

FISHING GARVIN BROOK

Exploring our Habitat Improvement on a Top SE Minnesota Stream

By Mark Reisetter

Less than five miles from downtown Winona, an amazing, small trout stream runs through southeast Minnesota. Filled with brown trout and some brookies in the headwaters, it offers excellent fishing opportunities for visiting and local anglers alike. Thanks to Trout Unlimited, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and funding from the Outdoor Heritage Fund (OHF), Garvin Brook in Winona County has been receiving quite a bit of attention in recent years. Lots of habitat work has been completed, offering ample new fishing locations. The stream will get more attention soon, as an additional habitat project just below Farmers' Park is already in the works for this summer.

Waiting right below the Garvin Brook project completed in 2014 (which was written about in the August, 2016 issue of *Trout Unlimited Minnesota*, which you can find online, along with all the other back issues, at mntu.org.) is a 3,500 foot reach which was restored in 2017 and should become a favorite destination of trout anglers for years to come!

Like the section of Garvin Brook completed in 2014, this 2017 edition (found in the DNR's "Trout Angling Opportunities in Southern and Central Minnesota" on pages 20-21, SE, Map 8) is a special-regulations stretch with a 12-16 inch protected slot for all trout during the catch and keep season, and it requires artificial lures or flies only.

The new owners of this "Oevering stretch" of Garvin Brook will use the property as a dog training site. "Reaction Retrievers" is run by Darren Thompson and co-owned by the landowner, Ron Blume.



NYPHYS WORK! THIS GARVIN BROOK BROWN TROUT FELL FOR A BEAD-HEAD GRAY SCUD. INSECT AND CRUSTACEAN LIFE ARE ABUNDANT IN THE STREAM.

Just off of Highway 14 at roughly milepost 248 ¾, there is a wide spot of gravel where an angler should park, being careful not to block the group of mailboxes present.

From the parking area, the angler should walk down the driveway, cross the railroad tracks, and stay on the driveway until it crosses the culvert over Garvin Brook. Once inside the stream access corridor, the angler can begin fishing or walking the stream bank.

Some finger-like ponds for retriever training have been built away from the stream, and if dogs are being trained, anglers should go about their business and respect the work that is taking place.

Darren Thompson has told me that he and the new landowner intend to construct a streamside pavilion dedicated for angler use for perhaps a lunch break, or a place to get out of the rain or hot sun. Inside the pavilion will be a plaque that honors Trout Unlimited for its role in improving this area of Garvin Brook.

MNTU employed the highly-skilled construction team of Dennis Barth and his heavy equipment operators with Barth Construction, Inc. and oversight team of Tom Dornack and Gary Sobotta of Habitat Solutions, LLC.. The Win-Cres Chapter members constructed the Minnesota Sky Hooks onsite that were used along the project. Also onsite most days was Melissa Konsti, the DNR's Stream Habitat Specialist out of Lanesboro.

Konsti was especially pleased with numerous elements of this project: "The narrowed channel flushes the fine sediment, and the sinuosity allowed us to create overhead cover with good depth in multiple bends where pools are located." Melissa went on to say, "The weirs used as grade control structures will help maintain the riffle-run-pool complexes so critical for healthy trout populations." This work was funded with OHF dollars secured by MNTU, although a small amount of farm bill funding was used (via TU DARE) to add some non-game features in the form of amphibian/turtle depressions.

The heavy construction work occurred in April-June of 2017, with tree removal

taking place prior, when the ground was still snow covered. The project flooded out five times during and immediately following construction, which really played havoc with establishing ground cover, and necessitated reseeding several times. John Lenczewski, MNTU's Executive Director, says, "We anticipate minor maintenance will be done for the next two years using non-OHF funding. Every project experiences settling of rock, wood, structures, etc., and needs some repair or maintenance before it is complete. It will also take two full



CLEAN, COLD WATER FLOWS THROUGH A RESTORED REACH OF GARVIN BROOK

growing seasons (through September, 2019) for vegetation to become fully established, and then the project will truly be complete." Lenczewski went on to say, "Everyone wants to rush to see the newly-completed projects, but folks should realize that they all look relatively 'raw' until vegetation becomes fully established in two or so years."

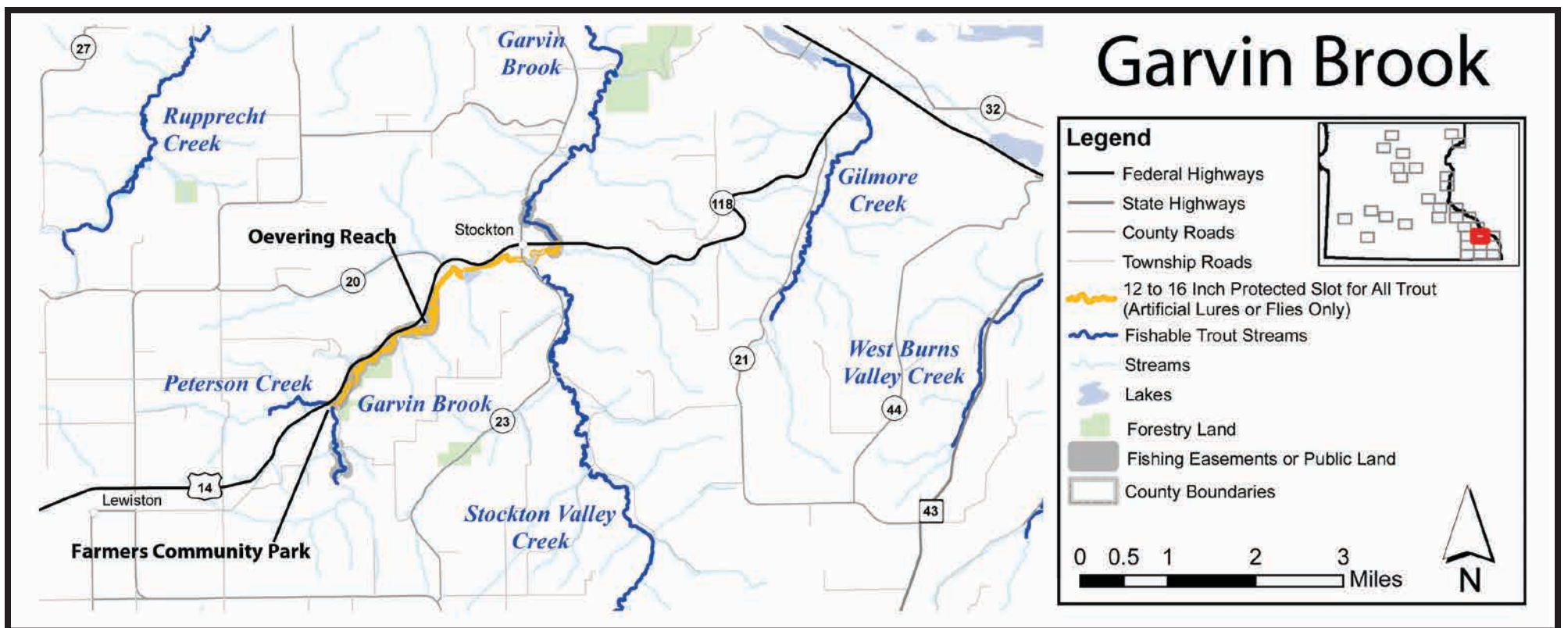
Jim Clark, long-time Win-Cres Chapter leader, fly angler and fly tier summarizes the positive reception this project has received when he says, "Before the project, there were perhaps six or seven places where you would catch fish. Now there are over twenty spots where you will find trout in good numbers." Jim says he also thinks "the improved cover may have convinced some of the big spawners migrating from the lower section to stick around."

Jim and other Win-Cres members have expectations this could be a premiere fishing location. This section has large trout potential. In fact, Dr. Neal Mundaahl, an active TU'er, and his Winona State University students, have electro-fished trout in this section of Garvin Brook for a number of years, occasionally netting brown trout in the twenty-inch category (see his photo). Since the headwaters of Garvin Brook (above Farmers' Park) have a population of brook trout, trouters are pleased once in a while to catch a "Garvin Brookie" in the lower parts of Garvin as well.

As far as fishing strategy goes, once I arrive at the stream, I have two choices. Since I prefer to fish upstream, I can either start fishing upstream from the culvert crossing, or go downstream to the



WIN-CRES TU CHAPTER VOLUNTEERS CONSTRUCT HABITAT STRUCTURES



bottom end of the project and fish back up. Over 2/3rds of the project is below the driveway crossing, so that is the direction I usually head. Fishing upstream from the crossing would allow you to fish some runs and a couple nice pools (one fed by a sizeable spring tributary which enters on the left) before reaching the railroad trestle, and then you could continue under the trestle, accessing the 1.2 mile previously-improved portion of Garvin Brook.

But if you choose to walk downstream, you will be tempted to ply your trade at the corner pools that provide such nice depth (often 4 to 5 feet) in this stream. Since you will be fishing these pools on your way back upstream, it is smart to at least scout them out a bit on the way down.

Garvin Brook has some excellent and often quite profuse hatches, especially its caddis hatches. The *Brachycentrus* (grannom) hatch began last year in the last half of April and was excellent! Fishing the tan caddis (size 18) in the summer often produces good action, especially towards evening.

Garvin has some good mayfly hatches, also. Look for the Light Hendricksons in May and there are good *Baetis* hatches in the spring (late March to early May) and fall (into October). One of our friends has seen an enthusiastic response during the *Baetis* event using a parachute BWO

fly anglers who fish Garvin make sure they have a good assortment of flies as they fish Garvin Brook. Small pheasant tail nymphs, regular and with beadheads, are a favorite here. Also the small beadhead Shop Vac is effective. See the pattern below. Soft hackle patterns also work very well on Garvin Brook.

With all the streambank grasses along this stretch and upstream, terrestrials will take a lot of trout. Cricket patterns on early summer mornings and small hoppers/beetles/ants in late summer afternoons extending into fall will bring you a lot of action.

With the increased depth added to this reach of Garvin Brook (four-plus feet in over a dozen places), you will need some weighted flies at times to effectively fish this stream. Weighted streamers (including leech patterns, sculpin patterns and perhaps Clouser minnows) are most effective as water starts to clear up after rain events. As we said, those off-color days are infrequent as Garvin Brook is known for clearing up quickly. Beadhead grey scuds work well for me. I also tie a weighted beadhead hare's ear on a size 12 hook that really gets down quickly and plumbs the depths easily, even in faster currents, and is a consistent fish taker.

Following the devastating flood of August, 2007, the DNR restored Garvin



A SECTION OF GARVIN BROOK PRIOR TO RESTORATION WORK. THE BANKS WERE LATER GRADED TO GRADUAL 3:1 SLOPES, AND ROCK WAS USED TO HOLD THE SLOPE'S TOE UNTIL GRASSES TOOK HOLD. LIMESTONE ROCK SITS ON TOP OF THE BANK, READY TO USE IN THE NOW-COMPLETED PROJECT WORK.



A LARGE WILD BROWN TROUT FROM GARVIN BROOK CAPTURED BY THE WINONA STATE CREW WITH DR. NEAL MUNDAHL

and also sparkle dun patterns down to size 20 in the fall.

Garvin Brook remains very clear, often even after a recent rain, so its trout can be skittish. But even in the absence of a hatch, anglers find active fish ready for your offerings. Some of the Win-Cres

Brook in Farmers' Park. Counting that work and the work scheduled for this next summer just below the park, anglers will be able to fish and enjoy four recent habitat improvement projects, now connected as one three-mile parcel of quality, spring-fed trout stream known as Garvin Brook!

A Fly For Garvin Brook: The Shop Vac

Hook: Scud hook such as a TMC 2457 in sizes 16-20.
Thread: Black 6/0 or 8/0
Bead: Gold, 3/32-inch.
Rib: Fine copper wire
Body: 6 to 8 pheasant-tail fibers.
Wing: White Antron fibers.
Adhesive: Head cement.

