



Chapter 3

Fish in Our Waterways

Ya?tekVtsyake tsi? yohnekahtvyé.tu kahnekalúnyu

RESOURCE HISTORY

With the relocation to the Wisconsin region in the 1800's, the Oneida diet had adapted to coincide with the available resources in the area. The Oneida culture was threatened by change and a strong influence was asserted to alter the culture to comply with the European lifestyles. With these cultural threats, the Oneida diet maintained a consistent consumption of deer, turkey, duck, goose, raccoon, rabbit and bear along with the seasonal vegetables such as leeks, wild onions, corn, beans, squash and wild rice. A variety of berries and fruits were also included in the diet, which was derived of strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, apples and wild grapes. As a woodland tribe, the Oneida also utilized many tree resources such as nuts of the Hickory tree, walnuts, butternuts, chestnuts and maple syrup. Along with these abundant foods, the Oneida had an annual fishing season, which included the harvest of Trout, Walleye, Pike, Bass and Salmon. Other noted species include Bluegills, Crappies, Bullheads, and Pickerel.

The harvest of fish played a key role in the Oneida way of life and was honored by ceremony and offerings to the Creator. There were established fishing and gathering areas along the waterways that were utilized annually. Even with resource depletion in the early 20th century, harvesting continued as an important element of life on the Reservation. Sucker runs were often mentioned in the Works Progress Administration (WPA) papers (as described in *Cultural Uses of Waters of the Oneida Reservation*, Dr. C. Cornelius and L. Metoxen, 1997.) The Suckers were cooked during the spring run, salted in barrels and canned for future use. As lands changed due to increased development, pollution and logging, the natural resources began to be depleted. The fishing and Oneida way of life was also adversely affected. The loss of resources was of great concern but with limited financial resources, the Oneida Nation was not able to pursue aggressive protection efforts.



In the mid 1900's the abuses and termination of past agreements led to several years of progressive reforms, including the eventual greater powers of Tribal self-government, which excluded the state authority. These changes achieved more legal policies during the 1970's than during the 200 years of the federal government relations. Many of the administered acts allowed the Oneida Nation and other Indian Nations to obtain natural resource protection as their governmental structures strengthened.

Through this time period of water resource management the Oneida Nation was exercising their Treaty rights on all the waterways of the Reservation. For the past 170 years the Oneida people had fished the Duck Creek basin without challenge, specifically the Pamperin Park property. With all the enacted policies the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) had never asserted their concerns prior to 1992. Once questioned by the state, the Oneida Nation had agreed to forgo traditional fishing practices for the season in that area to avoid conflict and confrontation. However, after numerous attempts to adequately address the issue between the state and Oneida Nation failed, fishing recommenced the following year of 1993. The Oneida Nation informed the State of Wisconsin of their intent to fish Pamperin Park during the annual fish run and continues to exercise their Treaty rights. At this time, the Oneida Nation began the process of becoming a member of the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Society. This would provide litigation experience and access expertise in marine biology. The actions taken by the Oneida Nation had resulted in the 1994 ruling, which clarified the eastern boundary of the Reservation and upheld the established Treaty fishing rights.

In 1997, an Oneida teenager overheard two older men talking about fishing in Duck Creek. He said to them, "Wow, you actually know someone who can remember fishing in Duck Creek?" Fishing in Duck Creek was not part of this young Oneida's world because the water has been so polluted that the creek is not used. Over the past decade, the Oneida Nation has made strides in trying to restore Oneida's fisheries. Oneida has continued to expand their management of Oneida fisheries through restocking, habitat modifications, and water quality improvement efforts. Coordination with external agencies such as the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) continues to be an important element.



11th Annual Youth and Elder Fishing Day

As the abundance and health of fish on the Oneida Nation continues to ascend again, so shall the presence of traditional family fish harvesting. An annual celebration of the fishing opener is held yearly at Osnúsha? Lake. This community gathering, called the Youth & Elder Fishing Day, will celebrate its 15th anniversary in 2014.

RESOURCE DESCRIPTION

Warm Water Environment

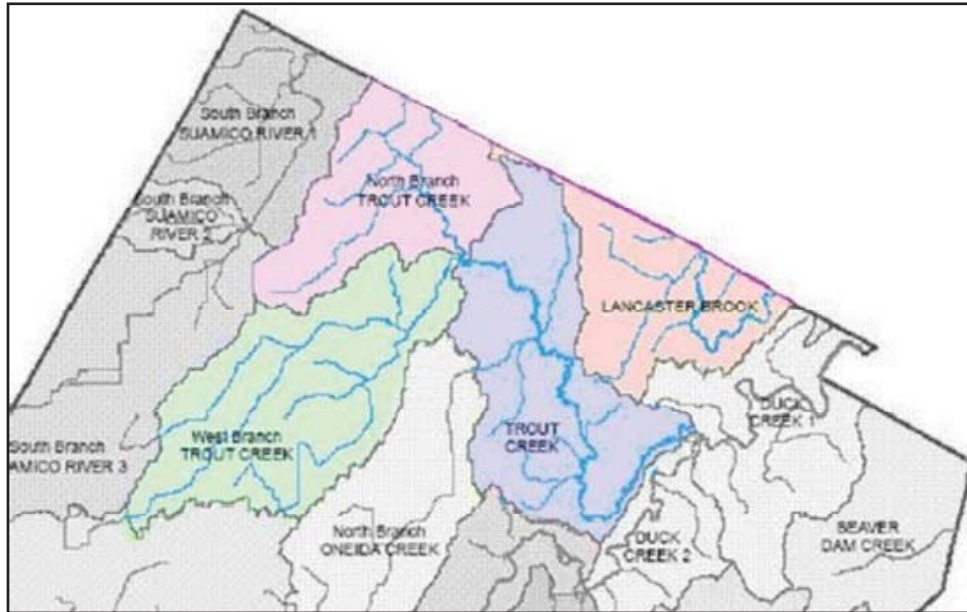
A Fisheries and Habitat Evaluation Assessment Plan was designed for Duck Creek by the USFWS, WDNR and the Oneida Tribe of Indians. This project provided information on the habitat and fish community of the Duck Creek watershed. Annual sampling has been conducted since 1995, and includes fish collection and identification, population estimates and habitat evaluations. Most of Duck Creek is classified as a warm water sport fishery with the exception of the upper reaches (headwaters), which are classified as warm water forage fishery. The resident fishery consists primarily of Panfish, Bullheads, and Northern Pike, while seasonal runs of Salmon, Yellow Perch, Northern Pike, Walleye and Suckers occur. A species of special concern, the Redside Dace, is present in Trout Creek, a cold water tributary to Duck Creek.

Cold Water Environment

The cold water fishery on the Oneida Reservation consists of Trout Creek, Lancaster Brook, and Thornberry Creek (a tributary of Lancaster Brook). Thornberry Creek is currently the only cold water stream in Brown County supporting natural reproduction of Brook Trout. Over the past decade, the Oneida Tribe has been focusing much of its restoration efforts within the Trout Creek Watershed. Recent initiatives have targeted the watershed for land protection, stream habitat work, and improvement of agricultural practices. Figure 3.1.



Figure 3.1 Watersheds Featuring Cold Water in Oneida, Including Trout Creek Branches and Lancaster Brook

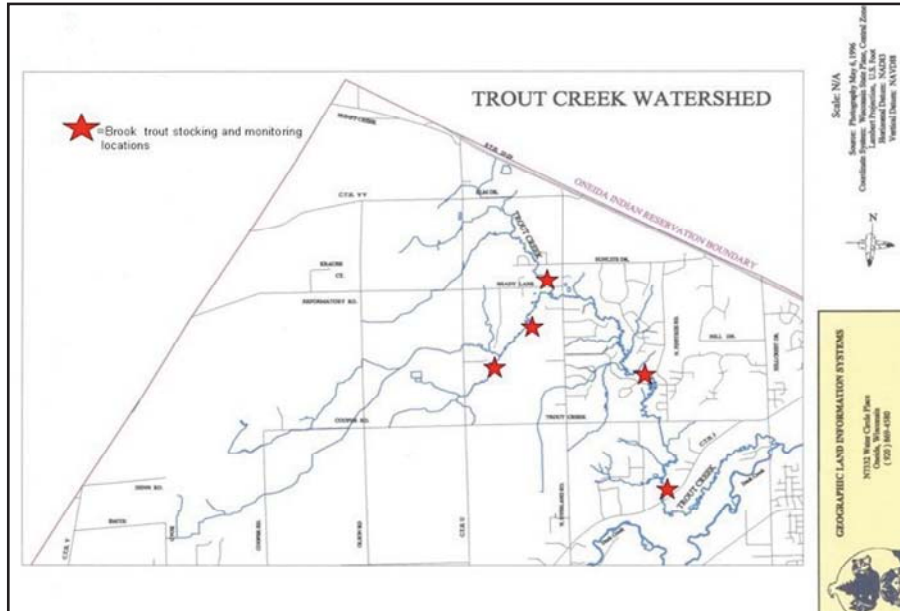


Fishery surveys were conducted in 2008 and 2009 on Oneida Creek, Trout Creek, Lancaster Brook, Duck Creek, and Dutchman Creek. Surveys were conducted earlier than previous years on intermittent streams, and the Intermittent Headwater Streams IBI Metrics are used as indicators of stream health. Only Lancaster Brook was sampled in 2009. Staffing constraints and Brook Trout fingerling stocking in Trout Creek prevented additional fishery surveys.

Trout Creek is now a relatively healthy cold water trout stream that does not possess a current population of brook trout due to past degraded conditions caused by previous agricultural pollution, channelization, and other human impacts. Oneida EH&SD is developing a Trout Creek Management Plan in conjunction with USFWS and WDNR. Trout fingerling stocking began in 2009 and was continued in 2010 and 2011. Brook Trout fingerling stocking occurred in quantities of approximately 3,000 each year. Figure 3.2.



Figure 3.2 Brook Trout Stocking and Monitoring Locations on the Oneida Reservation



Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) of Fox River

The Oneida Tribe became a member of the Fox River NRDA Trustee Council in the late 1990's. Historic, cultural, and natural resources on the Oneida Reservation, most importantly traditional fisheries, were damaged by the release of poly-chlorinated bi-phenyl (PCB) in the mid-20th century. Subsequent studies documented the damages to fish and wildlife within the Reservation. Since 2002, the Oneida Tribe has received funding from the NRDA program for six projects to replace, acquire, and restore resources that were injured by the release of PCBs. These projects have ranged from wetland restorations to watershed studies to land acquisition. Future projects will focus on restoring Reservation fisheries and sustaining Tribal fishing traditions, including the planning and excavating currently underway for a 32 acres lake.



COMMUNITY SUGGESTIONS & FEEDBACK

Live, Sustain, Grow survey results from the 229 respondents living on the Oneida Reservation indicate that although Oneida's fisheries have improved over the past two decades, much work is yet needed. The following results demonstrate several things. First, Oneida's are very active in the traditional culture of fishing, with 68% indicating that they fish on the Oneida Reservation at least once per year. Despite this active interest, 52% are either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the current populations. This resource loss is well recognized, and efforts such as, restoration projects and the Natural Resource Damage Assessment program are trying to improve populations. Also, only 54% consume fish caught on the Reservation, demonstrating the awareness of contamination present in the fish population on the Reservation.

Table 3.1 Live, Sustain, Grow Survey Results

How many days per year do you fish ON the Oneida Reservation?							
None	0-9 Days	10-19 Days	20-29 Days	30-39 Days	40-49 Days	50 or more Days	No Response
32%	49%	6%	4%	2%	1%	4%	2%
How satisfied are you with the current populations of fish on the Oneida Reservation?							
Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Not Sure	No Response		
3%	25%	38%	14%	14%	4%		
Do you eat the fish you catch on the Oneida Reservation?							
Yes	No	No Response					
54%	41%	6%					



GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goal 1

Protect, enhance and restore Brook Trout populations and the aquatic and riparian habitats on which, they depend such that healthy brook trout populations are rebuilt and sustained in Trout Creek and its tributaries.

Goal 2

Conserve, protect and manage the fishery resources of Trout Creek and tributaries such that quality and diverse fishing opportunities are maintained or enhanced.



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Goal 3

Increase and/or improve communication efforts to encourage the public to be better informed about fisheries management issues and management programs and activities, and to encourage environmental stewardship.

Goal 4

Conduct appropriate scientific investigations, monitoring and evaluations so management decisions are based on good biological and social information.



Woody debris added to Trout Creek improves habitat for trout reproduction



BENEFITS ASSESSMENT

Environmental

- The presence and abundance of fish species is highly indicative of the environmental health of Oneida's waters. Efforts to improve stream flow restore natural fish habitat conditions, and directly restocking fish have contributed to more abundant populations.

Social

- Fishing is a traditional activity of the Oneida culture and an activity that unifies and strengthens the community.
- Fishing is a family activity that strengthens the family.

Cultural

- Improving the quality of fishing improves the quality of life directly related to traditional Oneida culture.
- Restoring natural systems encourages today's Oneida youth and the next generation to maintain their residence and livelihoods on the Oneida Reservation.

Economic


- The harvesting of fish as a resource for consumption can reduce a family's food budget.
- Fishing is a low-cost and local recreational opportunity.
- The sale of sportsman licenses to non-tribal members is a revenue source to Oneida.

Food

- Restoring fisheries restores fish as a diet staple option to the Oneida community.
- Fish that is not contaminated is a healthy and low-fat protein source.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Several programs within the Environmental, Health & Safety Division work with internal and external partnerships to enhance the integrity of surface waters for fish and wildlife habitat. Next steps and future projects revolve around continuing these collaborative efforts and leveraging outside resource and technical assistance when appropriate.

Reservation waterways will continue to be managed for fish habitat around several areas: 

- Managing the quantity and quality of storm water runoff;
- Defining, restoring, and enhancing the functions of the watershed/sub-watershed system of the Reservation, including wetlands;
- Restoring and protecting aquatic habitats in the waters of the Reservation.
- Outreach activities focused on the Oneida community to promote appreciation and stewardship of our natural resources.

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Quarry Park, Cty. Hwy. J and N. Overland Road

