

FISHING OUR HABITAT IMPROVEMENT

Newburg Creek

By Carl Berberich



LEFT: NEWBURG CREEK AFTER WORK WAS COMPLETED AND PRAIRIE PLANTED. RIGHT: BANK EROSION PRIOR TO WORK.

Newburg Creek is truly a gem of a stream. Most trout-fishing people would have overlooked it, if not for the 2015 project the Hiawatha Chapter and MN Trout Unlimited did, using an Outdoor Heritage grant. This was an extremely wooded little stream choked full of downed wood, with raw dirt banks up to 6' tall. With the stream varying in width from 2' to 10' (averaging 3-4') and with many reaches having less than 6" water depths, it was not a stream that attracted many people to try and fish it. But it does have one thing very unique: brook trout. Yes, this little stream, about a mile long from its spring to its mouth on Wisel Creek, has brook trout, and half of it has fishing easement.

According to Paul Krolak, Hiawatha TU Habitat Coordinator, the design objectives for the project were to remove the high, easily eroded banks, reconnect the stream with its flood plain, reduce the channel width, and increase habitat density. Bank heights and bank slopes were carefully designed with sediment transport and flood flow in mind. The design team also elected to forgo overhead cover constructs, like lunkers or skyhooks, as their failure rate is pretty high in high-gradient flashy streams, and because they might favor brown over brook trout. Instead, 'toe wood' - a layered log, root wad and branch complex - was installed in a number of spots to provide cover habitat for fish and other aquatic life, and to protect the bank from high flood currents. Even in 3'-wide Newburg, the structure was dug four or more feet below the water's surface, and the wood extends 10 or more feet back into the bank. Like all streams in our area, sometimes a big storm parks over the valley and as much as 8" of rain may fall in a day or so. Newburg has weathered several such storms since the completion of the project. The toe wood complexes have come through without any damage. And the fish love them. We know because fishing success does not lie.

Located in Fillmore County and roughly 15 miles south of the town of Rushford, this trout stream has truly metamorphosed into a stream worth

exploring. The habitat project has really improved this trout stream. But watch out and do not overdo it. This stream has no special regulations. Due to its small size, it could easily be over-fished if we don't practice catch and release.

Cedar Valley Rd. runs north from the little village of Newburg and is parallel to the stream. 156th St, just off of Cedar Valley Road, crosses the stream upstream from its mouth on Wisel Creek. DNR maps show that the fishing easements start at the mouth and run upstream about halfway up its total length. The section above the bridge on the stream is the most easily accessed. The landowner, Jon Duhachek usually has a small path parallel with, but set away from, the stream. His place is known for the tall wild-flowers growing in the meadow during the summer. The native prairie plantings ensure that even in the middle of summer, this stream is pleasantly fishable. The next property upstream is a pasture. There is a fence separating the two with a crossing stile. This pasture is another easily fished

property in all seasons. Upstream of the pasture is the end of the easement. There are some places to fish upstream, but that requires getting access permission.

Small streams like this are easily fished with dry flies for early season mayflies starting with the BWOs in April, and standard nymph patterns like pheasant tail nymphs. Summer dry-fly boxes must always include caddisfly patterns, size #16 and #18. Late summers should also include small hoppers, crickets, and ant patterns. My favorite fall pattern is an olive and partridge soft hackle in size #14 or #16, swung downstream.

Brook trout are not too particular about what they eat; however, they are easily spooked. Keep very low, and do not walk around trying to see into the stream, just fish every hole as if there are fish in it. Fish it slowly and keep moving on. I find it unusual to catch more than one fish per pool. Once one is caught the others know what is going on and hide. Another way to fish a small stream is to stand (or kneel) away from the edge, up

to a dozen feet away. This prevents spooked fish. This technique works best on the turns in a stream where you have more viewable water in which to cast. Another way to prevent spooking fish, is to land any fish caught far upstream or downstream from where you are fishing. Preferably around a corner. Out of sight makes a difference.

One interesting trait about fishing a small narrow stream is the casting, whether upstream or downstream. If there are gusting winds it can be amusing, and frustrating at the same time. It definitely is challenging, when you can't get your fly line and fly to land on the water due to sudden gusting side winds. So, when you are standing and looking at a straight section 30' long but 3' wide, with a gusty wind, you might need to slow down and wait for the wind to quit before attempting the cast. I certainly lose enough flies on the stream banks, because I don't want to retrieve them and spook the fish.

As far as wading goes on this stream,

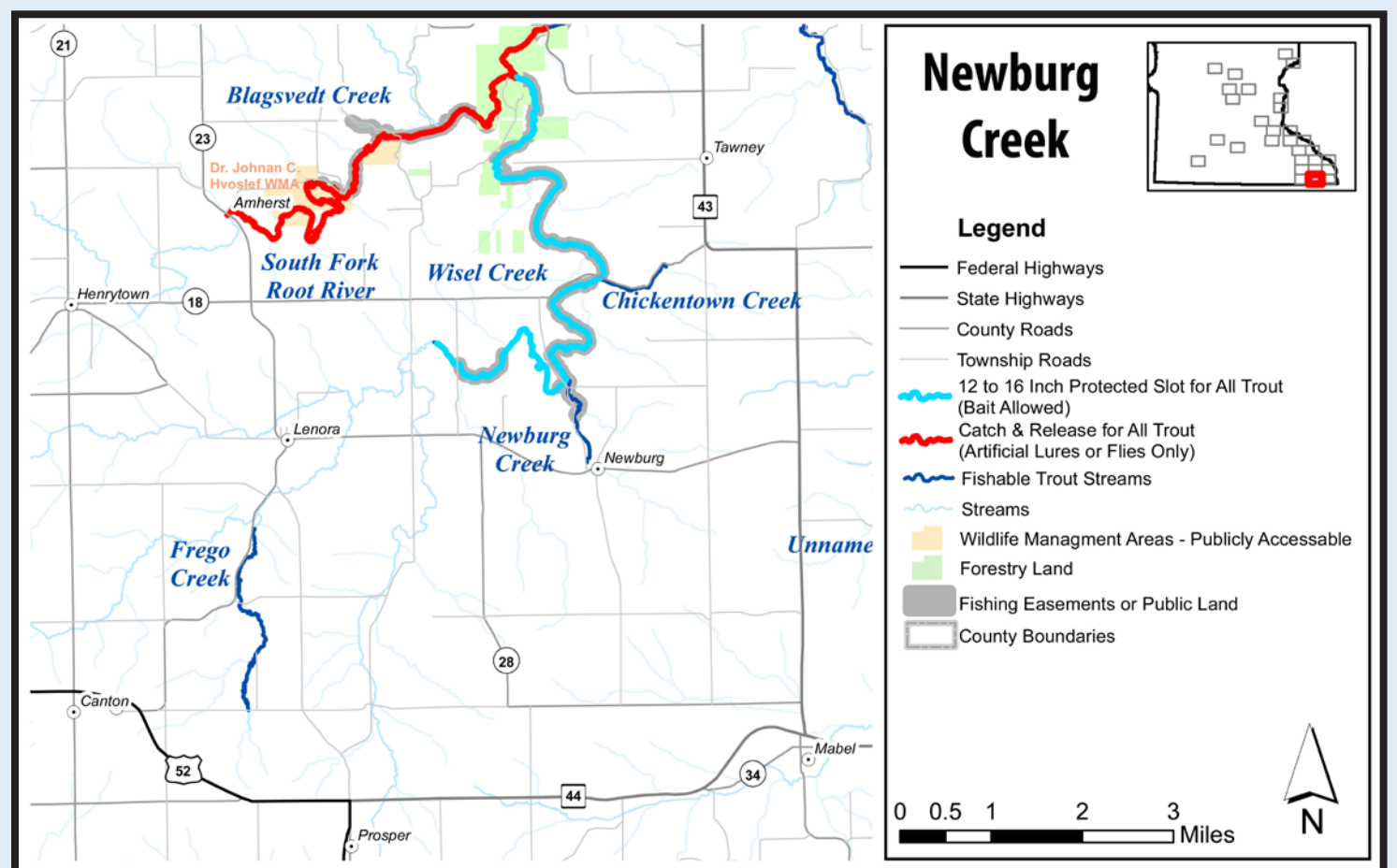


THE AUTHOR HOOKED UP THIS FALL ON A PRODUCTIVE REACH OF NEWBURG CREEK IN SE MINNESOTA

you don't need chest waders, especially in the summer. The maximum depth is around two feet in all but the deepest parts of pools, so hip boots or wet wading will get you almost everywhere. There is even a walking bridge across the stream on the Duhachek property. You really won't be standing much in this stream fishing, only crossing it.

There are a few reasons why Newburg Creek is getting extra notice in 2018. The first issue is because of its smaller size. This past year, Minnesota received a lot of rainfall, and the southeast has received plenty. All of the larger streams have been overflowing multiple times due to large rainfall events since last April. This clouds and muddies the streams. Throwing nymphs, soft-hackles and streamers have been the go-to flies for when this happens. But when you want to throw dry flies, you need to find clearer streams. Headwaters streams provide this, and Newburg is one of these. These streams are the first to clear up and generally do not get as turbid as the larger streams. Not to say that this stream never floods, it just clears up in a few days, in contrast to Wisel just downstream. Wisel can take a couple of weeks to clear after a single rainfall. The stream habitat project on Newburg has worked extremely well this year.

Another new thing on Newburg is an Airbnb rental that started up in November 2018. Jon Duhachek has built a new home creek-side and is sharing this via Airbnb. Find "Thistle Ridge



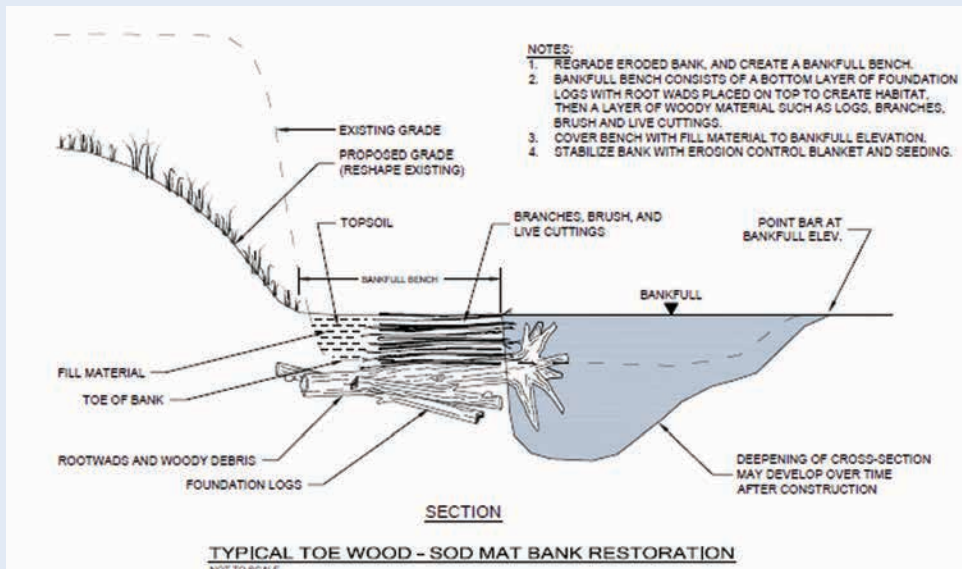
B&B" at "www.airbnb.com" (also check out the ad on page 18). Jon says "Thistle Ridge B&B is open year round for those die-hard trout fishers. Nestled in Cedar Valley with a 1/4 mile of Newburg Creek on the property and many more trout streams just minutes away. Enjoy your stay in a private suite with full bath and kitchen. Relax and enjoy panoramic views from your own deck overlooking the valley and stream." I think that having an Airbnb rental is a truly 21st century feature in this very 19th century Amish area. There are about a dozen

trout streams within 10 miles of this location, including the South Fork of the Root River, Wisel, and Gribben Creek. Having a go-to trout stream in questionable weather, such as Newburg Creek or other nearby topnotch SE Minnesota trout streams, can make a dependable fishing trip, even when you have a distance to travel.

One discouraging item that could transform this little gem: A proposed hog-confinement facility to be built a mile from Newburg Creek. The corporation Catalpa LLC has requested a permit from the MPCA. This project could have two barns, a composting building, and an over eight million-gallon manure pit that will be cleaned out twice a year and will be injected or broadcast onto numerous fields around the area and stream. One field is less than 600' away and a protected tributary to Newburg Creek is adjacent to another field. An additional concern is the limestone karst geology that is known for its sinkholes. Geologists predict that sinkholes are created by an accumulation of water or liquids on the surface, which percolate through the limestone and eventually create a sinkhole. Accidental releasing of up to eight million gallons of hog manure into a newly developed sinkhole, or allowing it to percolate through the

limestone could contaminate the water aquifer which would contaminate everyone's drinking water. Local concerned citizens from Mable, MN (3.5 miles away) have requested an EIS by the MPCA to investigate the proposed corporate hog confinement lot by Catalpa LLC. Due to unresolved questions, the Newburg Township board voted and approved a one-year moratorium on new feedlots over 500 animal units. This, hopefully, will make the MPCA do a thorough investigation on this issue. About five years ago a nearby one million-gallon manure pit collapsed spilling 500,000 gallons of raw manure downstream into Wisel Creek and then into the Root River. There were no penalties or fines given. The MPCA said that Fillmore County awarded the permit, and that the construction was improper. Evidently, the construction inspection by the county did not happen appropriately.

Next year we are planning to restore habitat on Wisel Creek about 1.5 miles below the confluence of Newburg Creek. So, keep your eye out for the future of Newburg Creek, Wisel Creek and the community around it. They may need all of our help.



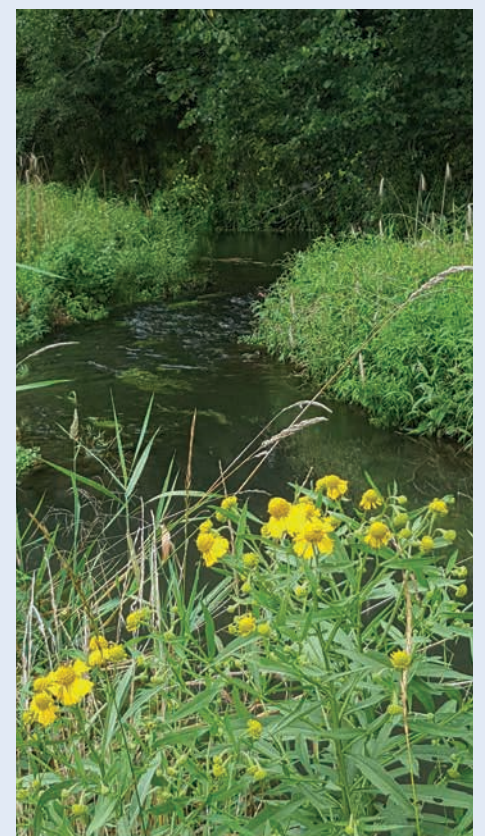
ROOTWADS PROVIDE GREAT TROUT COVER ON MANY BENDS OF NEWBURG CREEK. NOTE THAT ROOTWADS ARE NOW PLACED LOWER THAN IN PAST YEARS. THIS ALLOWS TREE TRUNKS TO REMAIN BELOW THE WATER LINE DURING LOW BASE FLOW CONDITIONS AND HAVE GREATER DURABILITY.



A DEEP REACH OF NEWBURG CREEK AFTER COMPLETED HABITAT WORK



A NICE NEWBURG BROOKIE



PRAIRIE ALONG THE CREEK