

Herrs' Nottingham Pasture Project Saves Fence, Improves Stream

(Continued from Page A1)

erator of the farm owned by his father, A. Dale Herr Sr.

Although at first "the biggest issue was to save our fence," said Herr, the project has provided an educational experience and expanded and improved stream health and fish and animal habitat.

"What started out as a fence-saving thing turned into a fish project," Herr Jr. said.

Herr estimates that the project will be completed in two years.

The Herrs had fenced the heifers out of the stream 15 years ago for herd health reasons, "and we got tired of fixing the fence every time it flooded," said Herr.

Although "anything that helped with the fish was a bonus at the time," the environmental aspect has since proven to be an important part of the project to the Herr family.

Taking advantage of the improved fish and bird habitat, mallards and wood ducks have returned to the stream along with a pair of geese who have nested and raised a brood in the pasture the past several years. Another development is the addition of a pair of beavers joined by two babies this spring.

The project, which began 10 years ago, continues to expand with the help of FFA students willing to provide manual labor and the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, which has drawn up plans and provided necessary materials.

The area quickly proved useful for studying new stream-saving techniques.

"Back then we didn't know very much, it was a lot of experimentation, but it was a small enough stream that we could manage it," said project coordinator Pat Fasano, project coordinator for the Octoraro Watershed Association, Nottingham.

"We as a watershed association serve as a clearinghouse of information," said Fasano. The organization focuses on educating the public, along with networking or setting up contact information for landowners.

Much of the legwork and coordination came from the Octoraro Watershed Association. The funding came from Pennsylvania's Fish and Boat Commission with Ducks Unlimited also contributing to the project.

What Works Best

"It was like a science project to see which project worked the best," said Herr.

The large "U" curving through the pasture was controlled with a variety of conservation practices.

The first step to stopping the stream's outward movement was the installation of several sawtooth deflectors. The deflectors — telephone poles and rebar placed in a triangular shape and topped with stones — were placed just before the curve that was inching toward the fence. The poles, which jut into the stream 20 feet, are anchored into the stream bank.

"The deflectors made the stream channel itself out," Herr said. The stream, which used to be 30 feet wide with three inches of water, now flows 15 feet wide with a depth of two feet.

The channeling has not only

stopped the creep of the stream but has also built up the opposite side of the bank.

As the silt swirls against the deflectors and slows down near the other side of the bank, topsoil is deposited. Native plants quickly take their place on the newly gathered soil.

The deflectors also create faster-moving water that scatters the silt in the bottom of the stream. This creates a rock bottom and an ideal habitat for fish, besides a place to stand for the cranes, according to Herr.

The steep slope was also graded to create a gentler slope, then lined with rocks.

The first rocks placed into the bank were the size of footballs. However, with the addition of machines, stones as large as boulders have been placed at strategic spots to alter the stream's velocity and course. The Herrs have enough stones to finish lining the stream bank or shore up areas in need of repair already on the farm.

Besides the deflectors, mud sills were installed at the curve. The sills are made up of eight-foot telephone poles dug into the bank. Over top of the poles are oak planks that hold stones. Consequently "when the poles rot out, stones still protect the bank," said Herr. The poles create a four-foot overhang and additional cover for fish.

Since the protective measures were taken, the curve has not made any further progress toward the fence.



FFA students work each summer to help place stones such as these that stabilize the stream bank.

Community Effort

It has been a community effort, said Herr, pointing out the help from the township, which lends backhoes and other large machinery for the heavy work.

Another example of community involvement is the trees "planted" in the stream that came from the nearby fairgrounds. Eighteen-foot trees, complete with roots, were dug into the bank, with the root ball in the middle of the stream, "a new practice to deepen the stream and protect the stream-bank," said Herr.

Also, FFA students have come to the farm for years to either help shore up the banks by placing rocks or by taking water quality samples as part of class work.

"It has been a great coopera-

tive project between the farmer, watershed association, Fish and Boat Commission, and Solanco FFA," said Fasano.

"Everyone got behind it locally," said Herr. Former FFA students, in fact, still visit the farm to check the stream's progress.

Stewardship

The Herrs have a history of stewardship with their land. A. Dale Herr Sr. was named the Outstanding Cooperator of the Year in 1989 by the Lancaster County Conservation District.

"We're just trying to save what was given to us — trying to make it better than when we got it," said Herr Sr. "I hope the next generation does that much more."

(Turn to Page A27)

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