

Friday, June 05, 2009

Update on the Lower Mountain Fork River

Hello Everyone,

I spoke with Paul Balkenbush, Streams Management Program Supervisor with the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation (ODWC) this morning on the phone. Paul was kind enough to provide some updated information on the situation on the Lower Mountain Fork River (LMFR). The following is a summary of our conversation and the information available:

The LMFR sustained considerable flood damage. Even so, recent assessments show that the situation is not as bad as it could have been in places. The Evening Hole weathered the event surprisingly well. The channel infillings (i.e., berms) and most trees and habitat structures remain in place. The flood did add some woody debris to the site. A large gravel bar also formed at the upper end of Evening Hole which re-directed much flow into the constructed wetland. This gravel bar will be manipulated so the flow is directed properly. From a restoration standpoint, Paul gave Evening Hole a grade A in terms of its stability during the flood.

Spillway Creek has been changed, but in a lot of ways, it is better than before. There are areas that are worse off and damaged, but several really nice pools, runs and pocket water have been created. The two wooden foot bridges were lost to the flood and will need to be replaced.

Cold Hole and Lost Creek received the brunt of the flood damages. In this location there is a valley type change which induced deposition of sediment transported from the failed highway and from upstream reaches. Cold Hole will have to be re-built and Lost Creek and the associated water diversion structure will have to be excavated and reconfigured. In ODWC's mind this is an opportunity to make things better than before.

The reach between the Lost Creek diversion structure and the bluff now looks entirely different than before. However, the sediment deposition and scouring has created some excellent habitat that should fish very well. ODWC will work some in this area to improve conditions while others will be left as the flood created them.

The Didymo found in the LMFR has been knocked back a little but the Oklahoma Biological Survey reports it will likely rebound quickly. Hence, there still exists a need to proceed with education and prevention efforts to curtail the spread of the algae to other

areas of the river and other fisheries. So, ODWC would like to proceed with production and placement of the Didymo signs.

Since the flood gates were closed last weekend, ODWC has been addressing the immediate concerns in the area including:

- Conducting flood damage assessments.
- Re-establishing stocking trails between the wooden foot bridges.
- Resuming trout stocking in most of the usual stocking locations. Most recent stocking was Thursday, June 4.
- Ensuring survival of salvageable trees planted along the Evening Hole restoration area.
- Working with the US Army Corps of Engineers to acquire approval to repair flood damages.
- Working with the Oklahoma Department of Tourism and Recreation to help rebuild the Cold Hole Bridge. This will include a temporary repair to restore traffic in the park and long-term plans to rebuild the bridge in a manner that will better withstand future flood releases.

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