

The Stony Creek Restoration Project

by WCO Mark A. Sweppenhiser

Stony Creek flows westerly through Dauphin County, from its source in Lebanon County to the Susquehanna River. The stream, as have many in the state, endured challenges throughout its recent history: Low pH, silt and sedimentation deposits, and industrial and residential encroachment. Nevertheless, through the proactive conservation steps of landowners, sportsmen's groups, the Dauphin County Conservation District, Pennsylvania Game Commission and the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission, the stream has once again become an excellent trout fishery.

The Stony Creek restoration project removed century-old railroad piers from the stream corridor, just one more step in the slow improvement of this watershed. The project began as a result of an agreement between the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) and the Fish & Boat Commission. The agreement allowed PennDOT to complete the U.S. Route 322 highway bypass project near Dauphin borough if the agency set aside mitigation funds for restoration projects in other Dauphin County watersheds. The disbursement of these funds was then charged to the Fish & Boat Commission to improve certain Dauphin County watersheds for fish and aquatic organisms.

The agreement allowed the Fish & Boat Commission and Northern Dauphin County WCO Mark Sweppenhiser to begin working with sportsmen's organizations and conservation groups throughout the county to gather ideas for using the mitigation funds. The groups offered wide-ranging suggestions: Some were feasible, but others fell outside the agreement signed by PennDOT and the Fish & Boat Commission. The usable ideas were compiled and analyzed by Fish & Boat Commission Area Habitat Manager Karl Lutz, Commission Watershed Analysis Section Chief Dave Spotts and WCO Sweppenhiser.



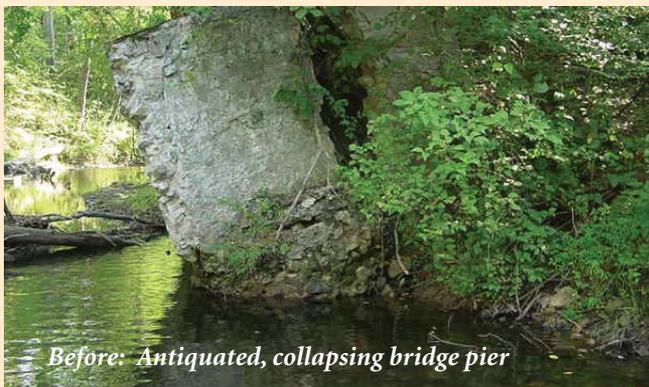
After: Improved angling, boating and landowner benefits

The project that best suited the needs of the agreement and had the greatest environmental effect for the cost was the Stony Creek restoration project, submitted by the Dauphin County Conservation District. The experience provided by the Dauphin County Conservation District allowed the project to flow seamlessly from its inception to its completion. In addition to providing supervision and some matching funds, the Conservation District coordinated the bidding process and assisted the Fish & Boat Commission in determining the best manner in which to complete the project.

The project was the removal of railroad piers near Ellendale Forge. The rail piers that were once used to cross Stony Creek were no longer used or maintained. They had begun to collapse and divert Stony Creek's flow, widening the stream channel. The removal process had to be coordinated with landowners and the needs of the contractor. Most importantly, any potential environmental effects on the stream were also considered. The removal had to be planned for a time when the watershed and the fishery would be least disturbed. Late summer was the best time to complete the project, well after stocking and before any wild trout began spawning.

The benefits of this project were many. Landowner relations were improved, which may ensure that trout anglers can reach the stream. The environmental benefits included developing a riparian zone, which helps maintain the coldwater fishery through shade and cover and prevents further erosion and sedimentation. Other benefits included helping protect the nearby road and allowing canoeists a safer route on that creek section.

The partnership of landowners, sportsmen's groups and county and state agencies was necessary to complete the project, which benefits everyone in the watershed. Many more individuals were involved behind the scenes to make this project possible. Many thanks to all who participated in this project. ☐



Before: Antiquated, collapsing bridge pier

photos WCO Mark A. Sweppenhiser