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Columbia Greene Trout Unlimited members Dick Riccio (left) and Hank Thiess of Claverack at a bridge spanning 10 Mile Creek in Oak Hill where they've been directing traffic as heavy trucks loaded with stone arrive for a stream rehabilitation project. The local chapter was instrumental in providing funding. Members will also assist in planting vegetation in the fall to help stabilize eroding banks.

Stream rehab saving piece of history

Trout, persistent flooding spawn multiagency effort

By Claude Haton
Hudson-Catskill Newspapers

It may have taken 10 years, but a grassroots effort to restore a local trout stream is finally underway with help garnered from local, state and even federal agencies. As an added benefit, the effort will also help protect an historic home overlooking the stream from future erosion and potential destruction.

"It started out with the trout," said outdoors columnist Dick Nelson Thursday. "See what a little fish can do?"

Nelson was referring to the current rehabilitation of a section of Ten Mile Creek in the



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Rosemary O'Brien relaxes in her backyard Wednesday. Just a few yards away, heavy equipment was shoring up the Ten Mile Creek stream bed.

Town of Dnrham, designated a public fishing stream by the state Department of Environ-

mental Conservation.

Heavy flooding in recent years have altered the Class

TS (trout spawning) stream to such a degree that the trout have largely been eradicated. Nelson, who has reported on the subject in depth, traces the problem to persistent flooding dating back to 1996.

Lobbying for the stream's rehabilitation began with Oak Hill resident Walt Bennett. An avid fisherman, Bennett is a member of the Norton Hill Sportsman's Club, Greene County Sportsman's Federation and other outdoor recreation organizations. Also involved is the Columbia-Greene, Rip Van Winkle Chapter of Trout Unlimited, a sportsman's organization that has been instrumental in seeking out funding for the stream rehabilitation project.

Bennett's efforts eventually garnered cooperation from the
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project from DEC, the Greene County Soil and Water Conservation District, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Town of Durham. **Independent** funding for the project has come through various state and federal grant programs.

Bennett first broached the subject with the Norton **Hill** Wildlife Club in 1998. He had noticed the decrease in trout numbers and referred to official studies produced by DEC showing the population had dropped from **45-50** fish per acre in the 1960's to less than two in recent years.

The culprit was erosion, Bennett said. Flooding had widened channels, making the creek shallower. Trees along the banks toppled over, reducing the canopy over the stream and allowing more sunlight through. Both conditions increased water temperatures, affecting the **trout's** spawning patterns. Bennett initially gained a permit for creek work that year, but was later informed by DEC that the project was unfeasible.

"It was tough to get people interested at first," he noted. "Once we got Trout Unlimited involved, things started to roll."

Two Claverack residents and Trout Unlimited members, Hank Theiss and Dick Riccio, were on hand this week at the work site, directing traffic at the tricky bend where large semis operated by Van Etten Trucking were ferrying the huge boulders to **the** work site.

Theiss, a past president of the local chapter of Trout Unlimited, recalled their involvement going back to 2001. The local chapter's Bob Novack has helped secure about \$7,500 in grant monies **to** help the project become a reality. U.S. Fish and Wildlife provided another \$10,000, with an additional \$10,000 coming through NYS DEC.

The project begins

Since early July, work has begun in earnest within the



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Members of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service watch earlier this week as the operations take place along Ten Mile Creek in Durilam.

stream bed. Accessing the creek from Saybrook Valley Road in Oak Hill, crews under the direction of Greene County Soil and Water Conservation District and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have been at work moving heavy stone and timber about the channel. In all, three and a half miles of the stream **will** get special attention, with more work scheduled for this fall.

The Town of Durham and their Highway Superintendent Wes Moore is on board with equipment and operators, as are members of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service out of Cortland, N.Y. Also helping out is Peckham Material, which is donating 150 tons of heavy stone to the project.

Carl Schwartz of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service described the work being undertaken.

"The stones will interlock with each other," he said at the work site on Tuesday, demonstrating the action with his hands, "so that when the high water comes through, they will stay in place."

For aesthetics purposes, the stone work is being laid up in such a manner that it mimics

natural patterns.

A secondary channel is being added to siphon off some of the water during flood stages, reducing the pressures on **the** primary channel.

As if to prove his point, stones interlocked in the dump bed of one of the huge 'dumppasaurus' rigs as the driver tried to off-load them. Despite the high angle of the dump body, the stones refused to budge, requiring a bit of jostling of the rig by the driver to fully dislodge them.

All hands on deck

Jeff Flack, executive **direc-**tor of Greene County Soil and Water, noted the project has taken years to come to fruition. Still, seeing the various agencies and organizations working together for a **com-**mon goal has been gratifying.

"It's probably been one of the most enjoyable projects in my career," Flack said Thursday.

He also lauded the property owners involved for their cooperation.

"The landowners have been great" Flack observed. "They've basically said 'do what you need to do,' and have been very agreeable."

Among those landowners are Rosemary O'Brien and Joanne Schindelheim, whose home sits high on a bluff overlooking the 10 Mile Creek. The house was built in 1840 by Silas Dean, who ran a multi-purpose mill on the site and whose family is still prominent in the area. The mill is gone but the home remains.

The property's 10 acres straddle the stream, and in recent years frequent flooding has begun to threaten the 1840 house which is situated on a high bluff just yards from a steep and failing embankment.

"There's been a tremendous amount of erosion," due to flooding said co-owner Rosemary O'Brien. "We've lost thousands of cubic yards of soil and 28 major trees since the flooding of 1996.

The women, who purchased the property in 1989, have made a concerted effort to seek help with their problem. Finally, **O'Brien** attended a seminar on preventing soil erosion presented by Greene County Soil and Water's then-director Rene Van Schaack. That began an education process that proved frustrating at times.

"I never dreamed it would be **so** complicated," q 'Brien said.

An aspect particular to their situation may have been helpful in that the property is deeded "forever wild." Since seven of their 10 acres lay on the opposite side of the streambed from their home and can never be developed, she feels it was in the best interest of the state to help solve **the** problem.

"Forever wild makes it attractive for recreation,' she said.

At any rate, O'Brien is relieved to see the work finally underway.

"This is a wonderful thing they're doing," she said. "I'm excited to see it."