Sheboygan County Stewardship Fund 2003
Trout Unlimited Habitat Restoration

The Sheboygan Chapter of Trout Unlimited constructed habitat structures for Trout at three sites along the Onion River.

The Lakeshore Chapter of Trout Unlimited was granted $10,200 for the stream restoration project. The goal of the project was to restore the Onion River to the high quality trout stream that it once was and to create a self-sustaining, wild trout population through efforts made to improve water quality, water flow, and trout habitat.

Trout Unlimited's mission is to conserve, protect and restore North America's trout and salmon fisheries and their watersheds.

Trout Unlimited accomplishes this mission on local, state and national levels with an extensive and dedicated volunteer network. Trout Unlimited's national office, based just outside of Washington, D.C., and its regional offices employ professionals who testify before Congress, publish a quarterly magazine, intervene in federal legal proceedings, and work with the organization's 142,000 volunteers in 450 chapters nationwide to keep them active and involved in conservation issues.

The Onion River drains 99 square miles of the southernmost portion of the Sheboygan River Basin tributary to the Sheboygan River. The junction of Ben Nutt Creek and Mill Creek in the kettle moraine region, west and southwest of the City of Plymouth form the river. The Onion River flows southerly for more than half of its length then turns northward and flows into the Sheboygan River at Rochester Park in Sheboygan Falls. Belgium Creek is the only major tributary in the watershed. The Onion River flows freely except for two shallow impoundments at Waldo and Hingham. Land use in the watershed is primarily agricultural.

Tributaries to the Onion River include; Mill Creek, Ben Nutt Creek, Belgium Creek, and ten unnamed tributaries (WDNR 1995). The condition of the surface waters within the watershed ranges from trout stream quality, with intolerant macroinvertebrates in the upstream reaches, to communities that show a dramatic decrease in species diversity. This translates into an increase in tolerant species as a result of habitat and water quality limitations in the downstream reaches of the river (WDNR 1988, 1995). Metal and PAH contaminated sediment has been found in the East Branch of Belgium Creek.

The Onion River Watershed was one of the early Nonpoint Source Priority Watershed Projects in the state (WDNR 1981). In 1984, USGS and WDNR (Field and Lidwin 1984) conducted a study of the water quality of the Onion River. A follow-up report on the Onion River Priority Watershed Project (WDNR 1992) found that the nonpoint source pollution continues to be a major detriment to water quality. Water quality is also affected by point source discharges. In all, eleven municipal and industrial dischargers are in the watershed. Three discharge directly to groundwater and five are wastewater treatment facilities (WDNR 1995).