

Press Release

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“Otter Creek Streambank and Habitat Restoration Progressing”

Efforts to restore and protect parts of Otter Creek are progressing this spring with work on several properties in the flood-prone watershed. Tree removal, bank shaping and seeding are the primary strategies being used.

The goal of this project is to reduce bank erosion along Otter Creek, improve the fishery, reduce flood damages to adjacent lands, and to reconstruct some of the prairie that once existed along the stream.

Robert Weiss, a landowner along the downstream section of the project area, said, “I hope that more landowners along the stream get involved with the project and improve Otter Creek.”

Many Otter Creek landowners are farmers that regularly experience storm damage to their streambanks and adjacent crops. Above average and in many cases extremely intense rainfall and repeated flooding over the last 10-15 years has caused significant damage to the streambanks.

Galen Alwin, a farmer who’s experienced repeated flooding firsthand, says, “We want to preserve the topsoil. I want to improve the stream for the next generation, reduce the erosion caused by flooding to my crop fields, and be a steward of the land.”

“If people have seen the burning of brush along Otter Creek they should know it is just a small portion of what is being removed,” says Alwin. “The trees are being selectively harvested and all the wood that can be utilized is being hauled out for lumber or firewood. Many of the more desirable species of trees are being left for wildlife and stream habitat.”

Sauk County Land Conservation Department staff have designed stream restoration plans for seven different landowners along Otter Creek covering nine sites. The carefully designed plans encompass work on two and a quarter miles of stream, including one continuous stretch of a mile and a half. All necessary permits were obtained from both DNR and Sauk County.

Brent Bergstrom, Project Director for the Sauk County Land Conservation Department, emphasizes that “The landowners that I have worked with are all wonderful people that are concerned both about farming and Otter Creek. They want to be able to coexist with the stream and be stewards of the land all at the same time.”

The project is being completed by three Sauk County contractors who won bids to do the work.

The project consists of removal of most of the trees along the streambanks, then grading back the steeply eroding streambanks to a flatter, more stable slope. This reshaping will allow the landowners to

establish and maintain these slopes in a mix of prairie vegetation. Rock will also be strategically placed for erosion control and to provide fish habitat.

Similar work on other portions of Otter Creek will continue, pending interest by willing landowners and additional funding.

Dave Luck, another landowner says, "I'm interested to see if the project can improve the fishery at the same time. Intense storm events and flooding have been damaging the cropland and our farming operation. I believe that restoration of Otter Creek will enhance the ability to keep the farm productive into the future."

More information on the project can be obtained by calling the Sauk County Land Conservation Department at 355-3245.