

BREAKING NEWS» U.P. among areas to receive part of \$40 million for Michigan conservation projects

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Projects protect U.P.'s coaster brook trout

April 22, 2013

By CELESTE BOTT, Special to the Journal

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LANSING - Removing sand from the Salmon Trout River in Marquette County has helped protect the spawning sites of coaster brook trout, according to researchers.

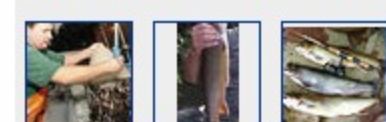
A sand collector was installed upstream last spring to intercept sediment before it reached the endangered trout's spawning habitat, according to a report from the Department of Natural Resources Marquette Fisheries Research Station.

The machine pumps sand out of the river, preventing it from covering stream-bottom rocks where the majority of coasters spawn.

Article Photos



Above, an unidentified Michigan Department of Natural R...



The Salmon Trout River is the last Lake Superior tributary with a natural breeding population of the species, said Casey Huckins, the project leader and professor of biological sciences at Michigan Tech University.

"They were once common throughout Lake Superior basin tributaries and nearshore waters, but the populations were wiped out due to over-fishing and habitat degradation," Huckins said.

Land use and roads in the watershed are the primary causes of erosion, which can lead to excess sand in the river, Huckins added.

The DNR funded the installation of the sand collector, but Huckins and his team will need more money to continue their work on the river. They've begun a "Save A Spawning Site" online fundraiser, where they hope to raise \$10,000 by May 15.

Donations would go towards the removal of the sediment that settled downstream before the collector was installed, Huckins said.

"Once we have cleared the sand that still covers the spawning site, the collector will be able to keep the site clean on its own, allowing coaster brook trout populations a better chance of recovery," he said.

Huckins said he hopes the additional sand removal will be possible this summer, and his team will continue to study the collector's effects by annually assessing coaster numbers in the river.

That's not the only ongoing research to aid coaster reproduction.

The Superior Watershed Partnership and Land Trust, based in Marquette, has spent more than a decade managing erosion control projects in the Salmon Trout River watershed.

In 10 years, its efforts led to a 70 percent increase in the native coaster population, said Carl Lindquist, executive director of the partnership.

"We started with a comprehensive inventory of problem sites in that watershed. Then we received funding and developed a management plan," he said.

That plan's success was featured in the DNR's 2010 State of the Great Lakes Report, but Lindquist said the partnership's work is far from over and will continue this summer.

The project received nearly \$1 million from a number of sources including the Environmental Protection Agency, Michigan Coastal Management Program, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Great Lakes Commission.

"We've been systematically addressing each problem site in the river, working on two or three each year," Lindquist said. "That's added up over the years. We've controlled a lot of the sediment sources and improved habitat conditions."

Lindquist explained that the river's surroundings make it particularly vulnerable to harmful sediment buildup.

"The majority of that watershed is surrounded by dirt roads and steep terrain," he said. "It may not look like a problem during a sunny day, but when it rains, it can hemorrhage tons of sediment."

"It's steep, and there's plenty of commercial forest activity, recreational activity and not very many paved roads," he added. "So that's one of the first things we addressed."

The Salmon Trout River watershed eventually reaches Lake Superior, and sand removal projects help ensure coaster brook trout can spawn and eventually make it to the Great Lake.

"We're excited about what we've done," Linquist said. "That watershed is small enough that we've been able to turn it around in a relatively short time."

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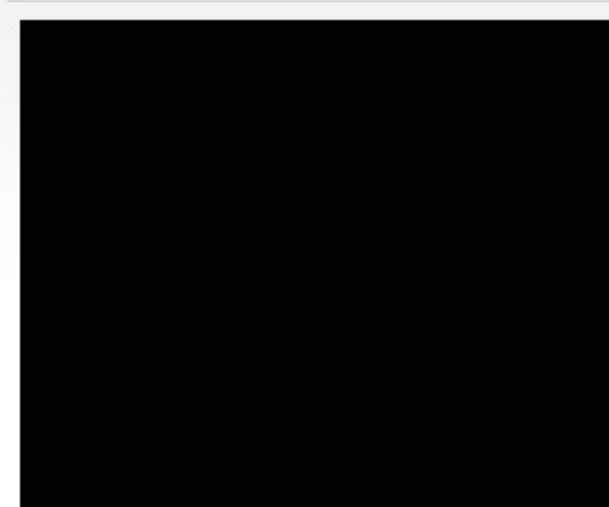
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