



# Wisconsin Trout

Winter 2025



## Council Awards and Fundraising Banquet Feb. 1 in Oshkosh

*Join your fellow TU members from around the state to help celebrate those people who are making the biggest difference in the TU community, while raising funds to support the TU mission.*

### Honoring Dave Vetrano

With the passing of legendary Driftless Area biologist Dave Vetrano, the Council will honor him at this year's banquet by renaming the award that we present to the most outstanding conservation professional. The award will now be called the Hunt-Vetrano Resource Professional Award. The first recipient of the newly named award will be Justin Haglund, DNR biologist. Welcome friends, family and coworkers to help us celebrate them both.

### Presenting our awards

We will also be presenting the following awards to some of the most well-deserving people in our TU community. We welcome and encourage family and friends of these award winners to attend the banquet and help us celebrate them and their accomplishments. Award winners this year will also include:

- Council Chair Scott Allen will receive our Resource Award of Merit.
- The Lakeshore Chapter will receive our Silver Trout Award.
- Harlon Meade and Lauren Genske will receive our Distinguished Service Award for Youth Education.
- Paul Kruse and Jim Hauer of the Green Bay Chapter will receive our Distinguished Service Award for their involvement in the Service Partnership arena.
- Dan Endres, President of the Aldo Leopold Chapter, will receive our Distinguished Service for Leadership Award.
- Michael Williamson and Andy Morton will receive our Reel Partners Award for their tremendous efforts to conceive, create and operate the recent Neonic Forum.
- Dick Berge, a life-long leader and teacher in both the Southern Wisconsin and Wild Rivers chapters, will receive our Lifetime Achievement Award.

## We lost a legend, but we'll never forget him

Retired DNR biologist Dave Vetrano passed away in November, but his impact on Driftless Area trout streams and trout conservation will live on forever. Please see the article by Duke Welter, as well as photos, starting on page 10 of this issue of *Wisconsin Trout*.

The Council is honoring Vetrano by renaming our award for conservation professionals the "Hunt-Vetrano Resource Professional Award. Please join us at our awards banquet Feb. 1 in Oshkosh to celebrate him and our amazing cast of award winners.

Dave Vetrano caught this coaster brook trout in 2023 while fishing with his brothers-in-law, Mario and Marc Comisso, on a cove of Lake Superior. Where? According to him it was "somewhere in North America."



### THE KNOWLES-NELSON'S STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM'S IMPACTS RUN STATEWIDE, SUCH AS THE WOLF RIVER. LEARN MORE INSIDE.

The extremely popular and successful Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program, which has protected parcels of land in every corner of Wisconsin for our citizens to enjoy, is coming up for renewal in the state budget. Turn to the next page of this issue of *Wisconsin Trout* to learn how important this program is and how you can easily get this message to your state representatives.

## Banquet donations welcomed

Please consider making a donation to our banquet. No donation is too small, and we will support and recognize those businesses and individuals who do so.

Your donation makes this banquet more successful, and that means more funding for the Council to carry out its mission during the next year, from helping our chapters to working with kids and veterans, to restoring our coldwater resources.

Anyone interested in making a donation can email me at [jdrflooring@gmail.com](mailto:jdrflooring@gmail.com). Thank you so much.

Myk Hranicka, Banquet Chair and Vice Chair,  
Wisconsin State Council of Trout Unlimited

# Help save the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program

By Mike Kuhr, Wisconsin Council of Trout Unlimited Advocacy Chair

Access to public lands and the waters that flow over them are vital to the quality of life here in Wisconsin. It's no secret that trout prefer habitats with good overhead cover, current breaks and easy access to food. We humans are similar in that we prefer to occupy places that provide ample opportunities to live, work and play. Thanks to the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program, Wisconsin's iconic public lands initiative, places to play are always close by.

Since 1989, the program has been used to preserve valuable natural areas and wildlife habitat, protect water quality and fisheries, and expand opportunities for outdoor recreation in Wisconsin. While recent polls show more than 90 percent of Wisconsinites support the program, it's set to expire in 2026 unless the governor and state legislature act to reauthorize the program in the upcoming state budget.

My childhood memories are filled with times spent camping, fishing, hunting, hiking, biking and boating on public lands. Now further into adulthood than I like to admit, with kids of my own, we often seek out these public spaces for recreation.

Winter offers riverside snowshoe hikes and ice fishing on the local lakes with easy access from a multitude of public boat launches. I always look forward to those few days in January or February where the temperatures sit just above freezing. We head to the local trout streams with public fishing access along the shores. With temps in the low to mid 30's there is no fighting iced-up

guides or the dreaded snowmelt, and we can usually find a trout or two that are willing to cooperate.

Springtime hikes in our local nature preserves often result in close encounters with deer, turkey and goslings. Spring fishing highlights include several trips to the Driftless Area, where public fishing easements abound. And every year I spend the May fishing opener with good friends on the Wolf River in Langlade County. The Wolf is where I fell in love with rivers, and this fabled trout water has lots of public fishery areas to explore.

Early summer means school's out, and we're looking for local parks, playgrounds, public beaches and bluegills near public shorelines. Dog walks through the local prairie become much more colorful, and the annual Father's Day hike through Parfrey's Glen is time well spent. This past June we took the classic family vacation out west in search of public lands – Badlands National Park, Yellowstone National Park, the Beartooth Mountains and Custer State Park in South Dakota did not disappoint.

Mid- to late-summer highlights include the 4th of July festival at our local park, camping and canoe trips and horseback riding at Governor Dodge State Park. My fishing attention this time of year turns toward smallmouth bass. Our state is home to many easily accessible walk and wade bass rivers. If you have the budget for it, I highly recommend hiring a guide for a day or two of smallmouth fishing in Wisconsin. Those guides know where all the public boat launches are, how to navigate our rivers, and they'll put you on fish.

Fall is my favorite time of year. It's grasshopper season on the Central Sands and Driftless Area trout streams. The musky bite gets going on the waters of northern Wisconsin and a father-son fishing trip with my Dad is always on the calendar. This year, I tried grouse hunting with a friend on public lands. It was a lot of fun and I'll be heading back out to the woods next year.

As a photography enthusiast, I sometimes set down the rod and pick up the camera in the fall. The colorful scenery in our local, county and state parks begs to be photographed. Speaking of color, it's always a privilege to have a brook trout in the net during fall. The spawning colors on our native trout are breathtaking.

Great Lakes tributary fishing picks up. There's no shortage of local riverside parks to access the trout and salmon coming into the rivers from Lake Michigan and Lake Superior. If I'm lucky, I can squeeze in a pilgrimage to the Bois Brule River this time of year. It's al-

so the perfect time to get in one more bike ride with the kids on our local bike trails.

I know our family is not alone in seeking out these public spaces for recreation. In fact, a recent report showed that outdoor recreation contributed 11.2 billion dollars to Wisconsin's economy. This data shows that the investment our state is making in public lands through the program is paying off.

But we already know that. We're Wisconsinites. We've chosen to live in this state because of the quality of life and the outdoor recreational opportunities the woods and waters provide. Setting aside these lands that hold natural significance is our legacy. We want future generations to be able to enjoy these areas and make their own memories on public lands. Now it's time for our elected officials to come forward and provide a long-term reauthorization for this highly successful program. It's time to save the Knowles Nelson Stewardship Program.

### Easily contact your state representatives

Knowles-Nelson.org has developed an easy-to-use form to create a personalized postcard in support of Knowles-Nelson. Check it out at [Postcard.KnowlesNelson.org](http://Postcard.KnowlesNelson.org). After supporters fill out the form, real postcards will be printed and delivered to your legislators. The more people who do this, the better the odds of saving and reauthorizing this incredibly popular program.

Join other supporters on Knowles-Nelson Lobby Day on March 12 in Madison. This is a terrific chance for TU chapters, leaders and members to engage in advocacy. No experience is needed. Registration is free and includes meals. Details are at [KnowlesNelson.org/LobbyDay](http://KnowlesNelson.org/LobbyDay).

TEAM KNOWLES NELSON


## KNOWLES-NELSON


### RENEW STEWARDSHIP FOR 10 YEARS.

### IT'S HOW WE PROTECT WI'S LAND & WATER.

For 30 years, the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program has funded our parks and trails, protected our lakes and rivers, and conserved special places across WI. It's how we take care of the outdoor places we love.


The governor and the Wisconsin state legislature must renew Knowles-Nelson in the 2025 budget or we'll lose hundreds of millions of dollars to care for Wisconsin's land and water. Ask your legislators to support the DNR's request for \$100 million annually for 10 years to protect our special places.






90%

of Wisconsin voters support public funding for conservation




750,000

Wisconsin acres protected by Knowles-Nelson




4,200+

grants to support local parks, trails, boat launches, and campgrounds



\$11.00

annual cost per Wisconsin resident




KNOWLES-NELSON SUPPORTS KEY WISCONSIN INDUSTRIES:

94,000

outdoor recreation jobs

\$24 BILLION

forestry economy



WHEN WE PROTECT NATURE, NATURE WORKS FOR US

ACTION.KNOWLESNELSON.ORG

A FINAL WORD FROM COUNCIL CHAIR SCOTT ALLEN

# Goodbyes are easy. Endings hurt.

I'm not certain I've ever experienced a happy ending. My first and best fishing partner would be my grandfather. From him I learned more than a hook set, but how to say goodbye, my mournful child face buried in his seersucker, when leaving that Minnesota lake assured "it will be here next year." And it was. By my twenty-first year I turned away from my grandfather's grave, behind the log church, knowing this was not a goodbye but an ending. What I learned, with time, is new beginnings are often served to us as painful endings. Endings are where new understandings, call it wisdom, emerge.

My biggest trout ever, easily three inches longer than actual, I had in hand no better than a second only for it to snap off and leap free. Indelibly etched in my retinas, now some 20 years later I could take you to that very spot of that riffle where on the last day of the season I watched that caudal peduncle slip from my hand and swim to freedom. An ending or a goodbye? For me a painful ending, for Mr. Kype certainly a goodbye with, if a trout had one, middle finger extended. Next time I would greet him with a net, and I did. I'll call that wisdom, Mr. Kype.

So, on the first of February my tenure as Council chair comes to an end. I question, is it an ending, a beginning or goodbye? Having attended the School of Endings for the better part of my adult life I know this is a beginning. Recent research

at the Mayo Clinic is supporting the long-held assumption that volunteering is good for your health, mental and physical. "Volunteering reduces stress and increases positive, relaxed feelings by releasing dopamine." How about that? Dopamine. It kind of has an illicit ring to it. I knew there was something going on inside me that maybe I shouldn't share with the world, but now I can be proud of it.

And it could be a great volunteer recruitment tool. "Hey, pardner, need a shot of dopamine? Come to the next workday. It's cheaper than beer."

At our annual Awards Banquet you will a chance to honor and meet ten volunteers who know the value of beginnings. They all know how to start, keep moving and don't think about endings; it's the journey rather than the destination. Let's call it the dopamine high from volunteering. Some of this years awardees are teenagers and others as old as the hills. I have a hunch those in the "hills region" have benefitted from years of selfless volunteering, just look for that smile and dopamine spring in their step at the Awards Banquet.

For me there will be no swan song or reflections. I will begin as National Leadership Council representative, following on the heels of Linn Beck. That should keep me happy and kicking until the next lap, but don't look for a sprint to the end.



AS HIS COUNCIL CHAIR TERM ENDS AND NLC REP TERM BEGINS, SCOTT ALLEN WON'T BE MOTORING OFF INTO THE SUNSET ANY TIME SOON.

## CABIN FEVER DAY

### A RETURN TO AN EXPO FORMAT!

Saturday, January 18, 2025

10 am - 5 pm

Tanners Grill & Bar, 730 S. Railroad St.  
Kimberly

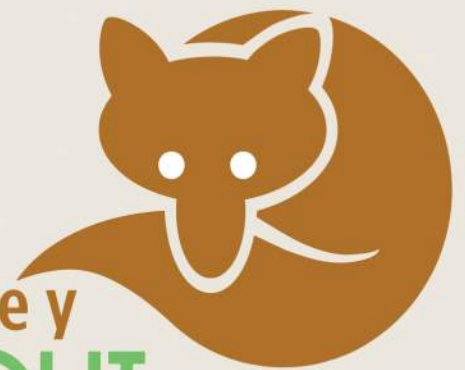
Up to 30 Exhibitors • 4 Speakers

Used Equipment Sale • Fly Tyers

Scott Grady Bamboo Rod Package Sweepstakes Sales

Silent Auction\* • High End Bucket Raffles\*

*\*must be present to win - no deliveries*



Fox Valley  
**TROUT** UNLIMITED  
foxvalleytu.org

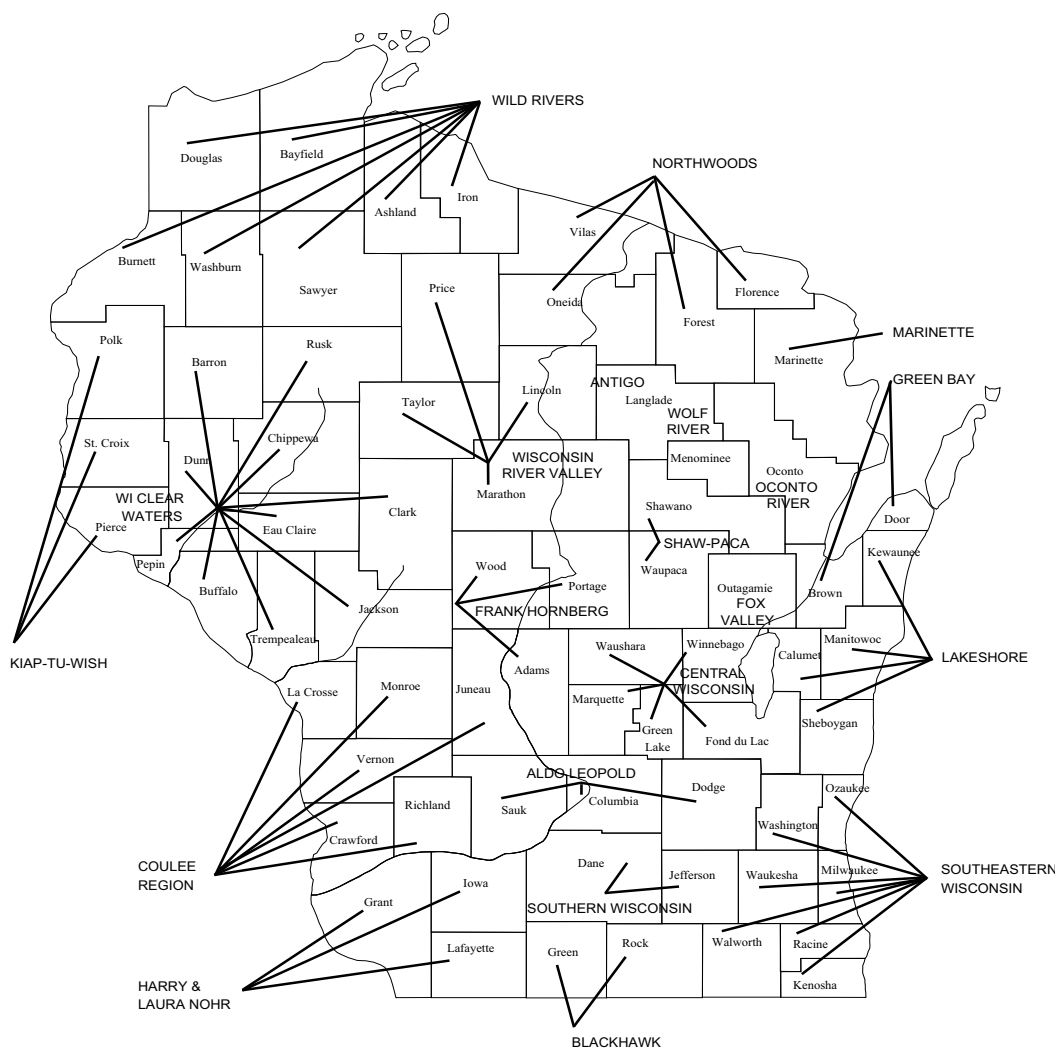


Advance purchase tickets  
Single \$12  
Family\* \$15  
Lunch (per person) \$12

At the Door  
Single \$15  
Family\* \$18  
Lunch (per person) \$15

\*Family includes a couple and all children under 16 years in same household

## Chapters of the Wisconsin Council of Trout Unlimited



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Visit the Wisconsin State Council of Trout Unlimited at [wicouncil.tu.org](http://wicouncil.tu.org) or find us on Facebook.

## State Council Leaders

**Chair:** Scott Allen; E4835 N. Stoney Ridge Road, Reedsburg, WI 53959; 608-495-9385; jscottallen12@gmail.com

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**Secretary:** Boyd Roessler, boydroessler@sbcglobal.net

**Treasurer:** Scott Wagner, 1208 Highway 35 North, Hudson, WI 54016; john.scott.wagner@outlook.com; 715-781-6874

**Vice Chair, Central Region:** Linn Beck, 160 West 19th Ave. Oshkosh, WI 54902; chlbeck@att.net

**Vice Chair, Northeast Region:** Dale Lange, See Marinette County above.

**Vice Chair, Southern Region:** Jim Wierzba, 2817 Country Club Drive, Mequon, WI 53092; 414-688-3606; hoke4me@aol.com

**Vice Chair, Western Region:** Gary Horvath, 623 W. Pine Street, River Falls, WI 54806 (715)425-8489; garyjhorvath42@comcast.net

**Awards:** Todd Franklin; Contact info at right

**Education Coordinator:** Bob Haase, W7949 Treptow Ln., Eldorado, WI 54932 (920) 922-8003; flytier@milwpc.com

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**Advocacy Coordinator:** Mike Kuhr; mikek.trout@yahoo.com

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**Webmaster:** Brandon Schmalz schmalz.dev@gmail.com

**Diversity Initiative:** Heidi Oberstadt, 456 Wadleigh St., Stevens Point, WI 54481; 715-573-5104; heidi.oberstadt@gmail.com

**Legal Counsel:** Open  
**Communications:** Open

## Are you getting emails from TU?

If you are currently not receiving news and event-related email messages from your chapter, the state council and TU National, then you are truly missing out on what's happening at all three levels. TU National manages the mailing list for the council and chapters, so update your address by going to [www.tu.org](http://www.tu.org), log in, then go to "Email Preferences." You can also call 1-800-834-2419 to make these changes, or to ask questions about making the changes via the web site.

## WISCONSIN TROUT

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*Wisconsin Trout* is the official publication of the Wisconsin Council of Trout Unlimited and is distributed to the members of Wisconsin's 21 TU chapters. Non-member subscriptions are \$12.50/year. Publication dates are the first weeks of January, April, July and October. Deadlines for articles and advertisements are the 10th of December, March, June and September. For a current advertising rate sheet, contact the editor.

Photo/article contributions, letters to the editor and advertisements are welcomed. Submit to:

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### State Council Officers

Executive Committee includes officers and vice chairs

**Scott Allen, Chair**

**Myk Hranicka, Vice Chair**

**Boyd Roessler, Secretary**

**Scott Wagner, Treasurer**

# Northeast Region chapters step up again

*It was a big ask, but as always, the Council's Northeast Region chapters worked together and found a way to meet the challenge.*

On a Saturday in early December, seven chapters from the Wisconsin State Council of TU's Northeast Region held their annual meeting, led by Region Vice Chair Dale Lange. Since 1985, this annual meeting ensures that our partner agencies have adequate funding to conduct trout habitat work in northeast Wisconsin.

The leaders and members of these chapters realized many years ago that if the agencies were limited to trout stamp revenue or agency-budgeted revenue, that there would not be an adequate amount of habitat work conducted in a region that has an enormous amount of trout water.

Over time our council, regional and chapter leaders have found tremendous success by funding part-time limited-term-employee (LTE) positions for the agencies, with the understanding that they only perform trout habitat work.

The agencies involved this year included Antigo DNR, Shawano and Lakewood DNR, and TU's Great Lakes Restoration Program Team. Their representatives explained what they have

accomplished in the past and can accomplish in the future with the funds from the various chapters and council. It was an impressive batch of reports highlighting impressive amounts of habitat work. And this program looks like it has a very good chance of growing even more in coming years.

Following the agency reports, leaders from the six attending chapters turned to the serious business of funding to keep the programs at current levels, and perhaps even increase trout work. These chapters included Green Bay, Oconto River, Marinette, Antigo, Wisconsin River Valley and Wild Rivers.

The agencies hoped that the Northeast Region chapters could support them with approximately \$54,000 for 2025. That was a big ask, but the attitude in the Northeast Region has always been, "that is a lot, but let's see if we can get this done." And do it they did.

These chapters worked very hard at fundraising in 2024. Banquets and film festivals had been

crowded and very successful. The chapters willingly crossed chapter boundaries with donations, applied matching funds to get Friends of Wisconsin TU grants and successfully funded the entire \$54,000.

Most of the funding will be used to hire LTEs. Because of the generosity of the Northeast Region chapters, the summer of 2025 will see as many as six full-time employees performing a full season of habitat work. Bad culverts will be replaced, reconnecting miles of streams. And 20 to 30 miles of streams will be brushed, narrowed and deepened. Many culvert sites will be surveyed, and many stream surveys will take place.

All that work will happen because our Northeast Region chapters work hard to raise funds and are then willing to put those funds to work in a way that best benefits the resource.

Nice work. Your dedication to the resource is amazing!

—Kim McCarthy

## Kinnickinnic Dam removal project continues, but a driving force passes away

By Duke Welter

After a year of waiting, last month the Kinnickinnic River dam removal project got a \$10 million approval from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACOE). Acting Assistant Secretary of the Army Jamie Pinkham signed the approval on November 4.

Meanwhile, a different, larger allocation of \$15 million may come through as the lame-duck Congress and White House finish their current legislative agenda. Congress is partway through passage of the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA), which the U.S. Senate is expected to address before it adjourns in late December or early January. The House of Representatives passed its version of the WRDA in September. The WRDA allocation, if approved, would replace the USACOE funding.

A significant loss to the volunteer effort to remove the dams was the recent passing of Judie Foster Babcock due to brain cancer. Judie had been a driving force in the dam removal effort and a key organizer of the Kinni Corridor Collaborative (KinniCC), a nonprofit formed to help the city raise funds and advance public education about the dams and the river.

The Corps now estimates the project will cost \$19.6 million to remove both the Junction Falls and Powell Falls dams and restore the 1.5-mile river corridor through downtown River Falls.

Once the federal government contribution is determined, the remainder will need to be raised from city, state and private sources. Wisconsin DNR has already approved a Dam Removal Grant of \$1 million for the Powell Falls Dam removal.

A second Dam Removal Grant of \$1 million could be requested by the city from the DNR, once the city surrenders the federal electrical generating license.

The USACOE feasibility study for the project costs \$750,000, which was split between the Corps and the city. Of the city's share of \$375,000, half was raised through the Kinni Corridor Collaborative (KinniCC), with significant help from Kiap-TU-Wish and Twin Cities Trout Unlimited volunteers and other chapters and councils across the region and country.

The Corps now stands poised to complete and issue its final feasibility study, after which several other steps will need to be taken. In addition to determining the final federal contribution, those steps probably include city and Corps concurrence in the recommendations of the feasibility study, planning and design, license surrender, and finally, the project itself.

### Judie Foster Babcock passes

Judie Foster Babcock had served on many nonprofit boards in the River Falls area, including as president of the Board of the Kinnickinnic River Land Trust, and was tireless in organizing KinniCC.

She often described herself as a "serial philanthropist." She and her husband, David, staffed informational tables, spoke to groups, flew their drone over the river to keep track of its conditions, and many other tasks. She made sure the tax forms got filled out, nonprofit status maintained and the board operated properly.

Contributions are being collected for a riverside bench dedicated to her memory. For more information visit <https://form-renderer-app.donorperfect.io/give/krlt/inmemory>



JUDIE FOSTER BABCOCK

**TROUT UNLIMITED WISCONSIN**

*What will your legacy be?*

Help support our mission of coldwater conservation in Wisconsin

Make a tax-deductible gift through your will, trust, life insurance or retirement account to the

**Wisconsin State Council of Trout Unlimited Fund**

Contact Ben Strand at the Natural Resources Foundation at [Ben.Strand@WisConservation.org](mailto:Ben.Strand@WisConservation.org) or 608-409-3133

## What will your legacy be?

*The Council has established an endowment so that you can support our mission by making a tax-deductible gift through your will, trust, life insurance or retirement account.*

The Wisconsin State Council announces the creation of a new permanent endowment fund — entitled the Wisconsin State Council of Trout Unlimited Fund.

The fund will be managed by the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin. Investment proceeds from this fund will either be accumulated within the fund or used by the Council to support our mission. Donations to this fund are tax-deductible.

The Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin is a non-profit, tax-exempt 501(c)3 charitable organization that was formed in 1986 to protect Wisconsin's lands, waters and wildlife by providing conservation funding, partnerships and programming and by connecting people to nature. The foundation currently manages more than \$10 million in 124 endowment funds to support their conservation mission.

You can donate to the Wisconsin State Council of Trout Unlimited Fund by:

- A gift of cash
- A gift of appreciated securities
- A gift through a personal donor advised fund.
- By naming this fund as a beneficiary of your will, life insurance policy, IRA or retirement plan.
- Through a bequest, charitable gift annuity or a life-income fund.

Contact Ben Strand at the Natural Resources Foundation at [Ben.Strand@WisConservation.org](mailto:Ben.Strand@WisConservation.org) or 608-409-3133.

# Dam decommissioning efforts continue in the Driftless Area

*An update on dams in the West Fork Kickapoo and Coon Creek watersheds.*

By Jason Freund

While it has been more than six years since the floods of late August and early September of 2018, their effects are still felt today. The failure of five dams in two watersheds, including the Jersey Valley dam, have led to the need to reassess the safety of these dams.

After studying the topic, all three counties in the watersheds – La Crosse, Monroe and Vernon – have approved plans to decommission the dams in the West Fork Kickapoo and Coon Creek watersheds.

## Unique situation

This will be a first-of-its-kind operation, as nowhere have as many dams been removed in such a short period of time. Many people are watching from both close and afar to see what happens, as there are thousands of these dams, of similar ages, throughout the United States.

PL-566 was enacted in the 1950's to help protect small watersheds from the effects of floods. PL structures, as they are commonly referred to, are relatively small dams that were built on small streams largely in the 1960's and are past their life expectancy.

There are 88 structures in Wisconsin and a quarter of these dams are in Vernon County. As with most counties in the state and across the country, Vernon County lacks the resources to remove or rebuild these dams.

All three counties have approved dam decommissioning and are seeking funding to V-notch the dams, rather than fully removing the dams. Cutting a notch in the dam rather than removing the entire structure is less expensive than full removal and is expected to achieve the same effect. Efforts to notch one of the failed dams in the West Fork Kickapoo headwaters are ongoing.

Removal of these structures is expected to cost \$4 million, a price tag that would be funded through federal programs. Estimates to fix the dams are \$61 million, a significantly greater cost and one that would be much harder to secure funding to complete. Some in the watershed are exploring other options. The largest price tag is for the rebuilding of the Jersey Valley Dam and creating a new lake downstream, where the geology will better support the structure.

The discussion around keeping the dams in place or notching the dams is multifaceted. Farmers in the valley fear that increased flood fre-

quency will doom their livelihood while others in the valley fear future dam breaches will destroy homes, infrastructure and potentially end in the loss of lives. The fact that nobody was killed in the 2018 floods is itself something of a miracle.

Preliminary plans are to breach the dams that are most likely to fail first as the entire decommissioning process will likely take several years.

Dam failures have been linked to dams abutting with sandstone geology that creates a weak point, allowing water to bypass and erode the dam structure. Part of the planning process was to examine the dams and determine which were most likely to fail in future storms.

The planning process also determined that the smaller dams did not provide a flood control benefit that outweighed their costs. However, the cost of rebuilding the Jersey Valley dam showed positive results in a cost-benefit analysis, due to its recreational value.

The Coulee Region Chapter (CRTU), concerned with several "trout-related" issues, recently wrote and circulated a position paper on the dam decommissioning within the Coon Creek and West Fork watersheds.

Our main concerns are related to dams that protect brook trout fisheries from non-native brown trout. These are in Seas Branch, Maple Dale Creek and the upper West Fork of the Kickapoo.

## Concerns about dam impacts on water temps

Another concern of the chapter is that increasing water temperatures in the West Fork are addressed in the rebuilding of the Jersey Valley dam. The upper West Fork of the Kickapoo has seen a decline in the fishery since the 2018 floods, and that is largely due to warmer temperatures. CRTU temperature loggers showed that during the height of this recent summer, stream temperatures averaged more 70°F for the entire day and routinely peaked at more than 80°F during the summer.

The stream grew warmer upstream, a sure sign that Jersey Valley Lake, near the headwaters, was impacting the river. This has resulted in a fishery where trout densities are lower and densities of fishes not associated with cold water have increased.

Brook trout fisheries above three of the larger dams on the Upper West Fork - Jersey Valley Lake, Seas Branch and Maple Dale Creek - are



JERSEY VALLEY LAKE, MINUS THE WATER

popular and unique resources that CRTU, the DNR and others believe need to be preserved and protected. In these streams, protection ultimately means that brown trout need to be excluded from these stream reaches.

Those of us who have fished these streams for years remember when upper Seas Branch and Maple Dale Creek and their tributaries were brown trout fisheries.

Through the considerable efforts of the DNR, brown trout were captured by electrofishing and removed from these reaches, and brook trout are thriving. In fact, DNR data shows these streams to have some of the highest brook trout densities in the state. Chapter leaders are working with the county and DNR to explore options to maintain barriers for the streams that have native brook trout populations.

On a personal note, these are some of my favorite places to fish because I can go anywhere to catch brown trout, but there are few places in the Viroqua area where I can catch native brook trout.

CRTU has neither opposed nor endorsed the Jersey Valley dam reconstruction. However, its leaders do have some reservations about its reconstruction, most notably, that the dam will be large enough and deep enough that the bottom-draw will cool the West Fork.

The West Fork, especially since the 2018 floods, is unique in that the river cools down as you move downstream because large tributaries from the West contribute significant amounts of cold water. Due to the geology of the watershed, tributaries from the east are not generally as cold as those from the West, but fortunately the two largest tributaries – Seas Branch and Bishops Branch – drain the western part of the water-

shed.

CRTU leaders also understand that maintaining adequate water quality in Jersey Valley Lake will continue to be a significant challenge. The lake and the river are both on the state's impaired waters list (303d) due to phosphorus runoff, which leads to excessive algae growth.

This impairment is not unexpected given that 80 percent of the land use above the dam is agriculture. Without sufficient efforts to create riparian buffers and reduce phosphorus inputs into the upper West Fork and its tributaries, the "new" Jersey Valley Lake will suffer the same water quality and fisheries issues.

The Coon Creek and West Fork watersheds produce some of the most productive fisheries in the state and the restored brook trout waters in the West Fork provide a unique resource.

Many trout anglers, myself included, have been fishing these waters for decades. They are truly special places that continue to change and hopefully continue to improve.

For all those who feel the same way, please voice your concerns about the protection of these brook trout populations. Contact CRTU if you'd like the names of the decision-makers in these affected counties, so you can make your concerns known.

*Jason Freund teaches in the Biology Department at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse and conducts research on stream and fish ecology with his students. In his free time, he writes a biweekly blog, The Scientific Fly Angler, at <https://www.thescientificflyangler.com/> and is currently president of the Coulee Region Chapter.*

# TIC students work and learn on Stony Brook

By Joe Bach

Students from Chilton schools added new educational experiences to their skills of raising trout in the classroom by planting oak trees along Stony Brook. And on another Saturday, students from their fishing club and the Kiel fishing club, under the leadership of volunteers, DNR biologist Angelo Cazzola and Water Quality Specialist Dani Santry, de-brushed more than 1,500 feet of Stony Brook.

The TIC students on their trout plant days not only received demonstrations of the Water Action Volunteers stream monitoring criteria, they also received fly-casting instruction from the Fox Valley Chapter's Randy Shultz and Dennis Johnson. Randy has also been helping me with the monthly WAV monitoring and mentoring me on my fly-fishing knowledge.

This year Stony Brook experienced a refreshing change in her physical location and appearance. Thanks to the Friends of Stony Brook, the Fox Valley Chapter, Calumet County, the Fund for Lake Michigan, Wisconsin DNR, NRCS, landowners, Chilton and Kiel students and other volunteers, Stony Brook had 1,200 feet of existing hidden straight run stream with 90-degree bends relocated.

It is now located with a very attractive meander in an open field very close to where she used to live prior to highway reconstruction many years ago, which is on the south side of highway F. This section of beautiful stream was featured at an Open House at the Teresa and Tony Hahn property. County and state dignitaries, neighbors and many Friends of Stony Brook attended the event.

Looking ahead, we hope to plant trees on this section of stream this year.

This re-meander, along with removal of unwanted vegetation along another 1,500 feet of stream in her headwaters, has not only brightened her appearance but refreshed her and made her a better, self-reproducing and sustaining trout stream. She sustains beautiful brook trout and brown trout, thanks to more than 1,400 students from Chilton and Oshkosh schools who have raised trout in their classrooms.

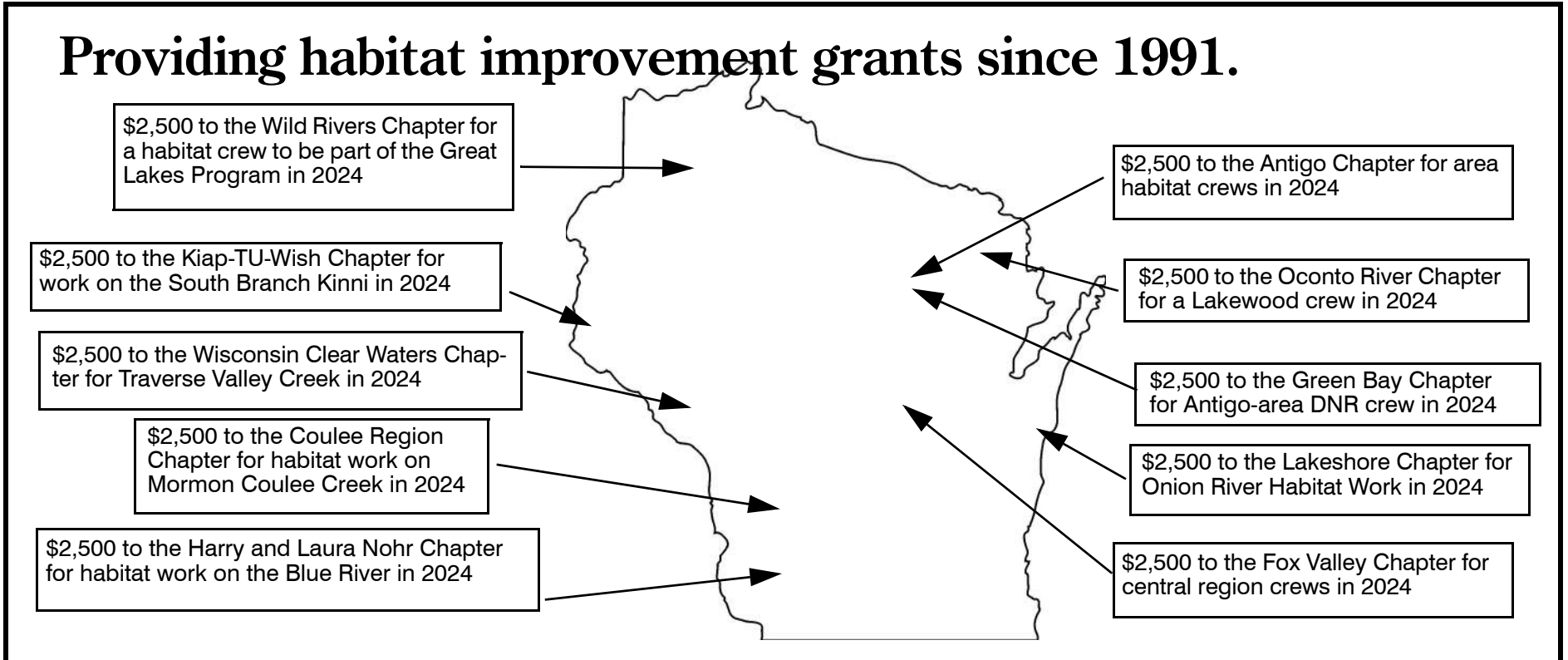
Thank you to Friends of Stony Brook, the Fox Valley Chapter, the DNR, Fund For Lake Michigan, NRCS, Chilton Community Fund, Merjent and many others who have helped students and Stony Brook have life-altering experiences. Visit [friendsofstonybrook.org](http://friendsofstonybrook.org)

Feel free to contact Joe Bach of the Fox Valley Chapter of TU and Friends of Stony Brook at 920-570-2632 or [Joebach1g@gmail.com](mailto:Joebach1g@gmail.com).

# Please support Friends of Wis. TU in 2025

Ten of our chapters received grants totaling \$25,000 for projects across Wisconsin in 2024. The Friends of Wisconsin TU habitat improvement grant program wishes to thank all of our donors for their generous support. We could not do this without you.

## Providing habitat improvement grants since 1991.



## Our Friends of Wisconsin TU

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Yes, I want to join the "Friends" of Wisconsin TU.

Enclosed is my check, payable to Wisconsin Council of Trout Unlimited.

MAIL TO: Kim McCarthy  
736 Meadowbrook Court  
Green Bay, WI 54313

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Phone # \_\_\_\_\_

## WITU Youth Camp enrollment opens soon

Plenty of forethought and preparation goes into making our annual Youth Fishing Camp a success, including lining up volunteers and mentors.

Enrollment for the camp opens at our annual meeting on February 1 in Oshkosh and there is always a lot of interest. I'll be available to help chapters with the pre-enrollment process prior to the Council meeting. All chapters will have a spot reserved for them through Wednesday, April 30. Then we will open enrollment so chapters can help fill the camp roster with additional students.

This year's camp is August 14-17 at the Pine Lake Bible Camp between Waupaca and Wild Rose and is open to youth ages 12-16. After working with the bible camp, we were able to keep our costs for each chapter at \$250 per student.

If you know of a youngster who is interested in attending the camp, please reach out to your local chapter for sponsorship.

We do still have several openings for volunteers and mentors, so please contact me if you are interested. I can be reached at 920-216-7408 or chlbeck@att.net

*Linn Beck, WITU Youth Camp Director*

## Eagle nest watchers needed

Join the community of citizen scientists who monitor bald eagle families as they raise their young. As a part of Bald Eagle Nest Watch, you will make weekly visits to a bald eagle nest, document what is happening at the nest that week, and submit your data online.

Training and locations are provided. Volunteers just need transportation and binoculars or a scope. The nest watch season begins in early February and continues each week until the eaglets fledge, usually in the end of June. Nests in our program are located in more than half of Wisconsin's counties.

All of the program data are shared with the DNR for nest protection and management decision making. To learn more, visit [swibirds.org/benw](http://swibirds.org/benw) or contact Brenna at [bmarsicek@swibirds.org](mailto:bmarsicek@swibirds.org) or 608-255-2473.

The program is coordinated by the Southern Wisconsin Bird Alliance in partnership with 1,000 Islands Environmental Center, the Bald Eagles Socialites Club, Barkhausen Waterfowl Preserve, Beaver Creek Reserve, the Friends of the LacLawrann Conservancy, The Ridges Sanctuary, Woodland Dunes Nature Center, the DNR and hundreds of volunteers and property owners.

## Thank you

*Outgoing NLC Rep Linn Beck reflects on his time with the National Leadership Council, and encourages others to get involved.*

I want to thank WITU and our members for giving me the opportunity to serve as your TU National Leadership Council (NLC) representative for the past six years. It was a phenomenal experience meeting all the TU staffers and having a chance to see the hard work they put into their jobs. I would never trade this opportunity to meet, work and learn from them. The same goes for all of the amazing members I met who are doing wonderful things for our chapters and councils.

This was and has been a most rewarding and enjoyable experience for me. I have learned so much about myself and Trout Unlimited. I thought I was well versed on the TU community, but as I got more involved with several of the NLC workgroups it was eye opening the depth that these workgroups go into covering their respective issues. These workgroups spend a lot of time helping chapters and councils grow and succeed. Please take the time to check out these workgroups.

When I first took the NLC rep position, I was confident in myself and where I was going in my TU career. But in time I realized there was more I needed as a person and a member of TU. I got involved with three of the workgroups that interested me: Youth Education, Great

Lakes and Mining. I also tried to get involved with the TUDARE Steering Committee. I truly enjoyed it, and I was involved with a lot of great work.

With the Youth Education Workgroup, which I chaired, just like our previous NLC Rep Kim McCarthy, we developed educational programs on TIC, Stream Girls and the Costa 5 Rivers programs. I was involved in the development of handbooks for the Great Lakes and Mining Workgroups. The latter was a great collaboration on steps a chapter/council would need in the fighting of a mine coming into their area. It was a great experience working with TU staff and TU members, including our own past NLC Reps Kim McCarthy and Bill Heart.

For all these great experiences, I thank you for the opportunity. I would encourage anyone wanting to make a change in their chapters or the State Council to get involved now and work towards this goal. There are many opportunities, and TU can always use your experience.

Lastly, good luck, Scott Allen, in your journey with the NLC. I know you will do well and enjoy it.

*Former Council Chair Linn Beck is the outgoing National Leadership Council Representative for the Wisconsin Council of Trout Unlimited.*

## Watershed Access Fund: Obtaining public access

**The Council's Watershed Access Fund has now completed its involvement in an important acquisition along the Kickapoo River. The hunt is now on for additional properties or easements that can be purchased to add to the amount of public water available for public trout fishing. Thanks go to all of our generous donors who have helped make our additions to public fishing areas possible. We appreciate your support.**

### Our WAF Contributors

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### TU CHAPTERS

|                     |               |
|---------------------|---------------|
| Antigo              | Antigo, WI    |
| Kiap-TU-Wish        | Hudson, WI    |
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| Oconto River        | Gillett, WI   |
| Southeast Wisconsin | Milwaukee     |

Here is my contribution of \$100 or more to the Wisconsin TU Watershed Access Fund

Make your check payable to Wisconsin Trout Unlimited

MAIL TO: Kim McCarthy  
736 Meadowbrook Court  
Green Bay WI 54313

Name

Address

City, State, Zip

Phone



# Friends of Wisconsin TU and Watershed Access Fund update

The Council's two grant programs are seeing continued success.

First of all, the Council sincerely thanks all of you who have donated to our Friends of Wisconsin TU and Watershed Access Fund grant programs over the years.

Last year we granted \$30,000 to our chapters through the Friends program to help them with their habitat work. Donations during 2025 have been strong once again, so we should be on track to match or exceed last year's grant totals. That grant money has then been used to leverage additional funding for habitat work, which is resulting in many miles of habitat improvement throughout the state.

The Watershed Access Fund grant program has been effective at allowing us to partner with land trusts, county governments and the DNR to obtain parcels for public fishing. In fact, we hope to announce a new project sometime in 2025.

Both of these programs are funded with 100

percent of the donations made from our members and friends. We at the State Council are grateful for all of you who have made the decision to support these programs.

## Exact names are important

We're all guilty of referring to our chapter or council by different names. However, for a variety of reasons, especially financial, we all need to pay closer attention to the official names of our chapters and council. Here's a great example of why this is important.

Donation checks we receive for our Friends of Wisconsin Trout and Watershed Access Fund grant programs should be made payable to the Wisconsin Council of Trout Unlimited. However, many of these checks arrive payable to "Friends" or "Friends of Trout Unlimited" or "Watershed Access" or "Trout Unlimited" or "Wisconsin Trout Unlimited." You get the idea.

Banks and other financial institutions are now

paying closer attention to these things, especially with larger amounts. We recently had to resolve an issue where our bank would not accept a sizable donation check for this very reason.

So be sure to make your checks payable to Wisconsin Council of Trout Unlimited. If you'd like, you can write "Watershed" or "Friends" or whatever you'd like on the memo line of your check.

Also those of you who are making generous donations from your required minimum distributions (RMD) should be sure to provide the correct Council name to your financial institution when you instruct them to make the donation from your RMD.

Thanks again to all of you who support our two great programs.

*Kim McCarth is the coordinator of the Council's Friends of Wisconsin Trout Unlimited and Watershed Access Fund grant programs.*

## Driftless Symposium will be live this year

The 2025 Trout Unlimited Driftless Symposium is Feb. 25-27 at the La Crosse Center. The symposium will be held in coordination with the Wetland Science Conference sponsored by the Wisconsin Wetlands Association.

Most presentations focused on trout stream riparian management will be held Tuesday, but there will also be plenty of relevant material scheduled on Wednesday and Thursday in partnership with the wetlands conference.

On Wednesday a working group of wetland and stream restoration practitioners and regulators will discuss issues related to permits and zoning requirements for wetland, stream and floodplain restoration projects. The goal of the working group is to advocate for state and federal policies and programs to be adjusted to better enable and encourage floodplain reconnection work in Wisconsin and beyond.

Climate change increasingly impacts stream temperatures. One way of mitigating rising temperatures is to plant trees. On Thursday we will look at tree plantings on trout streams with a workshop that will explore how riparian forests benefit trout streams and to develop some specific guidelines and criteria to make informed decisions about species, planting and other key considerations.

In a Thursday program entitled "Resilient Streams, Resilient Infrastructure," TU and Wisconsin Wetlands Association are teaming up to share newly acquired information on flood resilience techniques, road crossing vulnerabilities, and fish and wildlife impacts. Making road crossings more fish friendly and flood resilient is not only an important concern for anglers, but also for the towns, villages, cities and counties responsible for managing roads, culverts and bridges.

You can find more on the TU Events Center website. The conference has a block of rooms at the La Crosse Radisson available at a reduced rate for those wishing to stay overnight. Again, you can find out more on the TU Events Center page.

## DNR launches Brook Trout Reserves Program

*The goal is to conserve brook trout populations in a changing climate.*

The DNR recently announced the implementation of the Brook Trout Reserves program, a new initiative to protect Wisconsin's native brook trout populations from changing environmental conditions.

Coldwater streams provide the ideal habitat for native brook trout. Wisconsin has an estimated 22,000 miles of stream habitat suitable for brook trout. However it's projected that in 30 years, two thirds will be too warm to support brook trout.

To help combat this problem, DNR fisheries biologists have used survey and environmental data to identify coldwater streams in 205 subwatersheds that are the most likely to persist in the face of climate change. Each subwatershed within the Brook Trout Reserves contains:

- Self-sustaining brook trout populations.
- Above-average brook trout abundance, exceeding that of nonnative trout and salmon.
- Limited or no stocking of brown-trout.

More than two stream miles of brook trout habitat that are projected to remain by 2050.

There are many ways to get involved in this program, whether you're a landowner, angler or outdoor enthusiast. Members of the public can help protect our brook trout populations by:

- Enrolling your property in the DNR's Streambank Easement Program.
- Volunteering to help resource managers with forest and fish habitat management projects.
- Planting trees along stream corridors to restore shade and keep streams cold.
- Implementing healthy land-use practices in these watersheds.
- Identifying and fixing stream-crossing impairments associated with roads.
- Joining local conservation or watershed groups.

To become involved in brook trout habitat projects in your area, contact your local DNR fisheries biologist.

Contact the DNR Brook Trout Reserves Team at [DNRFBrookTroutReserves@wisconsin.gov](mailto:DNRFBrookTroutReserves@wisconsin.gov)

## Mining update

By Johnson Bridgwater,  
Water Advocates Organizer,  
River Alliance of Wisconsin

Winter finds much to discuss related to mining and Wisconsin. While we have been actively working across our state to hold metallic sulfide mining at bay, last year's election results, combined with the Biden administration push to expand domestic mining, means we fully expect a spotlight to continue, and possibly grow, on northern Minnesota and Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan during the coming year.

Talon Metals is already receiving U.S. Department of Defense funding to drill in both Minnesota and the U.P., and we are closely following these and other developments at the federal level for their potential impacts in Wisconsin.

### "Critical Mineral" push

The industry push to have copper designated as a "critical mineral" continues. The reason this specific federal issue matters to Wisconsin relates to what such a determination would unlock if copper is reclassified as a "critical mineral," rather than its current government classification as a "critical material."

Companies such as Greenlight Metals, which have copper-mining interests in our state, would be allowed to reach into the federal Inflation Reduction Act funding pots to carry out mining here which would make mining our small Wisconsin deposits financially viable. A solid coalition of Wisconsin residents, organizations and tribes is closely following these developments.

Despite ongoing financial difficulties, Canadian corporation Greenlight Metals (GLM) plans to conduct an exploration drill program this winter in the Chequamegon National Forest.

This is on the Bend Deposit of copper and gold in Taylor County on the North Branch of the Yellow River. Referred to as the "Soo Line 40," GLM is proposing to drill eight boreholes at six drill sites this winter. This parcel has a split ownership, with the surface belonging to the federal government while the minerals are privately owned by Soo Line, doing business as Canadian Pacific. Both the U.S. Forest Service

and DNR have oversight.

GLM is also pursuing a completely separate Federal Minerals Prospecting Permit to drill 15 boreholes at 13 drill sites on a separate federally owned portion of the Bend deposit in Taylor County. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is the mineral rights manager and the U.S. Forest Service (U.S.F.S) is the surface manager. A joint BLM-U.S.F.S environmental review will be required prior to issuing the permit, and the BLM and U.S.F.S expect to make a decision in the spring of 2025.

*Greenlight Metals (GLM) plans to conduct an exploration drill program this winter in the Chequamegon National Forest.*

### Good news from Minnesota

There is some good news from our friends and neighbors in Minnesota, as a significant metallic sulfide mining threat to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW) received a "third strike" of sorts in November. The Minnesota DNR suspended review of the

proposed PolyMet mine project next to BWCAW, making it even more unlikely that this mine will ever open. And I am happy to share that a tri-state metallic sulfide mining coalition continues to build and strengthen, and it will continue tracking and reporting on our water-rich region going forward.

Also in the good-news category, Gold Resource Corp., which now owns the proposed Back 40 mine on the Menominee River along the eastern edge of Marinette County, has been losing money for many quarters in a row, and at the time of writing this article they were facing the possibility of having to shut down their only functioning mine or go bankrupt early in 2025. What this means for us is that the company's attention and funding are focused elsewhere and not a single permit has been filed related to the Back 40.

If you have any questions or comments, feel free to contact me about all things mining. You can also visit the River Alliance of Wisconsin's mining page for online resources dedicated to mining education, and you can sign up for our "Mining Updates" emails. Visit us at <https://wisconsinrivers.org/mining/> or contact me at [jbridgwater@wisconsinrivers.org](mailto:jbridgwater@wisconsinrivers.org)

# A legend is lost

*With his trademark rebellious streak, Dave Vetrano forever changed the way we look at trout, streams, habitat improvement, agriculture and the entire Driftless Area.*



Todd Franklin

## SHOWING OFF THE NEPERUD PROJECT ON COON CREEK IN 2010

Dave Vetrano was particularly proud of this project, which was one of the first to incorporate designs to benefit so-called “non-game” species, from turtles and snakes and frogs, to birds and beyond.

By Duke Welter

With Dave Vetrano’s passing on November 3, Wisconsin’s Driftless Area trout resource and anglers lost a great friend. As the result of a remarkable confluence of a unique person and a unique place, he made the Driftless Area’s fisheries the nationally-recognized resource that they are today.

Vetrano, 74, died from pancreatic cancer, seven months after it was diagnosed. He is survived by his wife, Linda Speziale Vetrano, his daughter, Jessica Argent Vetrano, and his brother Rich, and their families.

During his 33-year career with the Wisconsin DNR, Vetrano worked mostly as a fisheries biologist and supervisor in the counties around La Crosse. He wasn’t a typical DNR employee: he sported an earring, frizzy Italian hair, drove his Harley-Davidson motorcycle to work and his work garb was engineer boots and Harley t-shirts instead of the standard DNR uniform.

While he was born and grew up in Milwaukee, as an adult he thrived living on a farm outside Bangor and working with a resource he hadn’t known before: trout streams.

But he spent time wading through research papers, DNR files going back decades and local historical societies to learn the environmental history of the Driftless Area. “You can’t know where you’re going until you learn where you’ve been,” he often told audiences. He put that knowledge to work, underpinning his own approaches to watershed restoration, and often shared it with groups in hundreds of evening and

weekend talks around the region.

The results? Vetrano and his fisheries crew renovated scores of miles of beat-up trout streams, developed effective new habitat structures and surreptitiously started stocking streams that needed to boost their populations with fingerlings raised from wild trout, which were better suited than trout from the brood stock traditionally raised in the DNR’s trout hatcheries.

When their research proved the wild trout offspring were more wary and able to live longer in the streams than the brood-stock offspring, Vetrano showed his higher-ups at DNR the data. They told him, “If you had asked permission to do that work, you’d never have gotten it.”

*As the result of a remarkable confluence of a unique person and a unique place, he made the Driftless Area’s fisheries the nationally-recognized resource that they are today.*

He would chuckle and say, “I knew that, so I didn’t ask.” Eventually the stocking done in Driftless Area streams was almost exclusively from wild trout. However, as habitat improvement became more effective in the long term than stocking, the numbers of stocked “feral” trout that ever saw a hatchery dropped off significantly.

## Creator of the LUNKER

Perhaps Vetrano’s most significant habitat development was the LUNKER structure, developed in 1982-3 and first placed in Spring Coulee near Coon Valley, just above County Highway P.

Before that time, habitat crews used sets of three or four logs wired together and secured at a diagonal angle pointing downstream. Those structures provided overhead cover but didn’t last well in the regular storms in the area. A big storm in 1978 blew out many of them, but the

DNR crew learned from the surviving structures some ways to help them last, and the LUNKERS moved restoration forward.

Vetrano came up with the name and often chanted it to groups: “Little Underwater Neighborhood Keepers Encompassing Rheotactic Salmonids.”

## Grew up fishing

Before his DNR career, Vetrano grew up in working-class Milwaukee suburbs like Cudahy, West Allis and Greenfield, and grew up fishing in Milwaukee park ponds and area lakes with his father Inno, a WWII veteran and a machinist at Allis-Chalmers. He fished around his grandparents’ home near Shawano.

In a memoir written last year and yet unpublished, he wrote of the influences that led to his fascination with watery environments and fish. As a child, he played in the snow-melt runoff in the alley behind his home, observing the currents and channels being built by flowing water.

As a young angler, he tempted panfish with dough balls in ponds, at Browns Lake in Racine County and below a dam on the Illinois Fox River with night crawlers, focusing on catching carp.

Later, while stationed on Guam with the air force, he snorkeled reefs and saw rich marine environments. He knew that eventually he wanted a career in fisheries.

During the Vietnam conflict, Vetrano served in the U.S. Air Force as a crew chief servicing B-52 bombers and KC135 tankers flying over Vietnam from Guam. Later, he said, “when they entrust you with a multimillion-dollar airplane and the lives of the crew, you learn to accept responsibility, even at 21 years of age.”

Dave married Gennean Strupp in 1985, and they had a daughter, Jessica. Gennean died of cancer in 2012. In 2013 he met Linda Speziale, and they were married in 2014. He was devoted to both Gennean and Linda in turn, and they to him.

After his service, Vetrano earned a degree in biology and fisheries management at UW-Stevens Point and joined the DNR. His early DNR assignments gave him memories of repeated “olfactory assaults.” First, as a wildlife technician around Black River Falls, one of his assignments was to pick up road-killed deer and wrestle them into an incinerator.

After that, he did research work on the emerging population of salmonids introduced into Lake Michigan, and did bloater chub surveys, another stinky job which, combined with seasickness, provided good incentive to work elsewhere.

In 1980 he moved to the La Crosse area and became the first fisheries technician funded by the new Inland Trout Stamp program. That funding became the bedrock of future habitat work on trout streams across the state. Unlike trout stamp funds in some states, Wisconsin’s inland trout stamp doesn’t fund hatcheries or stocking programs.

Vetrano wrote in his memoir, “on my first day in La Crosse the area fisheries biologist told me ‘I don’t care what you do, just don’t get me in trouble.’ Although I mostly kept him out of trouble, the freedom to try things was what ultimately made our habitat program successful.”

His supervisor, Ken Wright, agreed with that assessment: “He took it on himself to design that LUNKER structure, then used trout stamp funding to put them in streams, probably thousands of them.”

Retired Fisheries Bureau Director Mike Staggs said Vetrano was one of the most effective biologists because he was effectively implementing stocking, regulations and habitat programs, advocating for improved watershed land use practices, and he was heavily involved in the local community.

“He saw the bigger picture that fish lived in a stream, but also in a watershed, and indeed within a surrounding multi-species community that included us people,” Staggs said. “My predecessor Lee Kernen thought so, also. Soon after starting as Bureau Director, Lee thought it important to take me on a field trip to LaCrosse to spend time with Dave. It was time well spent.”

*“One thing that was amazing was how much those beat-up streams could heal if we just gave them a little help,” Vetrano said.*

## Habitat work blossomed

With Vetrano’s leadership and dedicated trout stamp funding, DNR habitat work blossomed with projects on streams like the branches of Coon Creek in Vernon, La Crosse and Monroe counties. On those branches (Timber, Spring and Rul-

lands Coulees and Bohemian Valley), more than 30 miles of easements were purchased and nearly all of it received habitat attention.

The impacts on the streams included flushing of accumulated sediment, installation of hundreds (or thousands) of LUNKER structures for overhead cover, sloping of banks to make streams more flood-proof, and land where cattle could graze in reasonable numbers. As land use improved, streams became colder and cleared rapidly after rainstorms. Trout reproduced and thrived with the exposed gravel and riffles, and their numbers rose tenfold in many areas.

“One thing that was amazing was how much those beat-up streams could heal if we just gave them a little help,” Vetrano said. On the West Fork alone, summertime high temperatures dropped by nearly seven degrees, allowing a marginal brown trout stream to harbor brook trout in abundance. With the improved stream quality, more anglers came to the area and brought economic impacts now estimated at more than \$1 billion a year across the Driftless Area.

## Encouraging TU chapters to ramp up involvement

Vetrano began working to encourage TU chapters to ramp up their involvement in the 1980s. When I first heard of his work, I was a much younger and very green



**REBEL OR NOT, VETRANO WAS WELL LOVED AND HIGHLY RESPECTED**

trout angler living in Madison. A friend from northern Wisconsin said he'd sat with this long-haired DNR guy from La Crosse at a dinner and heard about work being done on the West Fork of the Kickapoo.

We first fished it in the mid-1980s. It fished well and habitat work was helping turn it into a nationally-regarded destination. This happened because he coached the West Fork Sports Club and Blackhawk Chapter of TU to team up to get more work done, and then showed them how.

During his years of work on Driftless Area streams, Vetrano helped move restoration techniques forward, and he encouraged the DNR, counties and TU to do the same. Streams were changing, and so restoration

work needed to change, too. Flooding in the last 20 years has sped up that evolution.

One of the projects Vetrano often chuckled about took place on the North Fork of the Bad Axe in the 1990s. On that water below the confluence of the Springville Branch and Esofea Branch, brown trout dominated much of the year but in the heat of summer, smallmouth bass would come up from the Mississippi to find cooler water.

Vetrano's habitat crew always used up all its Trout Stamp allocation and he kept looking for more dollars. So, when they surveyed the North Fork in mid-summer and found smallmouth bass and other coolwater species, Vetrano sought an allocation of general fishing li-

*During his years of work on Driftless Area streams, he helped move restoration techniques forward, and encouraged the DNR, counties and TU to do the same*

## Funding proposals sought

The Driftless Area Restoration Effort National Fish Habitat Partnership (NFHP) is seeking proposals to fund projects that benefit coldwater resources. The deadline for completed applications is Feb. 7, 2025.

Projects eligible for funding should address habitat protection, restoration and enhancement that benefit native fish, including brook trout and other species. NFHP funds may be used for on-the-ground instream habitat restoration and barrier removal, along with floodplain restoration.

Eligible non-construction projects include landowner outreach or engagement efforts, outreach or education proposals that raise awareness of or benefit coldwater resources, and population, habitat or other assessments.

Project funding ranges from \$15,000 to \$75,000. A minimum nonfederal 1:1 match of cash or documented in-kind services is required, and a budget proposal must be included with the grant application. Funding through the National Fish Habitat Partnership Program is administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service under the authority of America's Conservation Enhancement Act.

TU chapters are among the entities that are eligible to apply for project funding. Copies of the application and detailed program objectives and requirements are available from any of the TUDARE staff or can be found at [tu.org](http://tu.org). Proposals should be submitted in Microsoft Word electronically to Sara Strassman at [sara.strassman@tu.org](mailto:sara.strassman@tu.org) and louise\_mauldin@fws.gov.

cense dollars to do a "smallmouth habitat project." Strangely, those smallmouth structures looked a lot like trout habitat structures. The DNR central office folks pulled their hair out, but his crew got the money and the project got done.

### Laura Hewitt arrives

In the mid-1990s, TU's national office got interested in the Driftless Area and helped assemble funds for a staff member to work in the Kickapoo River Watershed. Their project manager, Laura Hewitt, was a brand-new graduate of the UW-Madison's water resources program. She and Vetrano got to know each other and figured out ways to work together.

Hewitt recently wrote, "I recall our first meeting with a wry smile. He was rightly leery of working with this freshly minted conservation biology grad with minimal fisheries experience. We had a long, wide-ranging, and lively conversation in his office in La Crosse. Neither of us were afraid to challenge the other's ideas.

"That initial kernel of mutual respect grew into genuine fondness and fueled a very productive partnership. He was fun and irreverent, though extremely serious about his vision to restore native brook trout to coldwater streams in the Driftless Area."

That respect was mutual. Recalling the TU Home Rivers Initiative some years later, he told me, "If that had been just those bow-tie guys from TU out east coming in and telling me what we needed here, I'd have said, 'go ahead, do what you want' and just have stayed away from that project. But working with Laura, we got a lot done and it was great."

Eventually Hewitt took on many other roles with TU, including overseeing the Embrace-a-Stream program for grants to chapter projects, supervising all the dozens of Home River Initiatives across the country, and helping boost the idea of the Driftless Area Restoration Effort (DARE) when it was proposed in 2004. In 2010, Hewitt and Vetrano both retired at the same time, and TU honored them at a dinner in Viroqua with great jollity and gratitude.

In 2009, National TU named Vetrano as its National Conservation Professional of the year. He also

spoke at the Wild Trout Symposium in West Yellowstone Montana in 2013 about his work in the Driftless Area.

For all his lifetime outdoor pursuits, Vetrano showed a deep appreciation of the places and quarry he sought beyond the capture. The last couple of years we'd talk after deer or turkey hunting, and he'd mention that he had a nice buck or a big tom well in range, and just didn't shoot. He always appreciated watching a sunset or the water.

"He was definitely a stage-five hunter," his good friend John Olson said, "just appreciating the experience more than the kill."

Vetrano's interests ranged farther than hunting, fishing and habitat restoration. He and Linda were avid gardeners, and they canned and preserved their harvest.

He served on the Bangor School Board for sixteen years, including several as its chair, and dwelt with concern on both local and national political issues and leadership.

He raised cattle and chicken and worked with several groups to encourage managed rotational grazing calling it "probably the single best land use for agriculture in the Driftless Area." And he enabled young farmers to find a toehold to start their own careers in farming. And he served on the board of Greenfire, a group of former DNR staffers who offered their expertise on natural resource issues.

A Celebration of Life for Dave Vetrano will be held on April 5, 2025 at Pettibon's Resort, La Crosse, from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. Memorial donations may be made to the Coulee Region Humane Society, [www.couleehumane.com](http://www.couleehumane.com); Mayo Clinic Pancreatic Cancer Research, [www.philanthropy.mayoclinic.org](http://www.philanthropy.mayoclinic.org), or the charity of your choice.

*"He was fun and irreverent, though extremely serious about his vision to restore native brook trout to coldwater streams in the Driftless Area."*



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# Redd surveys help measure stream health



## LOOK CLOSELY AND YOU SHALL SEE .....

Participants in the redd survey training observe brook trout spawning on Elk Creek in Chippewa County.

By Peter Jonas

What could be more fun than watching trout? How about watching trout make babies? In November, members of the Wisconsin Clear Waters Chapter received training on how to conduct redd surveys to measure the level of spawn-

ing activity on area streams.

To conduct a redd survey, one or two volunteers walk a length of stream and record the presence of redds or spawning beds present. They also include data such as whether the redd is located in a riffle, run or pool, whether fish were present on the redd, and what spe-

cies the fish are, if they are identifiable.

DNR Fisheries Habitat Technician Steven DeVitt said he's "...looking at redd surveys as a habitat assessment tool." Redd survey data has a variety of important applications. Lack of spawning activity in a section of stream where trout are normally present can indicate that this section of stream could be improved by restoration techniques designed to expose gravel. The existence of redds, along with other data can be used to document natural reproduction in a stream.

The value of redd survey data becomes even greater if it is collected over time. Redd counts recorded over a series of years can reveal how a stream or watershed responds to climate change or other environmental factors. Data collected prior to and after completion of habitat restoration projects or replacing culverts to improve stream connectivity can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the projects.

Trout Unlimited staffers Jake Lemon and Shawn Rummel have developed a well-written handbook to guide chapter leaders or others who would like to conduct and record redd surveys. TU developed a smartphone app to record the data. A picture is taken of each redd, so latitude and longitude of each redd

are easily recorded. The app prompts the user to record the beginning and end points of the area surveyed.

Spawning activity for brook and brown trout in Wisconsin generally begins in October, peaks in November and continues into December. Participants in the training were especially enthusiastic that this initiative provides a reason to be outside on a stream well after the fishing season is closed.

DeVitt and Kyle Siebers from the DNR Wild Rose Trout Habitat Management Team trained the Wisconsin Clear Waters volunteers on the purpose of redd surveys and potential uses for the data, identifying redds (and of course, not stepping on them), the scientific methodology and use of the smartphone app, which is very straightforward and intuitive.

DeVitt works with volunteers from the Central Wisconsin and Fox Valley chapters who gather data on streams he is evaluating for potential habitat projects. According to DeVitt, "Redds are nature's trout hatcheries. These surveys help us to understand them better."

Chapters or individuals interested in conducting redd surveys can contact DeVitt at [Steven.DeVitt@wisconsin.gov](mailto:Steven.DeVitt@wisconsin.gov) or Peter Jonas at [peter.jonas@tu.org](mailto:peter.jonas@tu.org).

## TU volunteers help to make 2024 Reel Recovery Retreat a success

*The Midwest Reel Recovery Retreat is moving to River Falls for 2025. TU participants and volunteers are welcomed.*

By Scott Wagner,  
Photos by Trenity White

The 2024 Midwest Retreat in September included 12 participants from across the Midwest. Throughout the three-day retreat, these men had the opportunity to share their personal experiences with cancer in a safe, supporting environment through "Courageous Conversations," led by a professional facilitator.

Then they fanned out to area streams with volunteer "fishing buddies" to practice and enjoy fly-fishing. Ranging in age from their mid-40's to mid-70's, the men learned how to approach, cast and

set the hook on wary trout. Most participants experienced the excitement of catching their first trout on a fly rod. "Seeing the joy on the face of a guy with cancer who just caught his first trout is priceless. It makes you want to be a fishing buddy again next year," said co-coordinator Bruce Maher.

### Participants and volunteer fishing buddies welcomed

Although Reel Recovery Retreats last only a few days, they can be a life-changing experience for the men who take part in them. Trout Unlimited members living with cancer are strongly encouraged to sign up to participate

in a Reel Recovery Retreat. Trout Unlimited members are also encouraged to volunteer as a fishing buddy for the upcoming Reel Recovery Retreat.

For information about signing up as a participant or fishing buddy, contact Reel Recovery at [info@reelrecovery.org](mailto:info@reelrecovery.org) or 800-699-4490.

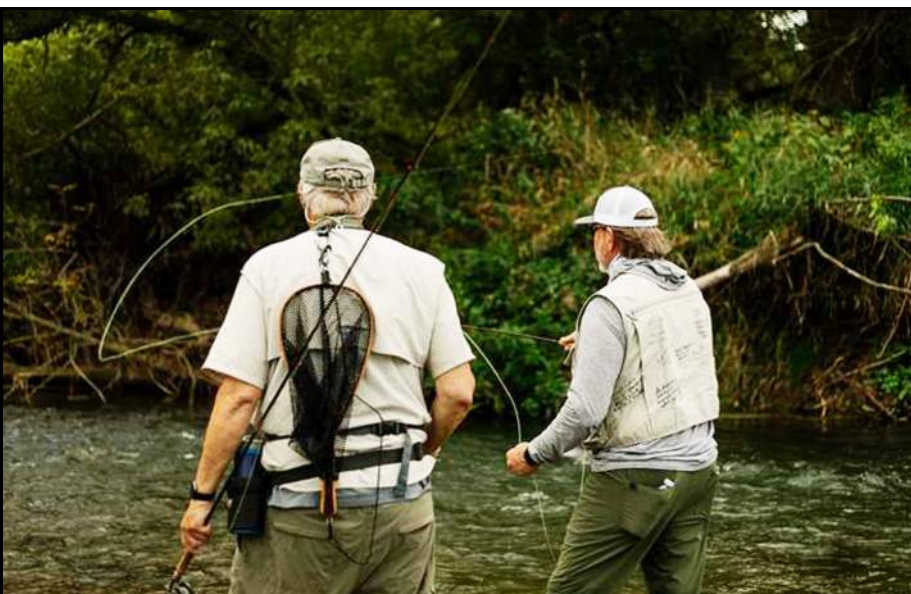
The 2025 retreat will be held Sept. 3-5 in River Falls, following three successful years in Eau Claire. Retreat co-coordinator Tom Sather said "Moving the Midwest Retreat to River Falls will give retreat participants ready access to the Kinnikinnic and the Rush rivers and has closer access to MSP Airport for participants who are flying in for the retreat." The Radisson Hotel in River Falls will be our host location.

Reel Recovery is a national non-profit organization that conducts fly-fishing retreats for men

living with cancer. The mission is to help men in the recovery process by sharing the healing powers of the sport of fly-fishing with them, while providing a safe, supportive environment to explore their personal experiences with cancer.

Retreats are offered at no cost to the participants and are led by professional facilitators and fly-fishing instructors who are very experienced. Reel Recovery provides all meals, lodging and fly-fishing equipment, and no previous fishing experience is required. Reel Recovery's overarching goal is to improve the lives of the men it serves.

The Midwest Reel Recovery Retreat is co-coordinated by Tom Sather (715-563-4738) from the Wisconsin Clearwaters Chapter, and Bruce Maher (612-749-7050) and Scott Wagner (715-781-6874) from the Kiap-TU-Wish Chapter.



### STRATEGY AND TROUT FOOLING

Reel Recovery participants are paired with fishing buddies throughout the retreat. Many of the participants caught their first fish on a fly.



"KEEP THE CIRCLE TIGHT. BE WELL! FISH ON!"

# Women's clinics are truly special

By Mary N-P

My sister and I prefer to give each other gifts of activities and adventures rather than stuff. In 2017 we hired a fly-fishing guide for a half-day river float, and I fell in love with a new sport.

I knew I wanted to continue fly fishing, but didn't know quite where to look for guidance.

Mom dug out Grandpa's old Eagle Claw rod, and I went to a store to get a fresh line. I lost a bunch of flies, got tangled in many trees and even caught a fish or two.

I met a woman at our local fly shop, and she told me about a group of women who taught other women to fly fish. This was an opportunity even better than I had imagined. Basically, it is a three-day fly-fishing summer camp for adult women.

I showed up at WOWSCI last summer with a 7-weight rod to fish for trout in the Driftless Area of Wisconsin. Oops. I had a lot to learn. Everyone was gracious and

helped me to better use my own rod. Each guide allowed me to cast their personal fly rods to better understand rod weight and different kinds of fly lines.

The clinic provides three opportunities to fish one-on-one with a guide. I learned about native plants, birds, entomology, knot tying, how to read the water and so much more. The guides shared their love of trout fishing and the Driftless Area, and I caught that bug.

The guides welcomed questions about how to access DNR water in Wisconsin, how to hold onto a rod and be able to release the fish, and freeing lines stuck in trees, grass and rocks. Meeting people with different fishing experience

and with interest in different parts of the sport helped me to understand how it can take a lifetime to learn fly fishing.

I decided after my first outing that I wanted to come back and keep learning. I signed up for the 2024 session as soon as it opened.

*"This was an opportunity better than I had imagined. Basically, it is a three-day fly-fishing summer camp for adult women."*

The women at WOWSCI are excellent instructors, tell top-notch fishing stories and have graciously allowed me to trial and borrow equipment. The time on the water focuses on basic skills like casting, allowing the fly to drift and setting the hook.

For more experienced fisherwomen, it's a chance to match the hatch, explore new waters, and to spend one-on-one time with an experienced guide and instructor. There are even chances to talk about safety and respect for private land while accessing the water.

WOWSCI has become one of my favorite weeks of the summer. The bunkhouse has real beds. There are hot showers, the best food and some of the best women anglers in the country. Every person welcomed us to fly fishing and helped us to learn and grow as anglers. I am now fortun-

nate to have a small, but growing group of "fly girls" to fish with in the Driftless Area and closer to home.

WOWSCI welcomes all women who want to fly fish. If you are unsure which clinic to sign up for there is a quick survey on each registration site to help you. Mark your calendars for summer 2025 and please understand that these clinics fill up quickly, so don't hesitate. More information is available at: <https://www.swtu.org/learn/womens-flyfishing-clinic/>

You can register by following these links:

Women's On the Water Skills Clinic (WOWSCI), June 11-13, <https://bit.ly/WOWSCI>

Beginners/Basics Clinics by women for women, for any skill level; June 13-16, <https://bit.ly/WFFF-CBasics>



## SIGN UP SOON FOR THE WOMEN'S CLINICS THIS SUMMER

WOWSCI welcomes all women who want to fly fish. If you are unsure which clinic to sign up for there is a quick survey on each registration site to help you. Mark your calendars for summer 2025 and please understand that these clinics fill up quickly, so don't hesitate. More information is available at: <https://www.swtu.org/learn/womens-flyfishing-clinic/>

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# Great Lakes Stream Restoration Update

By Chris Collier, Great Lakes Stream Restoration Manager

Our northern Great Lakes team has completed the 2024 construction season and said goodbye to our seasonal team members Tessa, Tyler and Willow. As we move into winter, our team's day-to-day activities shift to office- and computer-based tasks. This includes grant and project reporting to officially wrap the 2024 season, grant writing for the upcoming year's projects, bidding projects, preparing to hire 2025 seasonal teams, and setting final plans for our field needs in 2025.

However, before we officially switch the calendar and focus to 2025, we must celebrate all we did in 2024. Here are some highlights.

## Wilson Creek, Douglas County

Wilson Creek is a class 1 tributary to the Bois Brule River in Douglas County. The stream is far up in the headwaters of this legendary system and provides excellent spawning habitat for brook trout in an area where trophy brookies can still be found. Our involvement in Wilson Creek started in 2021 when the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other partners brought TU in to explore aquatic organism passage projects for three crossings creating barriers for brook trout, effectively cutting three miles of Wilson Creek off from the Bois Brule River.

In 2023 we completed the first project on the furthest upstream crossing. In 2024 we focused on the two downstream crossings, which

would fully reconnect this important tributary to the Bois Brule. The crossing projects were completed in September, and we monitored the site in October, confirming the new crossings now allowed fish to freely move up and downstream.

During our monitoring visit I saw several brook trout swim through the culverts, and while this doesn't add any data to our official monitoring survey, it sure is satisfying when the fish show us how valuable our projects are to them.

## N. B. Oconto River Dam Removal, Forest County

Our last project in 2024 was actually a multi-project effort. The North Branch Oconto River flows directly through the town of Wabeno, and the town's logging history included constructing several dams to support lumber operations.

While the logging industry has largely left Wabeno, the dams were left behind. These dams are relatively small structures made of rocks and whole trees, but they have a large impact on the river and fish by constricting the channel, filling wetlands and creating small waterfalls and increased stream flows that prevent or at least limit fish movement.

In a system like the North Branch Oconto, which can exceed temperatures that trout can tolerate, removing these dams is critical to make sure fish can access cold tributaries that flow into the North Branch near Wabeno.

In 2016-2017 a partnership was formed by the Forest County Potawatomi Community, U.S. Forest



## NORTH BRANCH OCONTO RIVER IN WABENO RUNNING FREE AGAIN

Restoring the stream and floodplain following removal of the third dam on the North Branch Oconto River as it flows through Wabeno.

Service, DNR, TU and others to identify and address fish passage issues in the North Branch Oconto. This partnership found three logging dams impacting the river as it flowed through Wabeno.

In 2018, TU and the DNR partnered to remove the first dam and in 2020 we partnered with the U.S. Forest Service to remove the second. In 2022, we entered into an agreement with the town of Wabeno to develop plans to remove the final dam and that work was completed this year. With the dam removed, trout and other species have easier access to coldwater tributaries in

and around Wabeno.

## Plans for 2025

We'll be back in Wabeno this year, as completing the final dam removal doesn't close the book on restoration efforts on the North Branch Oconto.

Our project partners in the region also identified several stream crossings that restrict fish movement in the river, and thanks to federal infrastructure funding awarded to the Forest County Potawatomi Community and other funding from the DNR, we're looking at removing these barriers. These are large

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**THIS OLD CULVERT WAS A FULL BARRIER TO BROOKIES**

This was one of the two perched culverts that were replaced on Wilson Creek, a class 1 tributary to the Bois Brule River. This culvert created a full barrier, preventing brook trout from accessing spawning habitat.

projects that will take place over a few years and it's safe to say they wouldn't have been possible without federal infrastructure funding.

We're also continuing to help the U.S. Forest Service implement projects in the Border Brule River watershed and working with NOAA infrastructure funding on projects in the Bois Brule watershed. We have several other projects in various planning stages including more crossing projects, a weekend-long volunteer event in the Central Sands and habitat work with folks from the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest.

**Staff expanding soon**

After several years expanding our program from its original Lake Michigan focus to include Lake Superior watersheds, we've finally reached a point where we can hire a dedicated staff member to support our work in the northwest. We should be introducing this new team member in the next issue of Wisconsin Trout.

Feel free to email me at [chris.collier@tu.org](mailto:chris.collier@tu.org) if you would like to learn more about our projects. I hope to see you at conferences, banquets and other TU events in early 2025.



**MORE THAN JUST A CULVERT. IT'S A STREAM.**

Looking inside one of the new culverts installed on Wilson Creek. Our projects aren't simply putting in a new culverts, but also involve creating stream beds and banks to simulate natural conditions. This helps to further restore habitat and encourage full fish passage.

**Does your fishing car have a TU license plate yet?**

Support Wisconsin TU and get your Wisconsin TU license plate now. Go to [www.dot.state.wi.us/drivers/vehicles/personal/special/trout.htm](http://www.dot.state.wi.us/drivers/vehicles/personal/special/trout.htm)



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# Neonic Forum exceeds expectations

*Neonics are a poorly understood significant insecticide threat. There are times when a situation arrives that causes a gut-level feeling of trepidation. This is one of those times.*

There are times when a situation arrives that causes a gut-level feeling of trepidation. This is one of those times.

Neonics are a poorly understood significant insecticide threat to the aquatic insects of our streams.

For this reason, the Wisconsin State Council of TU, Clean Wisconsin, River Alliance of Wisconsin, UW-Extension, Wisconsin Tribal Conservation Advisory Council, DATCP, Black Earth Creek Watershed Association and the DNR sponsored the Wisconsin Neonic Forum in October at UW-Madison.

More than 140 people attended in person and more than 100 attended on-line. The day-long series of presentations covered the use of neonics, environmental risks and impacts, and the status of state and federal regulations.

Neonicotinoids, or “neonics,” are the most widely used insecticides in Wisconsin and applied to millions of acres of agricultural and urban land each year. It is estimated that 95 percent of all corn seeds and more than 50 percent of all soybean seeds planted in Wisconsin are treated with neonics.

Up to 90 percent of the pesticide is estimated to wash off and not be taken up by the plants. While there are important benefits, there are concerns over impacts to both aquatic and terrestrial insects. Of interest to Trout Unlimited, research results presented at the forum showed that several aquatic insects

are impacted negatively, with one of the most sensitive being the well known “Hendrickson” or “Sulphur” mayfly (genus Ephemera).

Research is now being conducted by the DNR and EPA in Wisconsin to determine how the Hexagenia mayfly is impacted on the Mississippi River and inland streams.

Consequently, additional monitoring and attention is necessary to determine and address these risks in watersheds through which our trout streams flow.

### Why is this alarming?

Why are neonics declared a significant risk to aquatic insect life?

- Neonics are 7,000 – 10,000 times more toxic to insects than DDT
- Neonics were invented in Europe, but Europe has banned their use.
- In the United States, neonics are applied as an agriculture seed treatment, thereby using a “loop-hole” which circumvents the usual process for insecticide regulation.
- All corn seeds and 60 percent of soybean seeds are treated with neonics.
- Neonics are water soluble and thereby travel within water flowages in contact with agriculture and urban areas.
- Neonics are present in the groundwaters of Wisconsin.
- They kill insects indiscriminately, not just the so-called “bad insects” the users are targeting, but

also biologically important aquatic insects, pollinators and other beneficial insects that are building blocks of the food chain.

Learn more by viewing these presentations from the Neonics Forum.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v0upQ3Abj\\_Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v0upQ3Abj_Y)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GFPQBrKhzeE>

<https://www.youtube.com/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0RNOGMPeHrk>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6GL6FMxi8AM>

Orvis’s Tom Rosenbauer talks to the DNR’s Mike Miller about neonics: <https://howtoflyfish.orvis.com/podcasts/conservation/1783-the-insidious-nature-of-neonic-pesticides-with-michael-miller>

—Tom Lager and Andy Morton



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# The fall, rise, and fall, of the Hexagenia mayfly

By DNR Stream Ecologist Mike Miller & DNR Mississippi River Water Quality Specialist Shawn Giblin

When discussions turn to hex hatches among fly fishers, it often evokes vivid memories of late-night campaigns of trying to lure impressively-large brown trout while fishing blind and getting pestered by mosquitoes. At its peak, the Hexagenia emergence is an impressive natural phenomenon regardless of one's interest in trout. Hexagenia mayfly populations in the Upper Mississippi River are in significant decline and researchers are determined to find out why.

Mayflies are a relatively small group of insects with about 2,500 species identified worldwide. They are a very old group thought to have evolved more than 350 million years ago.

There are at least 150 mayfly species in 22 different families identified from Wisconsin. Hexagenia mayflies are in the family Ephemeridae and are referred to as common burrowers, since the larvae (nymphs) spend their lives in the soft sediments of lakes, streams and rivers. Hexagenia are one of the largest mayflies in North America and are widespread across Canada and the United States, and even extend into Mexico.

Hexagenia larvae dig "U-shaped" burrows in the sediment, where they reside for one or more years before emerging as winged

adults. The burrow openings resemble "wormholes" and are often seen in shallow, slow-moving water, along the margins of streams and rivers. The larvae position themselves in one of the upper arms of the burrow and with rhythmic fluttering of large "feathery" abdominal gills, move water through the burrow drawing in both food and oxygen.

Like most mayflies, Hexagenia are sensitive indicators of ecosystem health. Since they have a relatively long larval stage spent in organically rich sediments, they can be exposed to low oxygen levels, and toxins that accumulate in sediment.

## Biomass by the tons

For decades ecologists have recognized the contributions aquatic insects make to aquatic food webs, but only relatively recently have the contributions of aquatic insects to terrestrial food webs been studied. While a few fish species like catfish and sturgeon feed on Hexagenia when they are in their burrows, Hexagenia transfer phenomenal amounts of food energy to both aquatic and terrestrial environments during the synchronized emergences of the winged adults.

Emergences of Hexagenia mayflies tracked on weather radar have gained international attention and recently been used by academic researchers to estimate Hexagenia populations on the Upper Mississippi River and Western Basin of Lake



Mike Zhang, University of Florida

Erie.

Work by Phillip Stepanian of the University of Oklahoma and others have estimated that a single emergence of Hexagenia on a 400-mile reach of the Mississippi River may result in more than 3 billion individuals and more than 114 tons of mayflies taking flight in one evening, and more than 20 billion individuals and 720 tons of biomass during the course of a single summer.

This mass of mayflies translates into trillions of calories of energy for fish, frogs, bats, birds, and numerous other animals. The researchers report the food energy provided by the Hexagenia emerging from the Mississippi River and Lake Erie is enough to support more than 50 million nestling birds from hatch to fledge.

## Population fluctuations

Populations of Hexagenia adults have fluctuated over their recorded history on the Mississippi River. Accounts from the 1950's reported dense populations being a nuisance to barge traffic as the emerging insects would cover the channel navigation lights and boat lights used to spot unlit navigation buoys.

Hexagenia declines on the Mississippi River and Western Lake Erie in the 1960 and 70's have been attributed to uncontrolled agricultural runoff. Subsequent increases in Hexagenia populations on the Mississippi River in the 1980s may have been a result of improved municipal wastewater treatment and greater control of polluted agricultural runoff.

Lake Erie Hexagenia populations lagged with increases not occurring until the late 1990s.

Hexagenia populations are again on the decline. Stepanian et al.

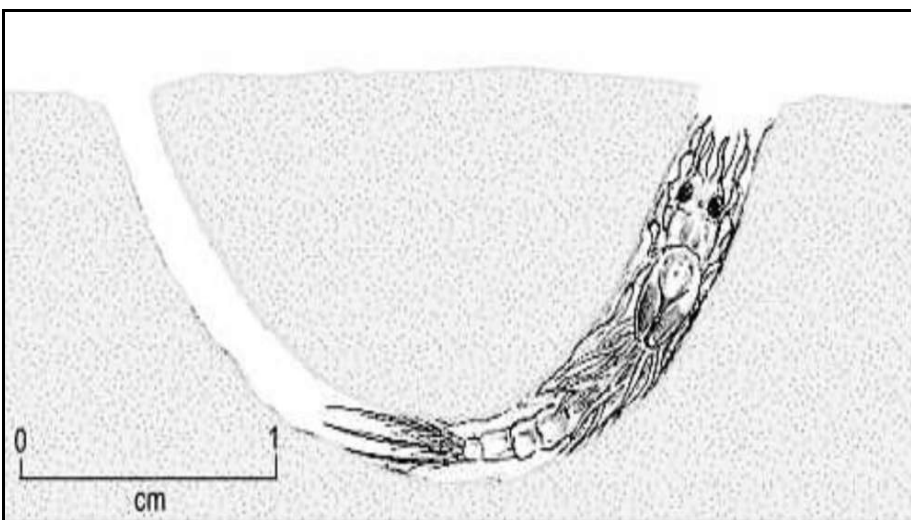
2020, report a 52-percent decline in Upper Mississippi River adult Hexagenia from 2012-2019. Changes in river-bottom habitat due to higher river flows and expansion of zebra mussels, toxins produced by algae, and use of newer, more toxic pesticides are suspected causes.

Researchers from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and state agencies in the upper Midwest, including the Wisconsin DNR, are collaborating on a study of Hexagenia in the Upper Mississippi and Lake Erie. Collection of water, sediment and Hexagenia tissue samples began in 2024 and will continue for the next two years in an effort to determine whether environmental pollution may be responsible.

As part of this study, samples are also being collected from other streams and rivers in Wisconsin that have different pollutant types and levels than the Mississippi. Innovative analytical techniques are being used to document the physiological responses of the mayflies to the various chemical pollutants to identify what chemicals may be responsible for the Hexagenia decline.

Non-targeted analysis is a chemical analytical technique that uses high-resolution mass spectrometry to identify the various molecules in water, sediment and tissue samples. The instruments can measure the hundreds (if not thousands) of compounds present.

Metabolomic profiling is another cutting-edge technology that is being used to analyze the Hexagenia tissue samples. When animals ingest food and chemical compounds, these compounds are broken-down (metabolized) by the body. These biochemical markers are identified, and it can be determined what if any of these compounds are toxic to the animal and affecting its health.



## THE HEX IS A COMMON BURROWER

Hexagenia mayflies are in the family Ephemeridae and are referred to as common burrowers, since the larvae (nymphs) spend their lives in the soft sediments of lakes, streams and rivers.

# What will your legacy be?

The Wisconsin State Council announces the creation of a new permanent endowment fund: The Wisconsin State Council of Trout Unlimited Fund.

The fund will be managed by the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin. Investment proceeds from this fund will either be accumulated within the fund or used by the Council to support our mission. Donations to this fund are tax-deductible.

The Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin is a non-profit, tax-exempt 501(c)3 charitable organization that was formed in 1986 to protect Wisconsin's lands, waters and wildlife by providing conservation funding, partnerships and programming and by connecting people to nature. The foundation currently manages more than \$10 million in 124 endowment funds to support their conservation mission.

### You can donate to the Wisconsin State Council of TU Fund with:

- A gift of cash
- A gift of appreciated securities
- A gift through a personal donor advised fund.
- By naming this fund as a beneficiary of your will, life insurance policy, IRA or retirement plan.
- Through a bequest, charitable gift annuity or a life-income fund.

Contact Ben Strand at the Natural Resources Foundation at [Ben.Strand@WisConservation.org](mailto:Ben.Strand@WisConservation.org) or 608-409-3133.



## Chapter News

### Aldo Leopold Chapter

Winter is upon us here at the Aldo Leopold chapter, and with that, so are our annual winter Bar Flies events. We invite anyone and everyone to join us, and even tie some flies. However, if you don't tie flies, join us for a drink, some food and lively conversation. Once again our events will be held in all three of our counties. In Sauk County, we will meet at Gem City Saloon in

Baraboo on Jan. 15, Feb. 5 and March 5. In Columbia County we will meet at K-D's Bar & Grill in Lodi on Jan. 14, Feb. 11 and March 11. In Dodge County we will meet at Ooga Brewing Company on Jan. 23, Feb. 20 and March 20. The start time in all locations will be 6 p.m.

—Dan Endres

### Antigo Chapter

In November we acquired trout eggs for the five schools in our TIC program: Bowler High School, Witt-Burn High School, Antigo High School, Peace Lutheran and All Saints Catholic grade schools. We're glad to report that eggs have hatched and are doing well.

In December we participated in the Council's Northeast Regional Meeting where we hear from conservation professionals and pool money from various chapters – and the Council – to support their fund-

ing requests for 2025. We're so proud of these chapters as they answered the call to help our coldwater resources. And we're proud to say that the Antigo Chapter contributed \$10,500, plus a matching \$2,500 Friends of Wisconsin TU grant.

We are currently planning our annual fundraising banquet, which is always held on the last Saturday in March. We'll see you there.

—Scott Henricks



### BLACKHAWK CHAPTER INSTALLS BENCH TO HONOR YOUNGS

To honor long-time chapter supporters Fred and Wendy Young, the Blackhawk Chapter raised funds to procure a metal bench and built a solid foundation for it at the West Fork Sports Club.



### ANTIGO CHAPTER CONTINUES ITS MISSION TO REDUCE LINE WASTE

Antigo Chapter volunteers placed three more waste line boxes at bridges within the City of Antigo recently.

accomplished tyers. We give a shout out to his wife, who is serving our country in the U. S. Army as a drill instructor at Ft. Leonard Wood. This event has brought new members into the chapter and continues to get the word out about TU.

Again this past year we sent several kids to the Council Youth Camp, along with our treasurer, Anita Vaughan. Every time she comes back from this event she shares with us what a terrific, well organized, fun-filled, highly educational event this is. She can't say enough about Linn Beck and the other organizers for the way this event inspires these kids. Our chapter has set up a fund to insure we

can sponsor at least a couple kids each year. After all, they are the future of Trout Unlimited.

In November, Kyle from Black Earth Angling Company presented a program on fishing the Lower Wisconsin River. He highlighted the great fishing opportunities and explained how important and unique this resource is. Like protecting trout streams, protecting the health of the river supports a whole diverse ecosystem.

Again, our chapter banquet is coming up in April, and planning is under way. We hope to see you there.

—Dave Brethauer

### Blackhawk Chapter

The Blackhawk Chapter has been very active this summer. Although we still do not have anyone to head up stream work projects, several members took advantage of the Southern Chapter's invitation to volunteer at their work days. Habitat work is what TU is about, so we're pleased to be able to team up and get out on the streams.

We did have two work days at the West Fork Sportsman's Club installing a memorial bench to honor Fred and Wendy Young. Fred was an avid activist for restoration in the Driftless Area and their generous financial gift to the chapter is allowing us to fund many needed projects.

Our great thanks to Fritz Wenger and PG&M for help in creating the unique bench and to the West Fork

Sportsman's Club for providing a fabulous location to place it. Hopefully it will provide a peaceful place for anglers to contemplate why the fish weren't biting today. And it will remind people that the efforts of individuals and organizations like TU are why we have these great resources.

We have continued the Wednesday-morning fly tying sessions at the DNR Service Center in Janesville. The flies go to make up boxes to raffle at our meetings, for our banquet in April and for the State Council Banquet. We have had many people stop in to learn about TU and fly tying. One gentleman from Missouri who was here visiting relatives, stopped with his three kids to tie. They dove right in and were quite

In October we celebrated our annual Awards and Conservation Banquet at the Marriott Waterfront Hotel. The chapter presented two years' worth of awards, as we did not have a banquet in 2023.

We presented our Brookie Award to Joe Peikert for 2024 and Tom Meyer for 2023. We presented our River Keeper of the year Award to Adam and Tanja Zins. I was honored to receive the President's Net, as outgoing chapter president.

November featured our end-of-year summary and banquet at the Wautoma Country Club. DNR Stream Biologist Dave Bolha presented the annual report. After our November meeting we enjoyed a presentation by Tim Waters of Wolf River Fly Shop about fishing the

Wolf River.

At our November meeting we discussed the possibility of adopting the Pine and Mecan rivers with the DNR's Adopt-a-Fish-and-Wildlife-Area Program. Work is being done on filling out the paperwork and processing our applications.

Our annual TroutFest event is Saturday, Feb. 15 at the Mount Morris Convention Center from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Come out and meet some of the top vendors from around the state, plus five great presentations, used fishing gear, fly-tying materials and a many great books available for purchase. Get out of the house and enjoy the day with us.

—Linn Beck

### Central Wisconsin Chapter

# Chapter News



## Coulee Region Chapter

In the Coulee Region we are well into our membership-engagement-event season. In September we welcomed John van Vliet, an avid fly angler, writer and filmmaker who has fly fished around the world. But the trout streams of the Driftless Area are his home waters. John shared his experiences and some breathtakingly gorgeous videos and an opportunity to pick up one of his books.

In October we tried something a little different and joined our nearby TU chapters Nohr and Aldo Leopold, for a joint meeting in Richland Center. DNR Senior Fishing Biologist Justin Haglund discussed trout management projects in Richland County. He also provided an update on the Mill Creek restoration project and survey results from Willow Creek and Knapp Creek watersheds.

In November the UW-La Crosse Freshwater Ecology and Management Club hosted our annual Fish Science Meeting event. During the last few years, we've dedicated our November membership event to meeting at either UW-LaCrosse or Viterbo to hear from students about their research on coldwater resources.

Graduate student Max Monfort presented the fish lab's winter mortality study from last winter, which

included some good news. Catch-and-release simulations showed no mortality. Of course, we must still handle winter-caught fish carefully as sublethal and longer-term mortality was not measured.

Emma Walkowiak and Audrey Sorensen presented water temperature data from the chapter-sponsored loggers, as well as those from the university. A vast amount of data was collected from loggers which record every 15, 30 or 60 minutes, depending on the model. We got some expected results and some surprises. This data will be used in a project in the Coon Creek watershed in the coming months.

Madison Wells presented research results from the fish lab's ongoing Pammel Creek research. The brook trout population in this stream is quite healthy. Students also found a high number of brook trout redds.

Finally, we heard from DNR Senior Fisheries Biologist Kirk Olson about dam decommissioning in Monroe, Vernon and La Crosse counties. These dams threaten economically and socially important brook trout fisheries. He also discussed the latest on the watershed reports based on trout surveys as well as recent updates to trend site data.

Upcoming events and activities



UW-LACROSSE ECOLOGY STUDENS SAMPLE PAMMEL CREEK BROOKIES

include:

January 15: Lauren Genske will share her TU Expedition experience

February 28: Annual Banquet and Fundraiser at Cedar Creek Country Club in Onalaska

March 19: DNR Game Warden Shawna McDowell will share insights

April 16: Angler and author Jason Randall will discuss dry fly and dry-dropper techniques in the Driftless Area

May 21: Chapter annual picnic in Coon Valley

Of course, all of our events and activities are included on our website at [couleeregiontu.org](http://couleeregiontu.org). Join us if you can.

Another issue that has kept the chapter busy is the dam-decommissioning project in the West Fork Kickapoo and Coon Creek watersheds. This includes La Crosse, Monroe and Vernon counties, and all three county boards have approved the decommissioning. Our chapter board has prepared and circulated an official position paper regarding the dam decommission

project in Vernon County and the reconstruction of the Jersey Valley Dam.

We have taken positions on two main issues. First, we do not support V-notching of the Maple Dale and Seas Branch dams without barriers to brown trout recolonization, so as to protect the existing brook trout population. We would also need protection of the brook trout fishery above Jersey Valley Lake, depending on what happens with the dam.

We did not take a position on the reconstruction of the Jersey Valley dam, as long as it is constructed deep enough that the bottom draw keeps the river as cold as it is above the dam

If you would like a copy of our position paper, please contact the chapter secretary at [couleeregiontu@gmail.com](mailto:couleeregiontu@gmail.com).

We also completed our matching-grant obligation for restoration work on Dutch Creek. The chapter helped support this trout-stamp-funded project through a \$2,500 donation and a \$2,500 match from the Council's Friends of Wisconsin TU grant program. We had planned to



Jeff & Lynette Moore

## LYNETTE MOORE'S RELEASE PHOTO NOW ON WYOMING SIGNS

Coulee Region chapter member Lynette Moore, a professional photographer who sometimes fishes and shoots photos in Wyoming with her husband Jeff, now has a picture of her releasing a tiger trout as part of the Wyoming TU and West Yellowstone Chapter "Keep Them Wet!" campaign.

spend the money on the Mormon Coulee Creek restoration, but pivoted when this project needed funding and Mormon Coulee was delayed.

Chapter member Lynette Moore and her husband Jeff are avid anglers and spend much of their summer haunting their favorite fishing spots in Wyoming. They are also excellent photographers and often submit photos for wildlife publications. Jeff and Lynette submitted a photo of a tiger trout showing Lynette performing a proper release and it was subsequently published. A few months later, the East Yellowstone Chapter of TU requested permission to use the photo.

Upon arriving the next year to Wyoming, they were surprised to be greeted everywhere by Lynette's proper-release photo. The signage was put up by the East Yellowstone Chapter and Wyoming TU.

Our annual banquet is February 28 at the Cedar Creek Country Club

in Onalaska. This a time to enjoy a social occasion with our fellow TU members, and it is our biggest fundraising event. Projects and events require funding, and your support is important to us. Please join us for plenty of auction items, good food, conversations, prizes and fish talk. Get your tickets at [couleeregiontu.org](http://couleeregiontu.org)

We are deeply saddened by the passing of Dave Vetrano. Dave was a legendary retired fisheries biologist for our area and was responsible for driving many of the wild trout management techniques and practices in the Driftless Area. His impact is difficult to overstate and his legacy impactful. He was probably best known for the development of the LUNKER structure. He loved trout and the Driftless Area. Dave was a regular speaker and attendee at chapter events and our annual banquet. We offer our condolences to his family and friends.

—Deb Muresan

## Fox Valley Chapter

Our big event, Cabin Fever Day, is January 18 at Tanner's Grill and Bar in Kimberly from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. The event will include a large variety of used equipment. Meanwhile, the bucket raffles will offer quality equipment including 15 spinning and fly rods, eight reels, fishing gear and a Blackstone Iron Forged Griddle, Dewalt 20-volt combo package and an Ego trimmer/blower combo. Plus, there will be some great art items on the silent auction.

You can check out the Scott Grady bamboo rod and package available in a sweepstakes that ends in February. The sweepstakes is live right now and you can purchase tickets at the event as well.

Discover great information from our speakers. Seth Waters discusses fishing Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Alisha Skrzypchak from the Wisconsin DNR provides information on stream habitat work and how it affects fishability in the Central Sands Region. Dan Geddes brings a wealth of information on spinner-fishing techniques and Chris Firkus shows how to catch large trout with streamers in the Driftless Area.

Join us on January 18 for a great time and a chance to meet with 25 or more vendors at our expo. Reduced-priced tickets and lunch tickets for \$12 are available at [foxvalleytu.org](http://foxvalleytu.org) until January 17.

Prices will be higher at the door.

Your generous support provides us the resources to provide the cold, clean, fishable trout waters in the Central Sands Region of Wisconsin. We hope to see many of our Wisconsin trout friends at the event.

We worked with the Fox Valley Technical College BIZ Squad to learn more about marketing our chapter. The experience was win/win, as students gained valuable experience in working with our organization and we benefited from learning how to improve our website. Please look at the changes we have already made to better tell the story of Fox Valley Trout Unlimited.

Our Stone Fly Socials at the Stone Yard in Appleton begin in January, running every two weeks on Tuesdays from January 7 to March 18. During these cold winter months, join us to tie flies and share information with anglers on where and how to fish Wisconsin streams once things warm up again in spring.

Some of our members participated in redd surveys on the upper parts of the Mecan River. These surveys provide useful data to show where trout are spawning. This data can become part of the comprehensive watershed plan TU CARES is working on right now. When we combine that information with the data collected by National TU this



## Chapter News



Chris Firkus

### LEARN TO CATCH HUGE TROUT AT FVTU'S CABIN FEVER DAY

Learn to catch huge trout on streamer flies at Cabin Fever Day 2025 by attending a presentation from Chris Firkus, shown above. There will be fishing-related vendors, bucket raffles, used equipment, a silent auction and more. Other speakers include Seth Waters discussing the fishing on Michigan's Upper Peninsula, Alisha Skrzypchak from the Wisconsin DNR providing information on stream habitat work and how it affects fishability in the Central Sands Region and Dan Geddes will discuss spinner-fishing techniques for trout.

summer, we can get a good idea of stream crossings that present problems in the watershed. Coincidentally, we heard some stories about huge trout on the redds from those who participated.

Cold, clean trout water is some-

thing FVTU embraces. Our membership is working to provide those trout waters for everyone in Wisconsin. See you at our Cabin Fever Day January 18.

—Tony Pudlo

### Green Bay Chapter

After a year off, in September we brought back our annual chapter picnic, across from the Northeast Wisconsin Zoo (N.E.W. Zoo). The chapter provided the main course of grilled burgers and hotdogs, as well as drinks. Picnic goers brought dishes to pass in potluck style. Grill Master John Duechert did an outstanding job cooking, and organizing the event.

In September we kicked off our meeting season with a 2024-25 budget-crafting session, which passed overwhelmingly at our October meeting. We now have a financial map for next year.

Also at our October meeting we were joined by DNR Trout Stream Fisheries Habitat Biologist Shawn Sullivan and Fisheries Habitat Technician Steve DeVitt. They discussed a volunteer trout redd documenting survey program. In late October the Department of Natural Resources held training on how to identify trout redds, enter observations into an app and how to conduct surveys. GBTU and other area chapters helped promote the event.

In November we hosted Wolf River Fly Shop owner, chapter board member and newly published author Tim Waters. He shared a presentation called "The Wolf River." This is the same title as Tim's new book.

We were taken on a wonderful trip down the Wolf River that included lots of data and some of Tim's great trout-fishing memories.

In November Adrian Meseberg and Randy Rake joined Trout Unlimited National's Manager of Volunteer Operations Maggie Heumann (host), as part of a Trout

Unlimited National webinar training series. Our presentation was on our newly completed Trout "Tails" Educational Trail. The webinar is being used as an example for Trout Unlimited chapters on how we managed our project, and how they can do the same. We shared several details including all our costs, revenue streams, work projects, volunteer hours, pictures, and much more.

We were humbled to learn our GBTU Veteran's Service Program (VSP) is also being recognized by TU National. Sarah Knobel, donor communications manager, reached out to six national chapters, including our chapter, to gather ideas involving veteran's program.

Together we came up with a summary Sarah called "a great feature," which National TU would like to use in their Annual Report, Case for Support, etc. According to Sarah, the GBTU VSP program is considered one of the top TU VSP programs in the country.

The Green Bay Chapter continues to hold our VSP program at the First Presbyterian Church in De Pere. Veterans and volunteers meet to learn fly tying and socialize every other Monday starting at 4:30 p.m.

If you are a veteran who would like to participate, or if you would like to volunteer, please contact Veteran's Program Coordinator Paul Kruse at kruser2@new.rr.com or 920-639-2361. All experience levels are welcomed. If you have never tied a fly or fly-fished, check it out.

For more information visit greenbaytu.org or check us out on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook.

—Adrian Meseberg

### Harry and Laura Nohr Chapter

Our main focus in 2024 was stream work on the Blue River, a class 2 trout stream in Grant and Iowa counties. This covered about a mile of the river and included shaping of stream banks and adding root wads, backwater ponds and vortex weirs. Funding is from our chapter, the NRCS, a DNR Surface Water Grant, a grant from the Trout and Salmon Foundation, a grant from the Wisconsin Council of TU, donations from other TU chapters in Wisconsin and Illinois, and donations from some individuals.

Some late-season stream work began on the Snowbottom project. Some brushing and stream-crossing work was done and most of the rock that will be needed has been stockpiled on site so that next spring the team will be ready to get going as soon as the weather and conditions permit.

October featured a work day along Big Spring Creek, with a great turnout of Nohr and Southern Chapter members. We cleared a tremendous amount of willow. Nohr served coffee, brats and beverages to thank the workers.

In November Madison's Badger Fly Fishers hosted Carol Murphy

and Ted Swenson, long-time members of the Harry and Laura Nohr Chapter's board of directors, for a presentation on past and present stream-improvement projects.

In November, 250 brown trout eggs arrived for the Fennimore Trout In the Classroom. And the eggs have now been hatching and students are busy removing eggshells and testing the water for ammonia and nitrates.

We held a joint work day with the Southern Wisconsin Chapter on Conley Lewis Creek in early December.

We will have a Lie and Tie event on Jan. 25, from 10:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Stonefield Retirement Center on the east side of Dodgeville. Board members and guests will demonstrate their favorite flies. We will be filling fly boxes for the Wisconsin State Council of TU Annual Awards Banquet.

We will be providing casting and tying instruction at Outdoor Skills Day on February 8, which is organized by the Grant County Outdoor Sports Alliance.

—Brian Larson

### Kiap-TU-Wish Chapter

Chapter meetings continued this fall with a presentation by Carl Nelson on "Rush River Macroinvertebrate Monitoring." Carl presented findings from an expansive study on macroinvertebrate populations in the Rush River. Carl is a retired engineer, landowner, trout fisherman, and naturalist. Since 1988 with his wife Cindy, he has owned and managed 200 acres of forested and agricultural land in Maiden Rock, a mile from the lower Rush River. The chapter contributed funds for the identification work. The results will serve as a benchmark on the health of the Rush River.

In November the chapter hosted past board member Loren Haas, who presented a program entitled "ERO Structures: A six-year update." Working with the DNR, Loren developed Elevated Riparian Optimization (ERO) structures. In 2020 the DNR placed nine of them on the South Fork of the Kinnickinnic River, and they have been providing

en to create scoured deep runs which provide habitat and cover for mature brook trout.

December featured our Holiday Award Banquet at Junior's restaurant in River Falls, a social event with entertainment by singer/musician/songwriter Chris Silver. The chapter sponsored a fly swap, white-elephant gift exchange and ugly sweater contest. The latter was won by a provocative Badger Flowers sporting a sweater covered in tassels made of strike indicators. Members also had a chance to see Joshua Cunningham's painting, entitled "Rush into Summer," which he has donated for our upcoming annual fundraising effort.

The ERO report from Loren Hass was timely in that the chapter has undertaken the Restoration/Habitat Improvement for the South Fork of the Kinnickinnic River project in cooperation with the DNR. The South Fork of the Kinni contains a wild, naturally reproducing



Ed Constantini

KIAP CHAPTER AWARDS LUND FLY SHOP OWNER BRIAN SMOLINSKI

# Chapter News



Ed Constantini

**KIAP'S UGLY SWEATER CONTEST WAS A HEATED ONE, OR JUST WARM**



Gary Horvath

## ELEVATED RIPARIAN OPTIMIZATION (ERO) STRUCTURE

Past Kiap Chapter board member Loren Haas presented a program entitled "ERO Structures: A six-year update." Working with the DNR, Loren developed Elevated Riparian Optimization (ERO) structures. In 2020 the DNR placed nine of them on the South Fork of the Kinnickinnic River.

brook trout fishery with no competing brown trout present, due to a natural barrier at its junction with the Kinnickinnic River. The chapter intends to hold several workdays at the project site to aid in the removal of willow and other undesirable and invasive plant species through 2025.

A major component of the project is adding additional Elevated Riparian Optimization (ERO) structures to the stream. These rock structures constrict and narrow the stream to increase the velocity and scour deeper pools for fish while clearing sediment downstream. Check our website for more details and project updates.

We were pleased to receive a \$7,500 TU National "Embrace-A-Stream" grant for the South Fork Kinnickinnic project. Additionally, we had the opportunity through this grant to raise additional funds and earn an additional reward for our fundraising efforts through the EAS Challenge. Thanks to the generosity

of our chapter members, local business partners, and friends/family members, we brought in an additional \$1,650 from 40 unique donors, which coincidentally earned us a second-place ranking in the "most donors" category and earned us an additional \$1,250.

Our winter habitat crew took some time to apply herbicide to past habitat project areas in order to control buckthorn sprouting.

Additionally, the crew prepared for the Greenwood Elementary School 4th-grade Service-Learning day in December. The kids showed up by bus with their instructors and some parent chaperones to pile the cut brush atop the bonfires. Chapter volunteers were on hand to help keep the kids safe and keep the fires under control. The DNR's Kasey Yallaly took groups of the kids on nature walks and discussed the management of the Kinni.

—Gary Horvath

## Lakeshore Chapter

We are honored to be named the Chapter of the Year by the Wisconsin State Council of TU. We'd like to see as many of our members join us at the awards banquet in Oshkosh February 1 to help us celebrate this achievement as we receive the Silver Trout Award.

Lakeshore Chapter volunteers and members wrapped up the year with our tenth and final Onion River work day on December 14, a successful year-end bash, the release of our new website and the exciting announcement of our first IF4 film screening in March of 2025.

Our final monthly workday featured 12 hearty souls preparing entry trails for winter skid loader work on the river and removal of the ev-

er-present ash deadfalls. The 50 hours of work logged brings our annual habitat improvement total to 640 hours by more than 60 different volunteers. We thank each and every one of you so much. Your work keeps the Onion as the top inland trout stream in Southeast Wisconsin.

Our annual year-end bash featured great food and a blast from the past in the form of a 2003 video about the original Onion River restoration. We recognized senior members Al Spindler and Rich Platz for their decades of contributions and we had silent auctions, raffles, sharing of fish pictures, and the great stories that go with them, and a fly swap. More



**LAKESHORE WORK DAY CREW AFTER ANOTHER ONION RIVER WORKDAY**



**LAKESHORE CHAPTER VOLUNTEERS KEEP IMPROVING THE ONION RIVER**  
Lakeshore Chapter volunteers held 10 workdays on the Onion River in 2024, totalling 640 hours of labor.

than 50 members and guests enjoyed a great evening of fun, nostalgia and camaraderie.

We launched our new website, with a new web address at [lakeshore-tu.org](http://lakeshore-tu.org). Along with a new modern look, the website adds many new features and is very easy to update.

One exciting feature is a donations page that enables members and supporters to make donations from \$5 to \$10,000 directly to the chapter via the website. Donors can make one-time donations or set up recurring monthly donations to turn small monthly donations into significant yearly totals. Thank you to members Carl Martens and Zac Dulmes for building our awesome new website.

Looking ahead, we are eagerly anticipating our first IF4 screening Sunday, March 9 at the historic Laack's Tavern and Ballroom in Johnsonville, Wisconsin. Doors open at 3:30 p.m., with the films beginning at 4:30 p.m. We will have raffles, silent auctions, door prizes, cash bar and food available for purchase. Cost is \$22 including all fees. Scan the attached QR code for tickets or visit [flyfilmfest.com/sheboyganwi/](http://flyfilmfest.com/sheboyganwi/). The films look incredible this year and we are excited to host our friends from around eastern Wisconsin for this screening.

—Al Wertz

## Marinette Chapter

We are back in full swing with monthly meetings held the second Sunday of the month at the Dome Lanes in Marinette. We have had presentations from Tammie Paoli of the DNR and prepped for the Council's Northeast Regional meeting. This winter will find the chapter doing the annual trout fishing class-

es which cover habitat, equipment, fly tying and fly casting.

In March we will also be demonstrating fly casting and trout fishing techniques at the Marinette Rec. Center's outdoor show. Our fundraising banquet is April 28 at Embers 1871 in Peshtigo.

—Dale Lange

## Oconto River Chapter

The Oconto River Chapter has nine schools participating in TIC. Equipment was put together and tested in anticipation of the egg distribution. Two new instructors added to the confusion but were assisted by a couple of the more experienced instructors. It's great to see the knowledge being shared.

Schools participating this year include Oconto, Oconto Falls, Lena, Suring, Gillett, Pulaski, Menominee Indian, Coleman and Marion. Many thanks to all the teachers who see the importance of including this program in their curriculum.

In November we procured eyed rainbow trout eggs from Tim Win-

kel at Silver Moon Springs Trout Hatchery. Tim divided them up so each school would get about 200 eggs. Many thanks to Tim for his continued support. He has helped us out for many years.

When possible, we delivered the eggs to the schools. Oconto Middle School had a new filter system to deal with. They will get eggs when they are ready. Thanks to Walter Taylor at Oconto Falls for taking the extra eggs and keeping them until Oconto Middle School is able to take them. Thanks to our own couriers who get those eggs delivered fast. It takes a lot of workers to get the job done. Thanks Dick and



## Chapter News



### GILLETT HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS LEARN TO FISH AT WOCKING'S POND

Life Sports students had a field trip to Lyman Wocking's pond to use the casting skills they had learned earlier. Each fish caught was logged as to species, length and captor. More than 90 fish were caught and released, and the students and their adult mentors had a great time. For many, it was the first fish they'd ever caught.



### OCONTO RIVER CHAPTER VOLUNTEERS TAUGHT CASTING TO STUDENTS

Volunteers who helped teach high school students how to cast and fish included Lyman and Cathy Wocking, Gary and Helen Lisowe, Wayne Czypinski, Gary Lemon, Bill Wagner, Tom Klatt, Dan Sumnicht and Dale Halla.

Todd Pamperin and Lyman Wocking for driving those eggs around on short notice.

Eggs start hatching within a week or two and begin feeding a few weeks later. The chapter will provide food to our TIC schools at that time. These rainbow trout should be more tolerant and easier to raise, with less mortality.

In June we held a workday on Waupee Creek downstream of Bear Paw Road. This site was in need of fishability brushing to allow anglers to access areas with habitat work accomplished by the U.S. Forest Service. Many of the excellent holding waters are a result of large wood placement in years past.

As we opened up these areas, we saw plenty of nice fish. We brushed about 1,700 feet of stream near where brushing was done in 2023, for a total of 3,000 feet. We also improved an angler trail along the bank. Thanks again to all the TU volunteers who helped with these projects.

On our July workday we continued downstream on Waupee Creek, clearing another 1,500 feet, for a grand total of 4,500 feet. Thank you to the chapter members for the help. We also thank the DNR folks for scouting the site, putting in a number of access trails and coming to the workday.

June 15 volunteers and staff: Oconto River TU: Joe Adam, Dan Sumnicht, Wayne Czypinski, Gary Lemmen, Ted Schaff, Bob Stastny, Tom Klatt, & Pat Klatt. Green Bay TU: Pat Hill, Jeff House, Brent Lavash, Paul Pinkston, Jon Ostanek, Adrian Meseberg, & Paul Kruse. Marinette TU: Dale Lange. WI DNR: Brent Ritter, Bishop Peterson, Max Scodius, & Jonathan Pyatskowitz.

July 20 Volunteers and staff: Green Bay TU: Pat Hill, Mitch Bent, Paul Kruse, Bruce Duechert, John Duechert, Steve Walker, Adrian Meseberg. U.S. Forest Service: Jake Carleen; DNR: Brent Ritter, Bishop Peterson, Max Scodius.

In September Gillett High School invited us to teach students how to cast a fly rod. The opportunity arose as part of a Life Sports class taught by Jill Halla and others. The class included a unit on fishing. Students were taught basics on different styles of fishing including spinning, baitcasting and flyfishing.

More than 20 students participated on their football field. A very good group of TU volunteers provided mostly one-on-one instruction. Chapter members including Wayne Czypinski, Lyman Wocking, David Kalous, Bill Wagner, Gary Lemmen and Dale Halla used the chapter's fly rods this day.

Also in September the Life Sports students had a field trip to Lyman Wocking's pond to use the casting skills they had learned earlier. Each fish caught was logged as to species, length and captor. More than 90 fish were caught and released, and the students and their adult mentors had a great time. For many, it was the first fish they'd ever caught.

Thanks to those mentoring adults, including Lyman and Cathy Wocking, Gary and Helen Lisowe, Wayne Czypinski, Gary Lemon, Bill Wagner, Tom Klatt, Dan Sumnicht and Dale Halla.

The chapter has been operating this program each spring and fall semester for the past three years, introducing fishing to more than 100 students thus far.

—Tom Klatt

## Southern Wisconsin Chapter

Auction action added up for SW-TU and our coldwater resources! Our September chapter meeting saw the return of our (in)famous Meicher Madness Auction, after a five-year hiatus. A large crowd of volunteers, buyers, donors – and the indefatigable Topf Wells at the center of it all – created a high-energy, fun and a profitable event. We raised more than \$4,000 and saw a surge of young folks, many new to our chapter.

A mountain of gear changed hands, from those who were done using it to those who can't wait to put it to use. We won't wait five years for the next Meicher Madness Auction. Everyone is welcome to join our meetings, which are always on the second Tuesday of the month at Schwoegler's in Madison. It's easily accessible from several main roads and features great food and drink options.

November's meeting saw the return of another pre-Covid event ... a Fly-Tying Jamboree featuring Pat Hasburgh demonstrating patterns on the big screen while tables of local tyers showed how they spin their trusty patterns to life.

To see who's speaking at future meetings, visit our website. Speakers vary from experts breaking down local streams to tales of far-lung fishing adventures in other lands.

Our Stream Team workdays took us to a lot of beautiful places this past fall. We went from warm and buggy to cold and slippery, and from Dane to Iowa to Green county. We went from buckthorn to boxelders, once again led by Jim Hess. Our crews worked alongside DNR employees, UW-Madison students and our friends from other state chapters. And if a landowner had a skid steer to help really move things, well that was good, too. All told, we had 95 workday participants this past fall.

And once again, we were proud to help the DNR make life easier for our native brook trout. This year, it was Trout Creek and a coordinated three-day effort to shock, net, sort, count and move nearly a thousand brown trout downstream below a dry dam that will keep them there. We helped capture approximately 400 trout. It was busy, intense work and we thank our DNR partners and everyone who came out to volunteer.

We are once again offering free fly-tying classes starting in January, including a class for beginners and another for those who are more experienced.

Visit us at [swtu.org](http://swtu.org) to see what else we have going on.

—Drew Kasel



### SOUTHERN CHAPTER'S STREAM TEAM HAD 95 VOLUNTEERS LAST FALL

Stream Team workdays took volunteers to beautiful places this past fall, from warm and buggy to cold and slippery, from Dane to Iowa to Green county and from buckthorn to boxelders, once again led by Jim Hess.

## Southeast Wisconsin Chapter

SEWTU's fall got off to a bang with the hosting of the IF4 Fly Fishing Film Fest in September at the Bavarian Bierhaus in Glendale. About 100 fans enjoyed some top-class fly-fishing short films from international and North American locations in beautiful settings. The fishing wasn't bad, either. Guests also enjoyed authentic German food and beer, along with silent auction and bucket raffles. Prizes included guided and mentored trips, fly fishing gear, a chainsaw, fine wine and high-end bourbon. Every attendee got a ticket at the door for the grand door prize of a high-quality fishing kayak. A few surprise consolation prizes were also handed out. We are deeply thankful for the generosity of our members, friends and sponsors for making this such a great event.

In September we also kicked off our fall habitat workday season with an extensive invasive species clearing project at Paradise Springs in the Kettle Moraine State Forest. 30 volunteers provided 140 volunteer hours and helped with this effort to clear and treat buckthorn, black lo-

cust, and multi-flora rose from this popular public trout fishery.

October was busy, too. A combined force of 15 SEWTU and Oakbrook TU members worked on Tichigan Creek in Racine County. Volunteers installed 40 biologs and provided 94 volunteer hours helping restore this small brook trout stream, continuing the restoration effort of this rare example of trout water in Racine County.

Our volunteers provided fly-casting lessons and distributed TU information at Shorewood's Fish and Feather Day at Hubbard Park on the Milwaukee River on October 5 and at the DNR's Steelhead Open House in Racine on October 12.

Our October chapter meeting at Crawdaddy's restaurant saw our old friend Fred Longreen from Milwaukee's Orvis store give an informative and enjoyable program on fall hatches in Wisconsin.

November saw a new workday event with a workday at McKewan Springs, a spring pond in the Kettle Moraine State Forest. We removed buckthorn and black locust from this public fishery. We saw this

# Chapter News



weekday volunteer opportunity as a way to tap into our large pool of retired members. Fifteen volunteers responded and later met for a fun lunch in nearby Dousman, giving our usual bratwurst crew the afternoon off.

Our November Chapter meeting featured MATC's GEO Sciences and STEM Instructor Christopher Schroede giving a presentation on climate change and its effects on trout water. He provided a large amount of well-presented and understandable scientific data which provided a clear picture of the avail-

able science-based information on this topic. Twenty members and guests were in attendance. The meeting wrapped up with our popular fly rod and gear raffle.

Our December Holiday Party was at Crawdaddy's restaurant and included a non-perishable food drive with a fly rod and gear raffle, and our traditional gift exchange. We will also have some "Mini-travelogues" presented by some of our members featuring some international and local fishing travel. SEW-TU wishes everyone a great 2025!

—Rick Larkin



## WILD RIVERS CHAPTER ADOPTS WHITE RIVER FISHERY AREA

Through a DNR program, the chapter recently adopted the White River State Fishery Area in Bayfield County. The chapter has done work on the White River watershed for many years.

### Wild Rivers Chapter

The Wild Rivers Chapter has been awarded a TU National Embrace-A-Stream Grant for Mosquito Brook in Sawyer County. The purpose of our Mosquito Brook Watershed Baseline Project is to improve the scientific understanding of the stream function and to start building support for this important cold-water resource in the local community. One objective of the project will be to gain insights into the water quality and thermal regime through macroinvertebrate and temperature monitoring at six sites within the watershed.

Another objective of the project will be to gain a better understanding of how trout are using the stream for spawning purposes. Fish sampling with minnow traps in the headwaters will supplement existing DNR trout surveys downstream.

Wild, native brook trout and wild, naturalized brown trout are both present and appear to be doing well as of 2024. But climate studies project a statewide 67-percent loss of brook trout habitat and a 30-percent loss of brown trout habitat due to climate effects during the next 50 years. The over-arching goal is to manage the watershed so that brown and brook trout can continue

to sustain a meaningful presence in this system. We already know, or strongly suspect that multiple and complex issues are in play, and need further study and action, including but not limited to: groundwater conservancy; wetland restoration, forest carbon sequestration; run-off, genetics, dams and barriers, wildlife (especially waterfowl, deer, and beaver): human use and development.

The Wild Rivers Chapter will start working on the long-term goal of creating a watershed plan to help conserve wild, self-sustaining trout populations in Mosquito Brook through this century.

Through a DNR program, we recently adopted the White River State Fishery Area in Bayfield County. Our chapter has done work on the White River watershed for many years. This will ensure the continuation of these efforts as well as adding new methods to improve and preserve this fabulous trout fishery.

I hope you're interested in helping us in 2025. If you are, please feel free to contact me any time at [john@wiflyfisher.com](mailto:john@wiflyfisher.com)

—John Simonson

### Wisconsin Clearwaters Chapter

The Clearwaters Chapter Board approved a gift of \$1,000 to the Wisconsin Reel Recovery Retreat that will be held in River Falls in 2025. This quality program provides a fishing-centered retreat for individuals who have been impacted by cancer. The board also agreed to donate \$500 to the Wisconsin State Council of TU's Watershed Access Fund grant program, and \$500 to

the Council's Friends of Wisconsin TU grant program. Our chapter has benefited from both funds, and found it gratifying to be able to provide further support for this strong work statewide.

Chapter President William Heth attended the recent Neonicotinoid Forum in Madison and provided a summary to our board. As our region is primarily agricultural, this is-

sue looms large for the potential impact on stream invertebrate life in our area.

In November eight Clearwaters Chapter members attended an in-service provided by Kyle Siebers and Steve DeVitt of the DNR on identifying trout spawning redds, and uploading data to the Wisconsin DNR Redd Survey App. This in-service included a trip to a local stream where a number of spawning redds were observed.

The Clearwaters Chapter joined other regional outdoor sports businesses and organizations as a sponsor of the 2024 Banff Centre Mountain Film Festival World Tour presentation in Eau Claire Dec. 2 and 3.

This is a world tour of outdoor sports and outdoor experience independent films selected from the annual Banff Centre Mountain Film Festival contest held in Banff, Canada. The films touch on a wide range

of outdoor pursuits and experiences ranging from extreme high risk back country downhill skiing in Antarctica to backyard birdwatching. Clearwaters Chapter hosted an informational booth in the lobby which allowed us the opportunity to interact with a wide variety of outdoor enthusiast in our region sharing our mission and work. The members staffing the booth enjoyed surprising some attendees with a fly rod outfit when they expressed interest in learning to fly fish, and identified they knew someone who could assist them in learning to cast.

The weekly Wednesday Fly Tying and Lying Sessions are scheduled to begin Jan. 8 at the Brewing Projekt in Eau Claire and Jan. 15 at the Chippewa River Distillery in Chippewa Falls. The sessions will then alternate sites each week during the Winter.

—Bob Mitchell

### Wisconsin River Valley Chapter

Sadly, our chapter lost a wonderful lady, Betsey Hager. Betsey served as treasurer for our chapter from 2013-2017. She was a wonderful, fun and artistic person. Betsey had worked with the Girl Scouts for more than 20 years and eventually served as the Membership and Marketing Director and Assistant Executive Director of Leadership.

She played a pivotal role in integrating the Hmong community into the Girl Scouts. Betsey's dedication earned her the Life Service Award from Girl Scouts of America. Her commitment to community service extended through her roles on the boards of directors for Neighbors Place and our chapter, and as a member of Friends of Sylvania.

She and her husband, Pat had many wonderful adventures together in Alaska, traveling to the Quetico 20 times and even sailing the Apostle Islands. She is survived by

her husband Patrick, sons Brennen and Kirk and daughter-in-law, Chris and grandson Liam. She was a truly wonderful person, and I am so happy to have known her.

In October Henry Kanemoto gave a presentation on the selectivity of trout. Thank you to Henry and all who attended. Also in October was the annual Plover River Stream study with the Wausau East High School students. This is always a fun event and I am thankful to Mr. Maata for letting us participate. Thank you to Al Hauber for giving the history of the Plover River Stream projects and insect information and to John Meachen and Perry Nikolai for helping the students identify the aquatic "critters" that were found. Then in the evening there was fly tying at the Sawmill Brewery in Merrill.

In November Terry Cummings gave a presentation at Scanni's on



WAUSAU EAST STUDENTS AT WRV CHAPTER'S STREAM DAY



WRV CHAPTER'S AL HAUBER EXPLAINS TROUT SELECTIVITY



## Chapter News



### WRV CHAPTER MEMBERS TEACHING FLY TYING

They recently demonstrated fly tying at a place called Creative Spirit, in Merrill. This is a place where you can buy a ticket for one of their events and go be creative. The chapter was asked to show a small group how to tie a few flies. More than a dozen people signed up and everyone enjoyed themselves.

fishing in the Catskills. It is often said about trout that they live in the most beautiful places. The pictures in the presentation are evidence to that fact. Thank you, Terry, and to all those who attended.

Also in November we demonstrated fly tying at a place called Creative Spirit, in Merrill. This is a spot you can buy a ticket for one of their events and go be creative. We were asked if we could show a small group how to tie a few flies. More than a dozen signed up for the class and it was a blast. Thank you to the folks at Creative Spirit and all the students and volunteers who attended.

And also in November we held our Hackle & Hops, which turned out to be the unofficial part two to fly tying at Creative Spirit. We had planned for three flies there but ran

out of time after the second fly so we invited the students to H&H to learn how to tie a foam beetle. Thanks to Bob Paine for his instruction and to John Meachen for assisting.

December saw us at the Sawmill Brewery in Merrill for a presentation about Fishing the Upper Peninsula by Seth Waters of Dark Waters Fly Shop in Ironwood, Michigan. There was also a Hackle & Hops, Open Fly & Jig Tying at Sawmill Brewing.

#### Coming up

- January 14: Antigo and Wausau DNR Fisheries Specialists; Sconni's Alehouse & Eatery, Wausau;
- January 21: Hackle & Hops, Sawmill Brewing; 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.
- February 5: International Fly Fishing Film Tour (IF4); UW

Center for Civil Engagement, 625 Stewart Avenue, Wausau. Tickets at [flyfilmfest.com](http://flyfilmfest.com). Because of the success of last year's IF4 event, we were able to send two kids to fishing camp and donate money to help support some summer crews that will be working to improve trout habitat. We are preparing several raffle prizes for the event so please come and join the fun.

- February 18: Hackle & Hops at Sawmill Brewing, 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.
- March 11: Hexteria: Fishing the Hex Hatch in North Central Wisconsin, with John Meachen; Sawmill Brewery in Merrill.
- March 18: Hackle & Hops at

Sawmill Brewing in Merrill from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

- April 8: Gearing Up for the 2025 Season with Craig Cook of Fall Line Outfitters, Stevens Point; Sconni's in Wausau
- April 15: Final Hackle & Hops at Sawmill Brewing from 6 p.m.
- May 13: Teaching New Trout Fishers, the Easy Way: Spin-casting with Dallas Moe; Sawmill Brewery in Merrill.

Changes happen, so please make sure to check out "The Riffle" or find us on Facebook at "Wisconsin River Valley Trout Unlimited."

—Linda Lehman

### Wolf River Chapter

Greetings to all from the folks at the Wolf River Chapter. A new year is upon us and we are excited for what the future holds for the Wolf River Watershed, based on past successes.

But we also look back and give thanks. We are thankful to those who came before us and looked beyond what they could put in their creels and considered the future. We are thankful to those who took up the yoke of leadership and truly led by example. We are thankful for the cooperative efforts between the federal, state and county entities that helped get things done. We are thankful to those who make donations that help get things done. And most of all, we are thankful for our volunteers, and the landowners who allow access through and on their properties to facilitate work projects.

Projects currently underway include limited otter and beaver control on two tributaries to help

protect spawning brook trout. Planned projects for winter include increased beaver and otter control, continued road brushing, stream access and tree release if the snow holds off or allows such projects.

Planned projects for the summer include continuing work on tributaries, beaver and beaver dam removal, blockage removal, brushing and tree release. Removal of the concrete (see photos) from the Old Bridge at Pearson from the Wolf River. And of course, continuing efforts to make progress in the planned removal of the Old Dam in the Wolf downstream from Lily.

Planned workdays for the summer are every Saturday from June 15 to September 15 that is not a holiday weekend. During that time, myself and others might be available during the week, in case anyone wants to get together and do some work. Get in touch.

—John Carbonari

# West Fork Sports Club update

The West Fork Sports Club had another great year thanks to many returning members, new members, local and national organizations and the support of the local community.

The West Fork of the Kickapoo River is almost back to normal after the floods of 2018. We've done substantial improvements to our stretch of the West Fork to restore the stream to a more natural meander. In 2023 improvements included bank grading and stream narrowing, three LUNKER structures, three rock weirs and multiple large holding boulders.

The rock weirs did their job perfectly, filling in slow shallow areas created by the 2018 and 2021 floods and reverting the river's course to a more natural meander and width.

The improvements created more protection, holding structure and spawning grounds for our resident brown and brook trout. Our 3,500-foot stretch of river now provides excellent habitat throughout almost the entire length of water.

Future improvements are being considered for the very top section, just south of the Highway S bridge. We are also considering supporting other projects in the area to create more public access and fishing opportunities on nearby streams.

The Campspot.com reservation system allowed us to share the beau-

ty and mission of the club with more new members and campers than ever before. And we're always improving the campground and facilities throughout the year.

### Hosting great events

About 25 college students from Wisconsin and Minnesota participated in the annual Trout Unlimited/Costa 5Rivers rendezvous to learn more about stream ecology, conservation, trout fishing and the Driftless Area. All students volunteered their time Sunday morning to plant 35 trees, spread more than 100,000 wildflower seeds and 200 pounds of oats to stabilize the streambank. Their coordinated efforts and hard work will provide campers with shade and beauty for decades to come.

We also planted seven maple memorial trees donated by Gladys Solakian's family. They overlook the river in one of the most beautiful sections of our campground, right next to the Weidner brothers' memorial oaks.

Heddon Fest was successful, with a fully packed clubhouse on a nearly perfect spring day. Those who camped the two nights before were treated to an absolutely spectacular KP-9 aurora borealis storm that engulfed the entire sky.

Meanwhile, in May the DNR hosted its "learn to fish" weekend, introducing new anglers to everything from casting to sustainable harvesting.

STREAMGirls hosted their annual event in August, which was a great success thanks to support from the Coulee Region Chapter and Girl Scouts of America. Many young anglers learned about fly fishing and had a blast.

In September, the Bamboo Rod Builders packed the clubhouse with some of the most beautiful bamboo rods in existence. Many TU chapters from around the state hosted annual rendezvous, fishing excursions, and board meetings at the club. The Blackhawk Chapter of TU donated a beautiful steel bench in memory of lifetime WFSC member, Fred Young. The bench is in the perfect location to enjoy one of our many iconic Seas Branch valley sunsets that Fred and his wife Wendy loved so much.

### Brook trout release

We helped release 2,000 native-strain brook trout funded by the DNR and WFSC, and raised by Living Waters Bible Camp. We released 1,500 in the headwaters and 500 in the stretch of river through club property. Those stream improve-

ments from 2023 did a great job holding the brook trout until the summer heat pushed them into cooler feeder streams.

### Data loggers

The club provided funding to purchase two water-temp-data loggers in the spring of 2024, at the request of Coulee Region Chapter President Jason Freund. Jason has been conducting a study on rising temps in the West Fork of the Kickapoo and other local streams. He is currently going through the data and we're hoping to identify "hot spots" that could be cooled down with stream restoration projects and strategic tree plantings.

### New mower

Due to the success of the campground and member donations, we were able to purchase a new John Deere mower that has cut down our mowing time, reducing fuel consumption and noise pollution. Numerous compliments were made on the quality of the grounds this year thanks to the diligent efforts of expert mower Chris Freeman and weedwhacker champion Sheri Penkalski.

See *WESTFORK*, page 27



# Consider hosting a fish science meeting



## EXPLAINING THE DATA FROM TEMPERATURE LOGGERS

Emma Walkowiak and Audrey Sorensen presented water temperature data from temperature loggers purchased by CRTU as well as UWL loggers.

By Jason Freund,  
Photos by Fred Spademan

The UW-LaCrosse Freshwater Ecology and Management Club (FEMC) recently hosted an evening of fish science talks with the Coulee Region Chapter. While I am more than a little biased, as they are “my” students after all, the fish science talks made for one of my favorite TU events ever. For the last few years, our chapter has had a fall meeting on one of our local college campuses – either UW-LaCrosse or Viterbo University. More recently, we have dedicated the November meeting to talks from students about their research on coldwater resources.

This year, UW-LaCrosse students presented their research on a number of coldwater topics. We had talks on a winter mortality study, stream temperatures and on our lab group’s research on a local brook trout stream. Our lab consists of about 10 dedicated people, including myself and Prof. David Schumann and our graduate and undergraduate students. We work to better understand the ecology of coldwater streams. Most universities have similar research being conducted by students and faculty, but we are blessed with plenty of nearby coldwater streams.

To kick off the fish science talks, UW-La Crosse graduate student Max Monfort presented the fish lab’s winter mortality study from last winter. The purpose was to better understand mortality from fish handling during the winter catch-and-release trout season. Our lab worked with the Wisconsin DNR to assess mortality of winter-caught brown trout.

DNR staff captured brown trout by backpack electrofishing. Then, to simulate the time it takes to take a photograph, the student researchers exposed the trout to the air or placed it on the snow for 30 or 60 seconds. A control group of trout was quickly measured and tagged, to simulate a near-immediate catch-and-release scenario. After measuring and being given a unique hole punch to a fin, the fish were held in nets in the stream for 24 hours. To our surprise, after 24 hours, no mortality had occurred. However, this does not give anglers license to handle fish poorly in the winter, as sublethal effects and longer-term mortality were not evaluated. It does shed some new light on the theory some people have been es-

posing online that mortality is unnecessarily high. The paper, co-authored by 14 of us, is currently in review.

Next, Emma Walkowiak and Audrey Sorensen presented water temperature data from temperature loggers purchased by our chapter as well as UWL loggers. Temperature loggers collected data every 15, 30, or 60 minutes depending upon the model and age of the logger. The new loggers are incredible and hold years’ worth of data.

Your chapter should think about investing in a few to gain insights from such data in your area. In any case, this summer was quite warm and the last half, quite dry and we captured how stream temperatures responded to this summer’s weather.

The West Fork of the Kickapoo River was an outlier due to the ongoing effects of the 2018 flood and Jersey Valley dam management. Daily maximum temperatures regularly exceeded 80 degrees Fahrenheit and some days, the average temperature was more than 70 degrees on the West Fork.

Other comparable streams had maximum temperatures that were much cooler as well as never having average daily temperatures above 70 degrees Fahrenheit. Anyone who has dealt with stream temperature data understands that the loggers collect a massive amount of data. The students then outlined their plans in the Coon Creek watershed which we will be planning this winter with the DNR and other interested groups.

Madison Wall, Freshwater Ecology and Management Club president, presented the fish lab’s ongoing Pammel Creek research. The Outdoor Recreation Alliance (ORA) recently purchased an abandoned farm on the outskirts of La Crosse and have provided an opportunity for the lab to “adopt” a stream close to campus. The stream is a tributary to the Mississippi River and the headwaters are isolated by a large concrete section through much of La Crosse. Brook trout were reestablished in Pammel creek and the population is quite healthy. The UW-LaCrosse Ichthyology Laboratory collected about one brook trout for every meter of stream they shocked this past fall.

Students conducting brook trout redd surveys found 30 redds in less than a half a mile of stream. Future studies will be continuing to monitor this population and evaluate



## PRESENTING RESEARCH ON LACROSSE’S PAMMEL CREEK

Madison Wall, Freshwater Ecology and Management Club president, presented the fish lab’s ongoing research on Pammel Creek, which is close to LaCrosse.



## WINTER CATCH-AND-RELEASE TROUT MORTALITY STUDIED

Max Monfort presented the fish lab’s winter mortality study from last winter. The purpose was to better understand mortality from fish handling during the winter catch-and-release trout season.

movement with a fish-tagging study. We are extremely grateful to the Outdoor Recreation Alliance for sharing their access to the property and their support of our students’ efforts.

Lastly, DNR Senior Fisheries Biologist Kirk Olson presented issues in his region and data they have collected this year. First and foremost are issues with the Jersey Valley dam on the West Fork, which is negatively impacting stream temperatures. The decreased water levels behind the dam have caused the warming of the West Fork mentioned above. This warming may be responsible for the decrease in trout numbers and increase in warm-water-tolerant fish documented downstream of the dam.

A 2019 DNR administrative order called for the complete draw-down of Jersey Valley Lake, but the lake was not completely drawn down until last summer and, since then, debris has frequently clogged the structure and backed up water. Compounding this issue, the ongoing dam decommissioning process threatens brook trout fisheries above the Seas Branch and Maple Dale dams. The Coulee Region Chapter, the DNR and others are working to protect those economically and socially important brook trout fisheries.

Kirk then talked about how budget issues are affecting stocking, particularly the co-op program. Lastly, he talked about the watershed reports he writes based on data from their trout stream surveys and updated us about their trend-site data. Trend sites exist across the

state to create a long-term database that allows the DNR and others to assess changes that occur over extended time frames.

I write this article to encourage other chapters to host a similar evening of fish science talks. Times have really changed on university campuses. When I was a student at UW Platteville in the 1990s, nobody in the biology department was doing environmental research. Today at UW-Platteville, Prof. Kris Wright and his students have been working with the Harry and Laura Nohr Chapter and others to study the local streams. Their partnership was the model for our chapter’s partnership

I think more chapters can work to create similar relationships with schools in their chapter’s area. As we lament the fact that our chapter membership is growing older, this is an opportunity to show younger people what TU chapters are doing. We had more than 60 students in the Student Union, largely thanks to extra credit, and we were able to expose younger people to the TU message. It may not result in many more members immediately, but is a long-term investment.

*Jason Freund teaches in the Biology Department at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse and conducts research on stream and fish ecology with his students. In his free time, he writes a biweekly blog, The Scientific Fly Angler, at thescientificflyangler.com, and is president of the Coulee Region Chapter of Trout Unlimited.*

# Tactical nymphing for the early season

By Kyle Seibers

I'm a big fan of Jensen Fly Fishing. Dave and Amelia are incredible fly anglers, guides, photographers and videographers. Their videos on YouTube are spectacular. They go above and beyond to not just produce high-quality fly fishing content, but also talk the viewer through the how and the why along the way. If you're not familiar with them, check them out.

However, while Dave and Amelia are fortunate enough to fish all over the world, and I am confined to my home waters of Central Wisconsin, there are still things I learn from them. One of their techniques is spotting and stalking trout, and I have really enjoyed weaving that tactic into my game.

During the cold months of winter there are trout that can be caught in our streams, and one of my favorite ways to target them is to sight fish. Winter streams in the Central Sands are low, cold and clear. This makes the first part of the equation, the spotting, a little easier. There is no foliage to conceal the trout as they hide in their shaded haunts awaiting a tasty morsel. I look for targets at the heads and tails of pools, or the runs between pools. And I'm often looking much farther out in front of me than I could ever properly fish. The goal is to spot a trout before you get so close as to spook it.

Some of my favorite fish are the ones holding in the middle of a flat run, in the sunshine, often on a clean sand bottom. We like to call these sunbathers. Despite holding in bright sunshine on a clear sandy bottom with nary a ripple on the water's surface, these fish can be very hard to spot. They are often lying stock still and superbly camouflaged against the sand. The fish at the heads and tails of pools can sometimes be concealed by a slight riffle on the water's surface, but due to the more complex currents at these locations they tend to move around a little bit more. Now, these aren't the darts and slashes of a hungry summertime trout. The movements of a winter trout are akin to the sway of a frond of aquatic vegeta-

tion; slow and lazy, sometimes nearly imperceptible.

The reason I don't look for trout in pools is because the depth often makes it hard to spot fish from any considerable distance. And if the fish are holding at the bottom of a deep pool there is a good chance they are less active than the sunbathers. Go ahead and fish the pools anyway. You're there to fish aren't you? I avoid trying to spot trout in outright riffles because the chop on the water's surface makes it impossible to spot fish. But fish them anyway, as riffles are always great spots.

Approaching a target trout once it is spotted is a different flavor of challenge. Winter trout streams offer very little concealment to the angler. Pay attention to your shadow and keep it away from the fish. Try not to spook other fish that might have the domino effect of spooking your target. Staying low and moving slow are two keys. I often finish my approach on my knees. The spookiness of wintertime trout might mean you have to fish from a greater distance than you would like. Just try to get as close as you can to make an accurate cast.

Presentation and fly choice might be the simplest part of the whole game. I like to use bead head, jig-style nymphs in the size 14-to-16 range. Frenchie or Perdigon-style flies will suffice. You want your fly to sink fast without making too much commotion when it hits the water.

I set a New Zealand style wool indicator 3-to-4 feet above my fly. Most times you'll see the trout move for the fly, or you'll see the white wink of the mouth open, so the indicator is often not needed. However, sometimes you won't see anything from the trout to tell you to strike, so I rarely forgo the wool. Using a foam or a plastic indicator is probably a bad idea. Even the little puff of wool will sometimes spook trout, so the added bulk and plop of an artificial indicator will only decrease your chances of success.

I would be remiss if I didn't take a minute to temper your expectations. The fish you'll be targeting us-



## PERFECT TYPE OF SPOT FOR WINTER NYMPHING IN SAND COUNTRY

Here's an ideal spot with good stalk conditions. Clear water and sunshine, but a few shadows to hide an angler. Maybe a touch too much riffle in this particular photo, but any fish on the edges should be vulnerable. The stone stream bed will hide fish better than sand, but a little extra challenge just adds to the fun.

ing this method in the Central Sands are often in the 6-to-10-inch range. A 12-inch trout, brought to hand through spot and stalk nymphing, is a real dandy. Trout over 12 inches are not uncatchable using this method, but they are often feeding in places where you can't sight fish to them. Because of the altered behavior of larger fish, this method is tailored towards the smaller trout.

This is a great way to fish with a partner. Two sets of eyes only increase the chances of spotting trout. Sometimes your angling partner can call out to you to set the hook if you can't see things from your angle. And spending time on a trout stream when the temperature is barely above freezing is always more enjoyable with a companion. In the coming months, as the early season opens and you get a case of the shack nasties, head out to your favorite Sand County stream and try to stalk some trout. It can be quite effective when things all go your

way, and it's a hell of a lot of fun.

*Kyle Seibers grew up exploring the public lands of Central Wisconsin. He is a Trout Habitat Technician with the Wisconsin DNR in Wild Rose. Kyle has nearly 25 years of experience fishing the area, and now more than 10 years working to restore, improve, and enhance Central Wisconsin's trout streams. He has an intimate knowledge of the many challenges, but also rewards, to be found while trout fishing the "Sandbox."*



# South Pine brook trout strain unique to Iowa

By Cam Acker, TU Iowa Driftless Outreach Coordinator

A crisp morning in November, fog rising from the valley, hot coffee and native brook trout. What could be better? It was the day after the election, and after endless political ads, we needed the solace that only a healthy trout stream can provide.

The South Pine strain of brook trout is unique to the state of Iowa. This strain was first identified in 1994. In 2018-19, the Driftless Area Restoration Effort National Fish Habitat Partnership funded a genetic analysis of brook trout from northeast Iowa streams to identify additional streams containing South Pine strain and to evaluate the suitability and sustainability of South Pine stocks to support collection and stocking.

Today the Iowa DNR (IADNR) utilizes the lineage of this strain to assist in replenishing brook trout stocks in acceptable streams across Iowa's portion of the Driftless Area.

Starting in 1996, IADNR began collecting eggs and milt (semen) from native brook trout at South Pine Creek. The process requires 10-20 fisheries staff and volunteers for most of the day and involves electroshocking the stream, collecting trout that are sexually mature (usually greater than six inches in size), collecting the eggs and milt, manually fertilizing the eggs, and transferring the eggs to the Manchester Fish Hatchery for rearing.

Depending on the number of fish caught, more than 15,000 eggs are taken. This produces enough fingerlings to stock approximately 10 sections of streams.

On this particular November day, we collected several beautiful specimens. We spent approximately five hours in the field, which is a fraction of the prep time and rearing time that is needed to ensure a successful population of fingerlings.

These fingerlings are precious to the Iowa DNR Fisheries Department. Brook trout were nearly extirpated from Iowa in 1874 and are



## PINE CREEK STRAIN OF BROOK TROUT FINDING NEW HOMES

Today the Iowa DNR utilizes the lineage of this strain to assist in replenishing brook trout stocks in streams across Iowa's portion of the Driftless Area.

now naturally reproducing in 16 Iowa streams. This would not have been possible without the diligent work of the IADNR Fisheries Department.

Many of Iowa's coldwater streams are either too warm or have water quality or habitat deficiencies

that restrict suitability for brook trout long term. The goal of the stream work that Trout Unlimited and the Iowa DNR are implementing is to correct these deficiencies so that more coldwater streams can hold this beautiful native trout in the coming years.

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**Women's Intro to Fly Fishing Clinic**  
 Taught by Wisconsin Women's Fly Fishing  
[www.swtu.org/learn/womens-flyfishing-clinic/](http://www.swtu.org/learn/womens-flyfishing-clinic/)

Feb 1, 2025 9:30-4:30 pm  
 1 N Main St, Oshkosh, WI 54901  
 \$21, Includes lunch, Gear Provided

Register :  
[WomenFlyFishingIntro.eventbrite.com](http://WomenFlyFishingIntro.eventbrite.com)

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 Wisconsin State Trout Unlimited

#### WESTFORK, from page 24

Project Green Teen (PGT) and 5Rivers put in substantial effort to clear rocks from walking paths along the stream. A brush hog was rented in August to tackle the willows and further establish the walking paths. The paths are now established enough that we should be able to mow them throughout the year.

A water softening system specifically designed to remove iron and sulfur was installed in the Clubhouse and Green Cabin. This should help improve taste and odor.

Both cabins continue to see increased interest, generating more consistent revenue to sustain the club and our conservation mission. We are hoping to make cosmetic and other upgrades to the Green Cabin in the near future to improve the overall experience. The Brookie Cabin continues to receive excellent reviews.

Overall, we couldn't be happier with how the 2024 season went and we thank our members, volunteers, community members and organizations who supported us throughout the year.

A special thanks to the rest of the West Fork Sports Club Board of Directors for all their hard work behind the scenes to keep the club and campground operating smoothly. We look forward to sharing the club with all of you in 2025 and supporting more stream restoration efforts in the Driftless Area. Find more information about the West Fork Sports Club at [www.westforksportsclub.org](http://www.westforksportsclub.org).

*Curt Riedl is the vice president on the board of directors for the West Fork Sports Club. You can reach him at 608-770-7211.*

**Wisconsin Women's Fly Fishing Clinics**



Presented by Southern Wisconsin Trout Unlimited  
<https://www.swtu.org/learn/womens-flyfishing-clinic/>  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/WiWomensFlyFishing>

|   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| <p><b>BASICS CLINIC<br/>BY WOMEN FOR WOMEN</b><br/>June 13-15th, 2025</p> <p>Learn to choose proper equipment, tie knots, cast, read water, select the proper fly &amp; time on the water. Learn new tactics, regardless of your level of ability. Equipment available for use.</p> | <p><b>ON THE WATER SKILLS CLINIC - INTERMEDIATE</b><br/>June 11-13, 2025</p> <p>Personalized instruction streamside. Tune up workshops by women instructors to refresh skills in casting, matching the hatch &amp; reading water. Fish WI finest trout streams with experienced anglers.</p> |   |
|    |    |  |
| <p><a href="https://bit.ly/WWFFCBasics">https://bit.ly/WWFFCBasics</a></p>  | <p><a href="https://bit.ly/WOWSCi">https://bit.ly/WOWSCi</a></p>   |   |
| <p>Westby, WI (near Viroqua, in Wisconsin's Driftless Area)</p>   |  | <p>\$355 until April 1<sup>st</sup><br/>\$375 after</p>                               |

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