

History of Fisheries in Wells Creek

Wells Creek was first surveyed by the DNR in 1959. Similar to most streams in southeast Minnesota, it was evaluated for its potential for supporting a trout fishery. Spawning conditions at that time were poor and the creek was considered unsuitable for trout. The 1959 report stated "no stream improvement measures are warranted -- it would be good conservation to have an adequate watershed improvement program".

The stream was again surveyed in 1974. By that time conditions had worsened, with silt and high water temperatures making conditions very poor for trout. High levels of phosphorous and nitrogen were common in the stream, making it even more difficult for trout to survive. Trout were few and far between, with populations estimated at only 14 adult (>8") trout/mile of stream (many streams in the area support 150-1000 adult trout/mile). Fishing pressure was extremely low and no trout were caught by anglers. Trout reproduction was very poor and invertebrates were low in number due to few riffles, lots of silt, and severe bank erosion. The 1974 survey report recommended the stream "not be managed for trout".

In 1986 Wells Creek was again surveyed, and conditions had not changed. The report stated "no improvement in physical characteristics of the stream". There was little evidence of fishing. Warm-water continued to hurt trout populations.

From 1957 - 1986, literally thousands of trout were stocked into Wells Creek, but they were unsuccessful in establishing good fishing. Fortunately, many streams in SE Minnesota have shown significant improvements in water quality and habitat in the recent past. In an attempt to determine if conditions have changed for trout in Wells Creek, 11,000 fingerling brown trout (2-3" long) have been stocked annually over the past few years to try and re-establish a trout fishery. The trout population appears to be slowly increasing, and during 1995 there were an estimated 45 adult brown trout (>8" long)/mile of stream. While these numbers are

still much lower than some other area streams, they are encouraging and indicate potential for the Wells Creek fishery to improve. In addition, natural reproduction of trout has been documented, however, levels are low. The fact that some fish can reproduce is promising.

With improvements in land use, and a healthy stream corridor, water quality and stream temperatures can be expected to improve. With these changes will come better natural reproduction, better survival to adult size, and the potential to establish a quality trout fishery. Stocking is only a band-aid. Continued improvements in the watershed and the stream corridor are really what's needed to bring out the best in Wells Creek.

If you would like a copy of old survey reports, or if you have other questions regarding trout management in Wells Creek, contact Jim Stewart or Tim Schlagenhaft, DNR, Lake City - (612)345-3365.