

## Work done on Swett Brook to help spawning salmon

By Matt Hongoltz-Hetling

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Swett Brook Before



Swett Brook After



Photo:

**SALMON SQUAD** — Front, from left, Anita Long, landowner; Steve Heinz, Sebago Chapter of Trout Unlimited. Back, Charles Hebson, Maine Department of Transportation; Francis Brautigam, Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife; Alex Abbott, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Matt Craig, Casco Bay Estuary Partnership; and Jay Milot, Caribou Springs LLC.

**WATERFORD** — Salmon in Waterford just got a boost, thanks to members of a local fishing organization who came together to influence the flow of water on Swett Brook Friday.

The brook, which flows into Crooked River, sometimes got dangerously shallow when flowing beneath Swett Brook Bridge on Bisbee Town Road. When water levels were low, it was impassable.

That was bad news for salmon and other fish, which use the upper reaches of the brook as spawning habitat.

"Fish can't go 30 feet over smooth concrete in 2 to 3 inches of water," said Steve Heinz of the Sebago Chapter of Trout Unlimited. The organization spearheaded the effort to open the stream to salmon.

The Crooked River and its tributaries are vital to the salmon population in Sebago Lake. Heinz estimates that 40 to 60 percent of salmon spawn in those waters.

"They swim well over 30 miles from Sebago Lake all the way up to Swett to spawn," he said.

On Friday, workers used an excavator to do the bulk of the work in constructing two weirs to raise the water level beneath the bridge. The weirs are comprised of a series of large stones that keep water levels high.

While salmon now have to leap over the weirs to spawn, Heinz said that this is not a problem.

"They're designed to let fish through. The Latin word for salmon means leaper," he said. "That's not for no reason."

Now, said Heinz, the fish will have unfettered access to the upper reaches of the brook. In 2009, the Swett Brook Bridge was found to be one of the five biggest problems in the Crooked River watershed for spawning salmon, according to an assessment done by Trout Unlimited and the Casco Bay Estuary Partnership.

"It won't happen overnight, but what we're hoping to see, is that the landlocked salmon start to use Swett Brook as spawning habitat and that they'll be able to ascend over low water conditions."

The project was supported by the Casco Bay Estuary Partnership, and the Maine Department of Transportation.

Heinz said that he is now going to turn his attention to other obstacles on Swett Brook. Trout Unlimited is hoping to improve these areas as well, to maximize the health of the watershed.

"There are some other things that need doing upstream," he said.

Those who took part in the project on Friday included Heinz, Anita Long, landowner; Charles Hebson, Maine Department of Transportation; Francis Brautigam, Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife; Alex Abbott, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Matt Craig, Casco Bay Estuary Partnership; and Jay Milot, Caribou Springs LLC.