Larry Doebert of the Lakeshore Chapter of Trout Unlimited, or John Nelson of the Wisconsin DNR, for more information about opportunities to view the restoration work. The Silver Springs restoration project is located on state owned land and is open to the public as a recreational and educational resource.

Why is this a model project?

This Silver Springs project is notable because its guiding vision has an ecosystem perspective and seeks to restore not only the native populations of fish, but also all of the other plants and organisms, both aquatic and terrestrial, that characterize the native ecosystem of the site. The project also has incorporated a monitoring program that is investigating the colonization rates of

macroinvertebrates and fish species to the site, allowing for an assessment of project ecological success and adding to the knowledge base that will assist in planning future projects. The larger Onion River project plans on establishing an Onion River Keeper fund to allow for continued restoration, preservation, and monitoring of the Onion River watershed into the future, and to ensure that their vision for the river as a natural resource treasure is reached and endures.

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