

Iowa CONSERVATION Showcase

Warm Water Stream Gets Cold Water Stream Treatment

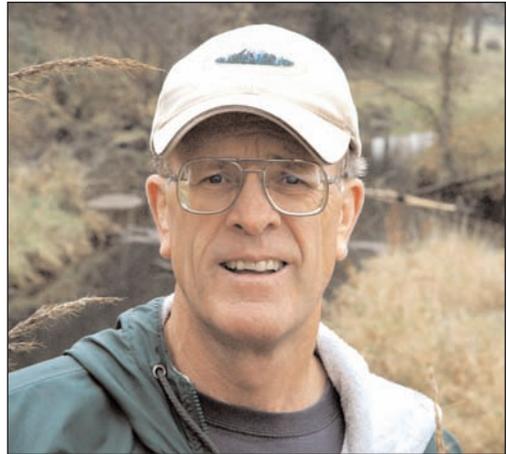
Randy Fiddelke grew tired of watching the streambanks on his Delaware County creek erode and recede year after year. After years of damage, he lost most of the once plentiful small-mouth bass habitat.

Fiddelke, who owns a financial consulting business, sought assistance from the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to reconstruct 633 feet of eroding streambank on his scenic stream called Coffins Creek, a tributary of the Maquoketa River. He also added habitat for smallmouth bass and other fish species.

Stabilizing the Streambank

With cost-share incentives from the USDA's Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP), Fiddelke completed the streambank protection project in March 2000. What was once a straight drop into the creek was reconstructed to a gradual slope to reduce erosion on an estimated 1.4 acres. The bank was then rip rapped with quarry rock and seeded to native grasses.

"Every year we were losing two to three feet of streambank," said Fiddelke. "Since completion of the project we have had three, what you might call, 100-year floods—the highest waters I had seen here in 30 years. The streambank came through in great shape every time."



Randy Fiddelke

Northeast Iowa is typically known for its cold water trout streams, but Coffins Creek is a warm water stream.

Delaware County District Conservationist Keith Krause said the work on Fiddelke's streambank was one of the first projects NRCS has completed on a warm water stream. "Coffins Creek is a high quality stream with a drainage area of 43 square miles above the site," he said.

Incorporating Fish Hides

Due to years of sediment buildup, DNR Fisheries Biologist Brian Hayes said Coffins Creek lacked the depth of traditional warm water streams. "A stream that is deeper than three feet will provide natural overhead fish cover," said Hayes. "Most warm water streams are deeper than three feet."

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The DNR installed 72 feet of fish hides along the Coffins Creek banks, also with cost-share through WHIP, to provide fish cover. “This was the first project in Delaware County on a warm water stream where we incorporated fish hides as overhead cover for smallmouth bass and other fish species,” said Krause.

Fiddelke said that as habitat disappeared over the years, so did most of the three- to five-pound smallmouth bass, but the fish are returning. “There is pretty good stream habitat here now,” he said. “The fish are really utilizing the hides.”



Randy points out some of the rock cover provided for fish habitat. The DNR installed 72 feet of fish hides along his portion of Coffins Creek.



633 feet along Coffins Creek were reconstructed and stabilized with rip rap and seeded to native grasses in 2000. Coffins Creek is a Maquoketa River tributary.

“Bass love rock habitat,” said Hayes. “Stabilizing the bank will help smallmouth habitat, too. Without sediment running off into the stream, the depth of this creek will increase over time. Anglers would be interested in this site.”

Project A Success
Hayes said the financial assistance through WHIP is important. “WHIP has really been a valuable tool, allowing us to do more work, provide fish habitat and save streambanks from eroding,” he said.

Fiddelke said he was impressed with the way the DNR and the NRCS worked together on the project. “From the fishery people at the DNR, to the biologists, engineers and Keith Krause with NRCS, everybody had the same goal in mind. They were all good to work with.”

WHIP is a voluntary program that provides cost-share to private and public landowners to establish wildlife habitat. The NRCS works with participants to develop a wildlife habitat management plan. This plan becomes the basis for entering into a 5- to 10-year agreement with landowners to implement the plan. Projects that focus on establishing habitat for threatened and endangered species or declining species receive a higher priority. Applications are accepted through a continuous signup process at the local NRCS office.

*Jason Johnson, Iowa NRCS
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