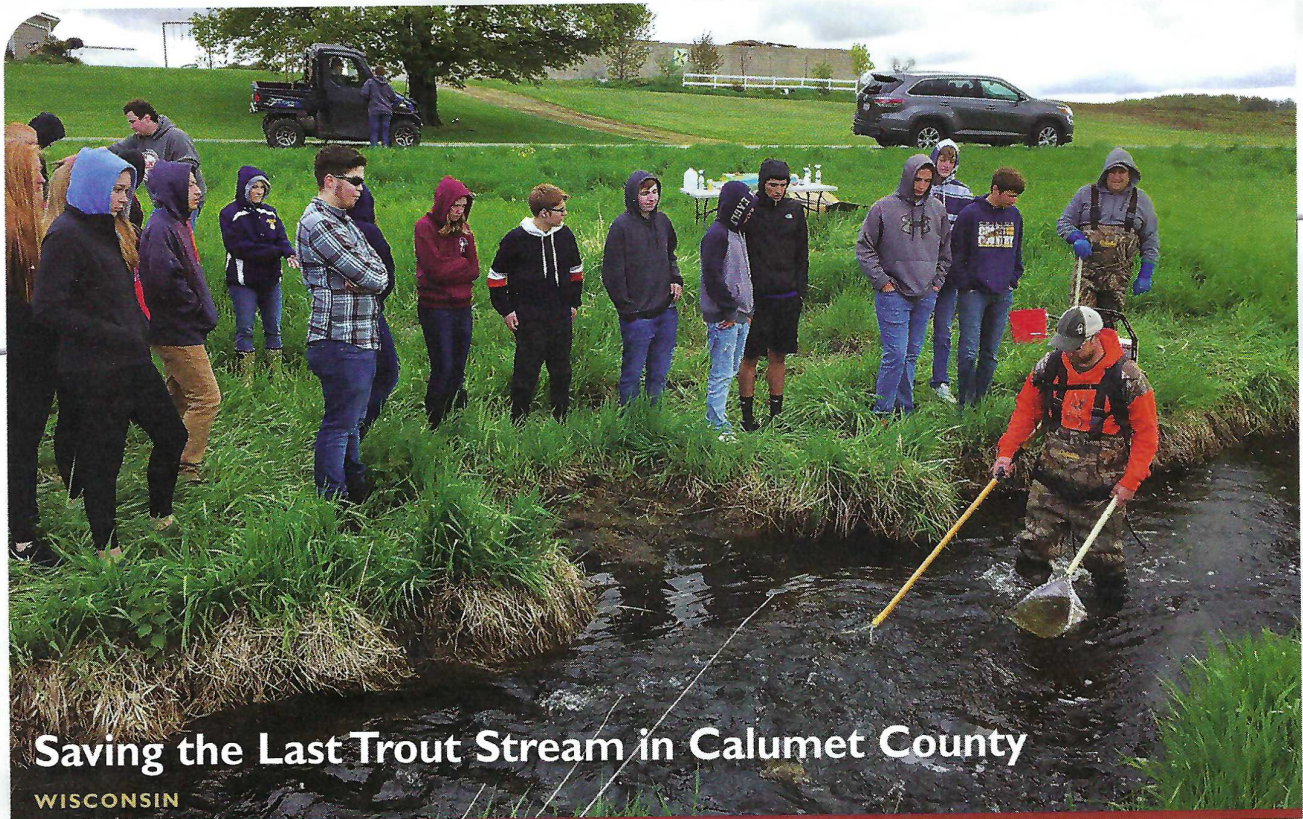


TROUT

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Saving the Last Trout Stream in Calumet County

WISCONSIN

A beautiful trout stream cannot be allowed to disappear; it must be preserved for future generations. It has been my pleasure to work with many who believe this to be true and demonstrated their work on Stony Brook. Stony Brook begins in central Calumet County in a spring-fed woodland west of Chilton, Wis. It flows east and south through farmland before emptying into the South Branch of the Manitowoc River. My interest began after years of driving past Stony Brook and wondering, "Could that little stream hold trout?" I began researching the history of Stony Brook and made time on my drive into school to take stream temperatures. I learned that the stream had been actively managed and stocked by the DNR during the 1970s but little care or management had occurred in the decades since that time. My temperature readings of mid 60 degrees in May were encouraging. Looking back, this was the beginning of Chilton Public School's Trout in the Classroom Program and the Stony Brook Project.

Trout in the Classroom is a nationally recognized program and curriculum that is designed to make connections between classroom learning with the natural envi-

ronment and to promote stewardship for the stream and surrounding landscape. TIC is an environmental education program sponsored and supported by TU. Most programs, including ours, end the year by releasing their trout in a state-approved stream near the school. In our case, Stony Brook is just six miles away.

I introduced the idea of TIC to science teachers Greg Sromek and Tracy Bartels. I also contacted then Fox Valley TU President Joe Bach. Joe had explored the watershed a few years earlier and showed interest immediately. Together with Sromek and Bartels, we wrote a grant through the Chilton Community Foundation to fund initial costs.

2015

In April of 2015, The School District of Chilton was awarded a grant from the Chilton Community Foundation to begin a Trout in the Classroom Program. The funds from the grant allowed for the purchase of two 55-gallon tanks, chillers, filter systems and stabilizing chemicals necessary for start-up.

As we talked, Joe Bach and I realized that one of the landowners along Stony Brook had a daughter at the middle school.

Joe contacted this farmer, Tim Sohrwiede, which eventually led to both a conservation easement on the property and the future TIC release and field trip site.

During November, science teachers at the sixth and 10th grade levels began incorporating TIC lessons into the curriculum and began the process of stabilizing tank water for the trout fry, which would arrive early in 2016.

2016

In January of 2016, water quality tests became part of the classroom routine. Students and teachers fine-tuned tank water and procedures in preparation for the arrival of our first batch of brown trout fry in February. Students performed daily tank cleaning, water quality testing and feeding. In April, students in sixth and 10th grade went to the Sohrwiede farm release site. Danielle Santry, Calumet County water resources specialist presented information about habitat parameters. Joe Bach and Norm Christnacht of Fox Valley TU used kick nets to show and identify aquatic organisms. Judith Hartl from Groundwater Guardians did water temperature, turbidity-transparency and flow rate demonstrations.



Korin Doering of Fox-Wolf Watershed Alliance taught about invasive species. Adam Nickel, WDNR Senior Fisheries Biologist and his crew from Oshkosh, performed electro-shocking along two sections of Stony Brook.

Release day is often very special for students. Each is given the opportunity to plant an individual trout into the stream. They do so with care and respect, often saying things like “good luck” as they place the fish in their new home. It’s an experience not quickly forgotten.

During the summer of 2016, Joe Bach continued his investigation of Stony Brook. Joe, often working with students, collected data over several years that determined Stony Brook has the right attributes for trout to flourish.

2017

During the 2017 school year, Tracy Bartels began to implement aquaponics into the TIC process. Aquaponics is a process that uses aquarium water to feed plants before the filtering process. In this way, the waste from the fish fertilizes the plants, is filtered and returned to the tank. Starting in 2017, Karen Doering and Christopher Acy from Fox-Wolf Watershed Alliance taught students about aquatic invasive species as part of TIC release day.

2018

Early in 2018, work began on signage to identify our field site at the Sohrwiede farm. The

sign, designed and built by Chilton students, recognizes our original stakeholders; Chilton Public Schools, Fox Valley TU, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Calumet County, Groundwater Guardians, Chilton Community Foundation, Winnebago Waterways Fox-Wolf Watershed Alliance Program and the Sohrwiede family. Plans are under way to update or replace the original sign to include Lakeshore Natural Resource Partnership and the Fund for Lake Michigan, which are our latest stakeholders.

Senior Fisheries Biologist, Adam Nickel, used his resources to access equipment necessary to implement a Passive Integrated Transponder tag array on Stony Brook. Select fish were “tagged” (a small transponder inserted under the skin) and released. The array electronically detects and records fish movement. Data collected reflects that the majority of planted trout were staying in Stony Brook and not migrating downstream to the Manitowoc River. We now had further proof that planted TIC trout were indeed making their home in Stony Brook.

During the winter months, stakeholders were hard at work making connections and

extending the vision for the Stony Brook Project. It was decided to begin planting brook trout in addition to brown trout and to “hold” a select number of brown trout in the classroom for a greater time period to allow for greater growth before their release. These select fish were also tagged for use in the PIT Tag array.

Calumet County Water Resources Specialist, Danielle Santry provided and presented information to raise the question of restoring Stony Brook to a Class Trout Stream. Considering the WAV monitoring data, it was concluded that Stony Brook does, indeed, have the potential to become a Class Trout Stream. Shawn Sullivan and Steve Devitt developed stream improvement drawings and a cost estimate that began a new phase of the Stony Brook Project.

2019

Through several discussions facilitated by Joe Bach and Danielle Santry with Jim Kettler of Lakeshore Natural Resources Partnership, Stony Brook’s potential was highlighted, and funding sources were explored. Eventually, through a combination of funds from The Fund for Lake Michigan, Calumet

County, Lakeshore Natural Resources Partnership, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and Fox Valley TU, more than \$83,000 was raised for stream improvement. Work began in the spring of 2020 and included culvert replacement and “lunker structure” installation. To everyone’s delight, electro-shocking efforts revealed several healthy brown trout in August of 2019. These beautiful fish were tagged and returned to Stony Brook. Additionally, TIC raised brook trout were found in the headwaters. This good news added to our excitement and enthusiasm about Stony Brook’s potential and future!

I am thrilled with the success, follow through and growth of our TIC program. I cannot thank our stakeholders enough. To date, several hundred students have been positively impacted by our program.

—Brad Howard Bowman

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