

A HEALTH REPORT 2024

Black Earth Creek Watershed

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

produced by the Black Earth Creek Watershed Association

POOR DEGRADED NEEDS IMPROVEMENT HOLDING STEADY EXCELLENT

The Black Earth Creek Watershed is a highly valued natural resource and recreational area on the eastern edge of the Driftless Region in southern Wisconsin. This watershed covers 105 square miles and includes several tributaries that flow into Black Earth Creek. The watershed includes prime farmland, villages and rural communities, highly prized trout streams, paddling routes, parks, hiking trails, and the Ice Age National Scenic Trail and Scientific Reserve.

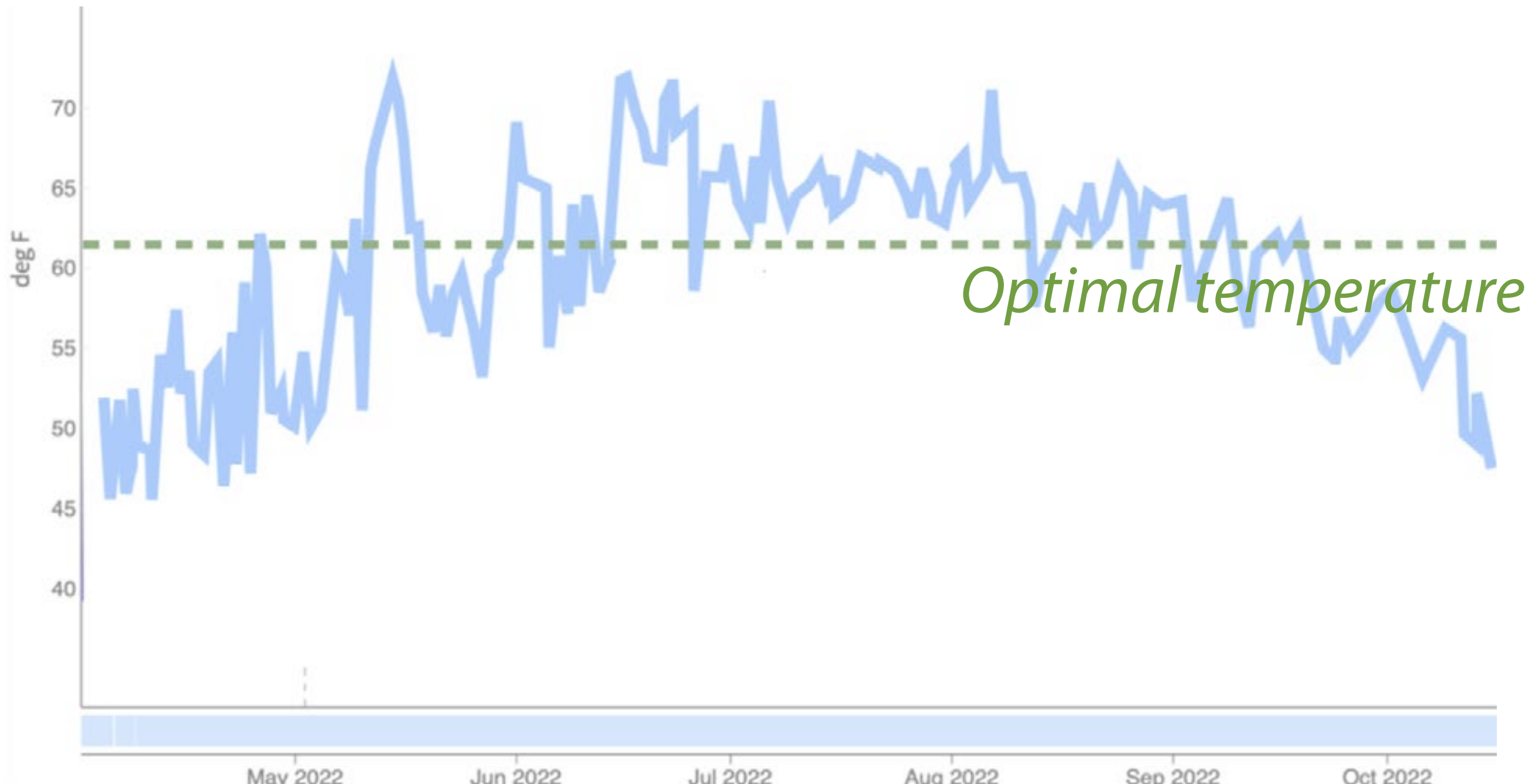
Positive indicators

- Black Earth Creek (BEC) is a nationally recognized WDNR designated Class 1 trout stream, with natural reproduction that sustains a wild trout fishery.
- Good overall water quality, along with public land for streambank access, parks, and trails, provide recreational opportunities for watershed residents and users.



Challenges

BEC summer temperatures can be too warm for trout health



Source: USGS provisional data

- Black Earth Creek can warm above the optimal water temperature for Brown Trout of 62^o F during the summer.
- Practices that infiltrate rain and snowmelt, such as “Green Infrastructure,” are important for cold, clean springs flowing into watershed streams.
- Invasive New Zealand mudsnails have been found in watershed streams.
- Neonicotinoid pesticides (AKA Neonics) and per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), occur in watershed streams and raise concerns. Neonics may be causing declines of aquatic insects, critical to the trout food base.
- Fertilizer and manure in agricultural/urban runoff can lower dissolved oxygen in the water to harmful levels for trout and other aquatic life.

Public support

- A recent survey of watershed users and residents showed they have a sense of responsibility, ownership, affection, pride, and deep-rooted connectedness associated with the Black Earth Creek watershed.
- Local/state governments and nonprofits cooperated to fund continued monitoring of Black Earth Creek by USGS (over \$75K per year).

“Black Earth Creek is a quality-of-life indicator for me. A healthy creek means we’re trying to do our best to be good stewards of our corner of the world.”

Survey respondent

Actions

- Encourage your local policy makers to adopt policies and pursue funding that support watershed improvement projects.
- Volunteer with organizations active in the watershed and support activities that promote watershed health.
- Become more aware and learn about aquatic ecology and other aspects of the watershed.



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Information presented in this report was obtained from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Dane County, and the United States Geological Survey