

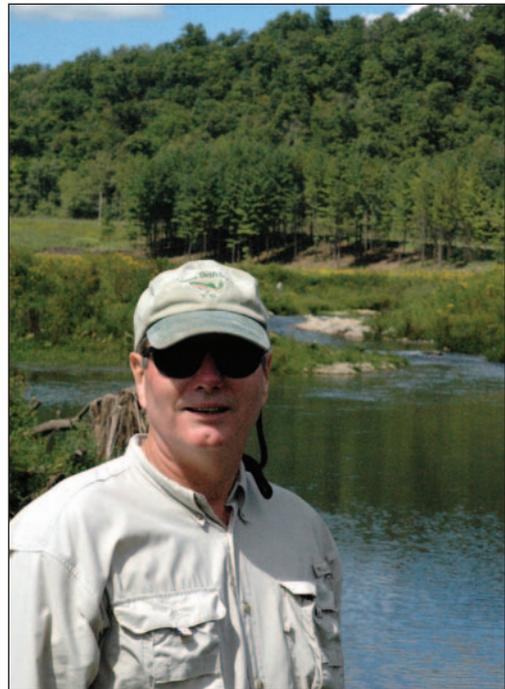
Iowa CONSERVATION Showcase

Waukon Native Re-Meanders Allamakee Trout Stream

Dorchester, Ia. – In 2002 Michael Osterholm purchased 98 acres of cropland in scenic Allamakee County. Land that was once tall grass prairie and meandering coldwater trout streams was converted to cropland in the 1950s. But the Waukon native’s passion for coldwater trout streams and tall grass prairie coupled with assistance from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) led to Osterholm restoring the cropland to its pre-settlement condition.

The property includes sections of two well-known trout streams in northeast Iowa, Waterloo Creek and Duck Creek. But Osterholm was also interested in re-meandering a 1,400-foot long stream that had been channeled into a straight-line ditch to accommodate row crops. The new stream, which originates at a spring on the property, would be named “Brook Creek” by Osterholm for the brook trout he plans to stock there.

“I have always loved to fish brook trout, and my interest in native prairie goes back to my days at Luther College. I remember doing restorative prairie burns in college,” said Osterholm, who is a professor in the School of Public Health at the University of Minnesota. His permanent residence, Greenwood, Minn. (just west of the Twin Cities), is a three-hour drive from Dorchester. “Even though I don’t live in Iowa anymore, I still have family there. The area means a lot to me.”



Michael Osterholm

Osterholm said his land is best suited for recreational purposes. “Land like this is marginal from an agricultural standpoint,” he said. “I am restoring the land to its original state not only for recreational purposes, but also for the environment.”

Re-meandering Brook Creek

Soon after Osterholm purchased the land he excavated a number of invasive species, including 7,000 box elder trees that shade out smaller, herbaceous flora. He then prepared the area for a native prairie seeding.

Meanwhile, Mike Henderson, Soil Conservationist with Iowa NRCS,

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found 1940s U.S. Geological Survey photos that outlined Brook Creek's original course. Henderson scanned one of the old photos and geo-referenced the old photo into the current layout of the land. He then drew in the stream and flagged it into the field. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR), along with a local consultant, designed the streambed.



At the mouth of Brook Creek, Michael Osterholm (left) and Steve Kiley of the Allamakee Soil and Water Conservation District check out the tall grass prairie in late August 2005.

Last year excavators reshaped the original channel and diverted the spring into Brook Creek. "The NRCS and DNR should be congratulated for their collaborative work on Brook Creek," said Osterholm. "Their local staffs did an excellent job of working together."

After the excavation, more than 60 volunteers planted plugs of prairie cord grass along the banks of Brook Creek, while Luther College biology students filled the stream with aquatic plants and animals from Duck Creek.

When the aquatic plants and insects are established in the stream, which should take place by this spring, brook trout from South Pine Creek in neighboring Winneshiek County will be stocked in Brook Creek. South Pine Creek brook trout are native to northeast Iowa and genetically proven to be a wild.

Osterholm said Brook Creek is doing quite well this year. "It's amazing to see how this little gem has matured over the last year. It's hard to believe these riffles, pools and runs were corn field just 22 months ago," he said. "Even on one of our hot afternoons this summer the highest recorded temperature in Brook Creek was 56 degrees. Typically, the temperature runs throughout the creek from 49 degrees to 53 degrees."

What's next for Osterholm?

Osterholm said that although he has no plans to live in Dorchester permanently, he wants to buy more property nearby and plans to build a cabin on the property. "I love it here; the people are so friendly and it's just peaceful," he said. "Watching the sun go down at dusk is breathtaking."

Henderson of the NRCS said he really enjoyed working with Osterholm. "You don't run across people like him very often," he said. "Mike's goal is to re-establish and preserve the native brook trout stream in Iowa. He is very passionate about everything he does, and he was more than willing to work with both the NRCS and the DNR to accomplish his goals."

Along with the NRCS and DNR, partners in the project include Driftless Land Stewardship LLC, Allamakee County Conservation Board, Trout Unlimited, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Hawkeye Fly Fishing Association, Luther College, Prairie Enthusiasts, Iowa Prairie Network, Northeast Iowa RC&D, Conservation Districts of Iowa, and the Upper Iowa River Alliance.

*Jason Johnson, Iowa NRCS
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