

2020 Iowa Trout Program accomplishments

- 1) In January 2020, the Iowa DNR acquired from the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation 115 acres containing a 0.25-mile section of North Bear Creek on the Larson Farm. This was an important property since it borders a county road and allows access to public lands further downstream. The project was partially funded through a \$200,000 Neotropical Migratory Bird Grant secured by the DNR with support letters and match contributions from multiple partner groups.



North Bear Creek on the Larson Farm in 2019, after streambank improvements.

- 2) We finalized “A Plan for Iowa Trout Management”, a 44-page document that will guide Iowa trout management over the next several years.
- 3) We worked with staff from the University of Wisconsin- Stevens Point to finalize the genetic evaluation of Iowa’s wild Brook Trout populations. This research project was funded by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Iowa Chapter of the American Fisheries Society, the North Bear and Driftless Chapters of Trout Unlimited, and the Iowa Trout Program. Results of this work are already being used to develop Iowa Brook Trout restoration plans.
- 4) In February 2020, we were informed that we had received a State Land Grant to improve water quality in Little Paint Creek. The grant provided \$55,000 to be used for streambank stabilization and reshaping along 1,400 ft of stream. The Driftless Flyathlon stepped up to provide match for the grant allowing us to move forward with the project. Then, Trout Program staff and Iowa Coldwater Conservancy members applied for, and received, a grant from the Trout and Salmon Foundation to support additional instream habitat installation as part of the larger project. Today, project planning continues with groundbreaking expected in spring 2021.
- 5) We worked with staff from Iowa State University to finalize the results of the Iowa coldwater stream inventory project that sampled headwater streams in the Upper Iowa, Yellow, and Little Maquoketa watersheds. The work was summarized in an Iowa State University thesis by Brett Kelly titled “Spatial distribution and ecological relationships of stream fishes in Iowa’s Driftless Area”.
- 6) Working with the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, we reached out in 2019 to secure angler contributions to help us acquire a 165-acre addition to the Bloody Run Wildlife Management Area. The parcel included a 0.6-mile segment of Bloody Run Creek that supports natural reproduction of Brown Trout and is managed under the artificial lures only and 14-inch minimum length limit for Brown Trout. Contributions from several groups were collected in early 2020 and the property transferred to the Iowa DNR in June 2020. Since then, a new parking lot access point has been developed, providing angler access on the west end of the management area.

- 7) As part of a culvert replacement project along Waterloo Creek, Allamakee County Roads Dept. needed access to the project site across DNR lands. Contractors also needed several loads of topsoil to complete the project. Working with contractors, we allowed them to take fill from the streambanks along Waterloo Creek for use on their project. By the time the project was completed, about 700 ft of streambank had been reshaped, seeded, and mulched at no cost to the DNR. This section of streambank connected the two project sites already renovated by angling groups in 2016.
- 8) Working with the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, we reached out in late 2019 to secure angler contributions to leverage as 25% match for a State of Iowa REAP grant. The match provided by several partners allowed the Foundation to apply for, and receive, a grant used to purchase a future addition to the Falcon Springs Wildlife Management Area. The parcel contains about 1,000 ft of Ten Mile Creek and is the first public access area on Ten Mile Creek. The parcel is expected to transfer to the Iowa DNR in 2021.
- 9) Partnering with Iowa DNR Engineering and Wildlife Staff, the Trout Program funded a new angler parking area along Waterloo Creek, just upstream of Dorchester, as well as new lots along Canoe Creek and West Canoe Creek, streams included in the Seed Savers Exchange Angler Access Easement. These lots will provide easier and safer access for anglers.
- 10) During 2019 and spring 2020, Trout Program staff worked with Dianne Rissman and NRCS staff to develop a streambank stabilization plan for a portion of the Yellow River on the Rissman farm. This section of stream was protected with an Angler Access Easement in 2018. As part of the project, several boulder clusters and rock weirs were installed in addition to streambank shaping during summer 2020. In the end, the landowner would have been required to pay just over \$6,000 for the work to be completed, however, several partners stepped up to the challenge and provided contributions to offset nearly all the landowner's costs. Today, the banks are stabilized and the stream is protected with a CRP buffer. Trout Program staff also planted about 750 cordgrass plugs along the stream during fall 2020.
- 11) We worked with anglers to plant over 500 prairie cordgrass plant plugs along Waterloo Creek in a section that was recently reshaped by Allamakee County as part of a larger culvert improvement project along the trout stream.
- 12) We worked with Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation staff to plant over 500 prairie cordgrass plant plugs along North Bear Creek in a section that was recently improved by the Foundation.
- 13) We partnered with Winneshiek County Conservation to stabilize the stream bank along a universal angler access on Trout Run near Decorah. We also cleaned off a second universal angler access that had been covered by silt during recent flood events.
- 14) Trout Program staff and faculty from University of Wisconsin- LaCrosse received a \$31,000 grant from the US Fish and Wildlife Service to evaluate the use of winter aerial imagery for locating coldwater streams in Northeast Iowa. A graduate student will lead the project with expected completion in 2022. This work will provide important information that will be used during the reclassification of warmwater streams to a more appropriate coldwater stream designation.
- 15) We finalized an Angler Access Easement along North Bear Creek on the Hermeier Family property. This easement will protect angler access on about 1,600 ft of North Bear Creek while protecting about 5.3 acres of stream corridor. This easement is immediately downstream of the Lane Angler Access Easement that was secured in 2019.

- 16) We began the process to acquire a second portion of Angler Access Easement along the Yellow River on the Dianne Rissman Farm. The easement will provide perpetual angler access to 0.69 miles of the Yellow River while protecting 15.3 acres of stream corridor. For the first time ever, angling group partners have stepped up to cover the entire cost of the easement acquisition totaling \$42,450. Before moving forward, the acquisition needs to be approved by the Iowa Natural Resource Commission at their January 2021 meeting. Once approved, we can finalize paperwork with expected final closing in February 2021.
- 17) A contractor excavated 30,000 cubic yards of post-settlement alluvium from the near-stream floodplain along a 1250' stream section within the Big Mill Wildlife Management area with the goal of improving stream stability, decreasing non-point pollution, and enhancing fishing and hunting access. Given the outstanding natural attributes of the stream at this location, and supplemental stocking of trout by Iowa DNR, the Big Mill fishery supports about 11,600 trout fishing trips each year. Most of the construction components of this project were completed during December 2019 through June 2020. Manchester Fisheries Management sought and secured a grant from the 319 Program (Federal Clean Water Act Funds) for \$95,000 to fund a significant portion of the project, with the remaining \$49,983.75 of construction cost funded using state sources.



Pre-project photo of Mill Creek at Big Mill Wildlife Management Area, Jackson County, Iowa.



May 2020 photo of Mill Creek at Big Mill Wildlife Management Area, Jackson County, Iowa. Floodplain excavation, seeding, mulching, and silt fence installation complete for Phase II of floodplain restoration.

- 18) Along Spring Branch Creek in Delaware County, a DNR contractor used stone-toe protection with native limestone to reduce streambank erosion along 350' of Spring Branch Creek adjacent to Manchester Fish Hatchery. The goal of this project was to improve aquatic habitat while halting encroachment onto neighboring private property. Construction was completed during May 2020 at a cost of \$4,416.
- 19) We partnered with a private landowner, a farm management consultant, an agricultural renter, and the Hawkeye Fly Fishing Association to fund and develop a paddock grazing system on a portion of the upper Maquoketa River under permanent water quality and angler access easement. The goal of this project is to provide a managed grazing system to reduce streamside cattle access, improve streambank stability, and improve water quality and aquatic habitat for trout. The project was completed during October 2020 at a cost of \$3,748.75 funded by the private landowner, the Hawkeye Fly Fishing Association, and the USDA-Farm Bill.
- 20) The Iowa DNR received a water quality and angler access easement from the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation during April 2020 along Mill Creek. This 150' wide fishing corridor easement includes 0.6 miles (3,295 feet) of Mill Creek and is located about one-half mile upstream of the Big Mill Wildlife Management Area. This easement was generously donated by the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation to all the anglers of Iowa, and it would typically have a valuation of more than \$30,000. This fishing easement on Mill Creek is open for public fishing only and closed to all other activities. The section of Mill Creek within the easement has a quality wild Brown Trout population sustained entirely through natural reproduction. DNR Fisheries Management worked with INHF staff at the easement location to improve access through installation of a fence walk-through, an angler walking path, and a vehicle parking area.