

## Trout Habitat Improvements on Mill Creek!

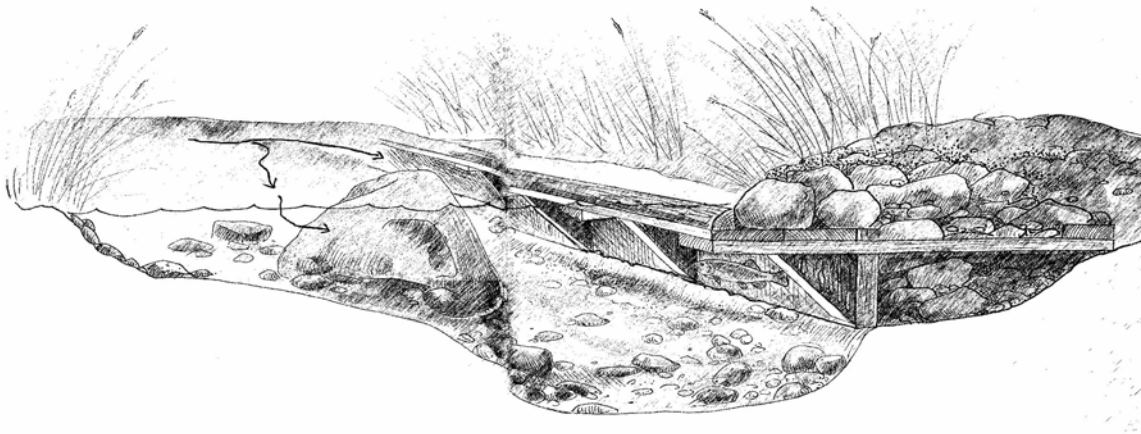
Nick Girondo

Fisheries Management Biologist

Rolla

The wild rainbow trout population of Mill Creek in Phelps County is about to get a home makeover. The Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC), with help from many private funding sources, recently purchased a 432 acre tract of land containing 1 ¼ miles of stream frontage on Mill Creek. This new property is called the “Bohigian Conservation Area”, in honor of Dr. Bohigian who made a significant contribution of this property. This area is located just outside of Rolla. With this acquisition, the public has access to fish the upper 2/3 of this coldwater stream within MDC and U.S. Forest Service ownership.

Starting in the summer of 2007, structures will be placed in the stream to create new habitat that will help adult trout survive. This small, clear, spring-fed stream is very shallow with extensive amounts of gravel and watercress vegetation. This type of habitat is great for young-of-year and one year old trout; however, older fish have a hard time surviving without deep pools and overhead cover that are currently lacking in the stream. The new structures are designed to create these habitats within the stream. These structures include skyhooks, boulders, anchored root-wads, half logs, hard points and some other innovative techniques.



Skyhooks will be the main structures installed on the Bohigian CA portion of Mill Creek. Skyhooks are structures designed to increase the amount of overhead bank cover for trout. They are assembled out of rough cut green oak on the stream site and then set into the bank. Large rock is then installed to armor the structures and stabilize the bank. This creates a 22-inch overhang submerged just below the waterline, an ideal hiding place for trout. When placed at the tail of the riffle, skyhooks provide a protected home close to a food source. These structures have been successfully installed in Barren Fork in Shannon Co, a stream similar to Mill Creek, and are being used by adult trout there.



Heavy equipment will be used to put these structures in place. Although construction will create some unavoidable disturbance, precautions will be taken to ensure that no long-term damage occurs. Recovery from disturbance has been rapid and complete at enhanced sites on Barren Fork and careful use of equipment will ensure a similar quick recovery of the streamside vegetation on Mill Creek.

Many factors play a role in the size of a trout population, including habitat availability, food sources and water quality. By increasing the availability of adult trout habitat on Mill Creek, MDC is taking steps to provide anglers with a unique trout fishing opportunity in mid-Missouri.