

Community

Watershed group helps fish find food more easily

Published: Monday, June 19, 2006 3:00 AM CDT

The Bad River Watershed Association, in cooperation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, came to the aid of trout and other species in the Town of Ashland last month.

A culvert located just south of Highway 13 near Highbridge at the intersection of Billy Creek and Poppe Rd., sat nearly two feet above the stream. For trout and other fish species looking to swim upstream, this minor waterfall prevented them from gaining access to valuable spawning and feeding habitats.

"With over 1,000 road-stream crossings throughout the watershed, fragmenting habitats in this way can have significant negative impacts on fish populations," said Michele Wheeler, fisheries biologist and adviser to the watershed group.

But not on this stretch of Billy Creek any longer. Funds from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and cooperation from the Town of Ashland made it possible to install a "fish friendly" culvert, one without a drop at the outlet and with lower water velocity through the pipe. Engineers from the Ashland Bayfield Douglas County Land Conservation Department helped the USFWS design the new crossing. Tracey Ledder, technical adviser from the watershed association, a citizen group in Bayfield, Ashland and Iron Counties, coordinated the project.

"Projects like this one are a perfect example of what the watershed association is working towards," said Karen Danielsen, president of the group. "We bring together local governments, agencies and citizens to maintain and improve the high quality of the watershed."

The BRWA isn't stopping there though. Its Culvert Project, currently underway, aims to study the more than 1,000 road-stream crossings in the 1,000 square-mile watershed. The group hopes to list culverts most in need of repair and to help find funds to assist towns with the work involved. In cooperation with Northland College, the group will conduct a training program in October for town road crews on installing fish friendly culverts. A grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation will help fix more culverts next summer.

For more information or to volunteer call Michele Wheeler, BRWA Culvert Project coordinator, at 765-4284, or visit the BRWA website at www.badriverwatershed.org.