

## **BATTENKILL TWIN RIVERS FARM HABITAT ENHANCEMENT PROJECT**

### **What is the project?**

Twin Rivers Farm is a 1/2 mile stretch of the Battenkill in Arlington, Vermont. The landowner, Dr. William Lesko, offered his property for a major habitat restoration project. Other landowners on the opposite side of the river have also cooperated in allowing work to be done on their land as well. The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department and the Green Mountain National Forest are designing, implementing and monitoring the project. The Battenkill Watershed Alliance is the local organization working with landowners and through which the funding will flow. Orvis and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation are partnering with Orvis customers and concerned individuals to raise \$90,000 to supplement the \$85,000 being provided through the GMNF.

### **Why is this project necessary?**

The Battenkill wild trout fishery has seen a dramatic decline in the number of trout since the early 1990's. After extensive studies (2000 - 2005) it has been determined that available trout cover through the Battenkill mainstem is well below levels needed to sustain a robust trout population.

### **Why not stock the river?**

This is a question asked by many. There are several answers. First, and most simply, just as wild trout require in-stream cover, so to do stocked trout if they are to have any chance to hold over. Second, Trout Unlimited (TU) has done extensive surveying of the river in the fall and confirmed that spawning is taking place throughout the mainstem and critical tributaries of the river. Third, annual electro-shocking surveys indicate that there is adequate recruitment of young of the year trout but that a "bottleneck" exists when these fish grow to the yearling age class. Those fish that do make it past this age group survive and thrive and there are more than a few impressive brown trout in the river, not to mention a healthy brook trout population. There is simply not enough protective habitat for the fish to hide from the many predators along the river or withstand periodic flooding and other natural occurrences. Finally, there is genuine value to wild trout. The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department is charged with maintaining wild fisheries where they are able to so.

Through the studies that have been done on the river it has been demonstrated that the Battenkill has many characteristics of a quality wild trout stream - clean water that stays cool in the summer, adequate spawning gravel, slightly alkaline water that acts as a buffer against acid rain, and stable flows. Cover habitat is the key missing ingredient.

### **What will be done?**

Over the next two years numerous in-stream structures will be built utilizing natural stream channel design methods (bioengineering). These structures will consist primarily of root wads, debris clusters, and whole and partial trees, which in turn will influence the creation of gravel bars to add a degree of sinuosity to the river channel. These structures are natural in appearance and in fact replicate what would be happening on the river if not for past land use practices that have removed large amounts of woody debris from the banks and within the stream channel.

## **Will it work?**

There have been several smaller scale projects done on the Battenkill utilizing root wads to protect eroding banks. Electro-shocking (and just plain old fishing) these sections after project completion has demonstrated that trout use this cover extensively - all age classes of fish. Telemetry studies on other rivers that have undergone extensive habitat improvement such as the Au Sable in Michigan show that trout utilize the type of cover that will be placed within the Battenkill. Similar projects have also been successfully completed in the White River watershed in central Vermont.

## **What can I do?**

Two things. First, please consider contributing to the project fund. For every dollar donated, Orvis will match with a dollar and NFWS will match with another dollar. A \$50 contribution means \$150 toward the project and restoring a unique wild trout fishery. Contributions of any amount are welcome!

Second, come fish the river. Despite the bad press the Battenkill has received in recent years the fishing is really not that bad at all. Does it take a little extra effort? Perhaps so, but that has always been the case on the Battenkill. When other rivers are in a summer funk in August, Battenkill trout are rising each morning to heavy trico spinner falls. Brookies up to 13 - 14 inches can be caught. This is to say nothing of the numerous small streams in the area that offer terrific fishing and several other area streams that hold extensive wild trout populations.

## **Finally ...**

Further details about the project can be found at <http://www.orvis.com> (conservation section) or at the Battenkill Watershed Alliance website (<http://www.BKWA.org>)

Thanks very much. To keep up to date with what is going on up in our neck of the woods check out our Southwestern Vermont Trout Unlimited website at <http://www.tuswvt.org>.

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Southwestern Vermont Chapter of Trout Unlimited  
[www.TUSWVT.org](http://www.TUSWVT.org)