Wisconsin Council of Trout Unlimited
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# Wisconsin Trout

**Winter 2026**

# Wisconsin's Inland Trout Stamp dollars at work

*Your trout stamp dollars support trout habitat restoration projects throughout the state, such as Lincoln County's Spring Creek, a vital Prairie River tributary.*

**By DNR Fisheries Biologist Taylor Curran**

Spring Creek is a class 1 trout stream in Lincoln County that is home to naturally reproducing native brook trout and naturalized brown trout. It flows in a southerly direction from the outlet of Spring Lake through the town of Merrill before flowing into the Prairie River. The creek is not only an excellent trout stream in its own right, it also provides critical spawning habitat, cold-water refuge and additional cold-water input to the Prairie River. Although it's one of our most storied trout streams, it can present thermal challenges to trout in its lower reaches during summer months.

During the summers of 2024 and 2025, the DNR, with the help of TU and local landowners, completed 3,000 feet of channel restoration on Spring Creek. Located northeast of Merrill, west of State Highway 17 and south of Spring Lake Road, the project lies within the Prairie River Fishery Area. The project started on the downstream end of a DNR forest road culvert and ended 3,000 feet downstream, which is 1,200 feet above the confluence with the Prairie River. Public access is located on the upstream end from a DNR access road off Spring Lake Road and on the downstream end from the Prairie River at the end of Prairie Road.

Before the project was completed, this section of river was wide, shallow and lacked overhead cover preferred by trout, likely the result of historic logging, log drives and other watershed issues. A pre-habitat electrofishing survey was completed to assess the trout populations which showed healthy numbers of brook and brown trout, but overall small size quality. A post-habitat electrofishing survey will be conducted in 2030 to assess populations and size quality.

*See **Spring Creek**, page 7*

**STREAMS SUCH AS SPRING CREEK PLAY CRUCIAL ROLES**
Lincoln County's Spring Creek is not only an excellent trout stream in its own right, it also provides critical spawning habitat, cold-water refuge and additional cold-water input to the Prairie River.

## Sen. Rachael Cabral-Guevara and TU CARES leaders meet

In early December TU CARES and Wisconsin Council leaders met with Sen. Rachael Cabral-Guevara in Wautoma to discuss restoration efforts in the Central Sands region. The group presented an overview of TU's involvement in the area, highlighting the importance of public lands, recent improvement projects on the West Branch of the White River and planning efforts for the Mecan River watershed.

Discussions followed regarding statewide priorities of reauthorizing the Knowles Nelson Stewardship Program and providing an inflation adjustment to the Inland Trout Stamp. Senator Cabral-Guevara expressed her support of the stewardship program and took an interest in working on the Inland Trout Stamp adjustment.

The group visited the site of a culvert replacement project in the West Branch of the White River watershed. We're planning future site visits to the Pine River and Mecan River headwaters this spring. We thank Sen. Cabral-Guevara for her time, legislative insights and support of our work to improve conditions in our local waterways.

From left are Tom Lager, Linn Beck, Graeme Hodson, John Tucker, senate staffer Sydney Faestel, Sen. Rachael Cabral-Guevara and Laura Tucker.

## You're all invited to a celebration...

*...to recognize the outstanding efforts of those who deserve it the most.*

**Each year at our annual awards banquet, the Wisconsin Council of TU recognizes a number of individuals and organizations for their outstanding efforts in support of TU's mission. Please join us in celebrating as we present awards to the following:**

**Resource Award of Merit: Linn Beck**
**Silver Trout Chapter Award: Green Bay Chapter.**
**Distinguished Service - Leadership: Jason Fruend**
**Distinguished Service - Youth Education: Terry Cummings**
**Distinguished Service - Service Partnership: Joe Harper**
**Hunt/Vetrano Resource Professional Award: Chad DeWyre**
**Reel Partner: Brandon Scholz**

## Passionate about TU? Join us at our annual meeting.

All TU members and leaders are invited to attend Council meetings, including our annual meeting in Oshkosh at 9 a.m. on Saturday, February 7.

If you plan to attend, please send an RSVP to Council Chair Myk Hranicka at jdrflooring@gmail.com, so we can be sure to have enough lunch on hand for all attendees.

If you have any items that you'd like to see on the agenda, please submit them to Chair Myk Hranicka.


**Visit the Wisconsin Council of TU at wicouncil.tu.org or find us on Facebook.**

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**Wisconsin Clear Waters (#255):** Bill Heth; wlcaddis@gmail.com; wcwtu.org
**Wisconsin River Valley (#395):** Eric Pease; wrvtu.org
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## State Council Leaders

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**Diversity Initiative:** Heidi Oberstadt; 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, 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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Photo/article contributions, letters to the editor and advertisements are welcomed. Submit to:

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(608) 516-3647
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YOU'RE INVITED
To celebrate our accomplishments and the people who make it possible
2026 Wisconsin Council of Trout Unlimited Banquet
Saturday, Feb. 7, 2026
Oshkosh Marriott Waterfront Hotel
and Convention Center
1 North Main St., Oshkosh, WI 54901
Doors & Cash Bar @ 4:30 pm
Dinner Seating @ 6:30 pm
Awards Program to follow
Tickets just $50
Order online at:
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For more ticket information, contact Jen Kuhr
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Name:_____
Phone or Email:_____
# of tickets @ $50 ea.: _____
_____ My check (payable to Wisconsin Council of TU) is enclosed
_____ I am unable to attend but will support Wisconsin TU with this donation
Mail to: Jen Kuhr 6103 Queens Way Monona, WI 53716

# Council Youth Fishing Camp August 13-16

I would like to thank all the members and chapters that made the 2025 youth camp a huge success. For the first time in the history of the camp, we had enough adult mentors to cover each of our students. We even had a surplus of three mentors, which really came in handy during presentations. All of the youth reported having a great time, and everyone caught fish on Sunday, which was another first.

The 2026 camp August 13-16 at the Pine Lake Bible Camp between Wild Rose and Waupaca. The Council will open registration at our annual meeting in Oshkosh on February 7. Chapter cost for sponsoring a student remains at $250.

This is an early warning to get your campers lined up, as the camp seems to fill up by the first week of May. If you are planning on sending a youth, please let me know as soon as possible. And if you don't have one lined up right away but are planning on sending a camper please also let me know so I can hold a spot for you. I will hold these spots until June 1. All chapters will have one spot held for them until April 15. At that time, we will open it up for chapters to send additional students.

We are still looking for a few Youth Camp Committee members to help us improve the camp, and to help with activities at the camp. If you enjoy working with young people and have ideas on improving the camp, please contact me and join us.

We are also looking for additional adult mentors. If you are interested, contact me at chlbeck@att.net or 920-216-7408.

*—Linn Beck, WITU Youth Camp Director*

# Meeting will address public access concerns

One of the topics on the agenda of the Council's upcoming annual meeting involves the use of TU resources on habitat restoration projects that may not have public access.

Several members had expressed concerns about a project in the Driftless Area on private property where a public fishing easement had not yet been obtained. The last issue of *Wisconsin Trout* provided a detailed response to those concerns, with a promise to address any ongoing concerns at the upcoming meeting in Oshkosh on Feb. 7.

Council meetings are open to all TU members, so feel free to attend and share your thoughts, opinions and ideas on this or any other agenda topic.

# Letters

The Knowles-Nelson Stewardship fund was created in 1989 to fund land conservation in Wisconsin. The shutdown of this fund has put conservation projects across the state at risk. The majority of Wisconsin's legislators appear to be in favor of a continuation of the program. But there has been little progress made on advancing proposals by either political party in the legislature. The stewardship fund should not be partisan. We should expect a compromise from our legislature to continue this well respected program well into the future.

*—Dave Swanson, Platteville*

## TUDARE update

# NFHP celebrates 20 years

*The National Fish Habitat Partnership will celebrate the milestone with various events.*

**By Sara Strassman, Driftless Area Director**

The Driftless Area is both a Priority Water for Trout Unlimited and a national Fish Habitat Partnership, a designation that is governed by the National Fish Habitat Board and authorized through the America's Conservation Enhancement Reauthorization Act.

This year the partnerships, including DARE, will move their request-for-proposals process to September to help reduce the long lag time we've had for applicants.

Traditionally, applications were due in February and awarded in the early summer of the following year, a 14-16 month wait. The process is subject to federal budgeting and appropriation processes and those delays are out of our control, but this change will better position our calendar to fall closer to when those decisions are made. We hope this will reduce the waiting time for applicants.

This year also marks the 20th Anniversary of the National Fish Habitat Partnership. The National Fish Habitat Partnership began in 2006 with the National Fish Habitat Action Plan, which identified the problems with aquatic degradation and proposed a partnership that would bridge agency and partner lines to deliver conservation efficiently.

There will be a host of events around the country in 2026 to help celebrate the 20th anniversary. If your chapter is planning an event that you think might be a fun opportunity to also highlight 20 years of NFHP, please reach out with your ideas. We're hoping to raise the profile of the NFHP and DARE through sponsorship or dual-events.

### Driftless Symposium

Our main outreach event for our DARE Partnership is our annual Driftless Symposium. This year, the event is Feb. 25-26 at the Stoney Creek Lodge in Onalaska. As we finalize our agenda we plan to have two focal topical sessions on Feb. 25 to kick off the symposium. One will be on the topic of creating permit-ready restoration designs. The other will focus on current trout stocking and genetic activities and programs taking place in the various state natural resource departments in our region.

Our Fish Habitat Partnership provided funding to two projects that were completed in 2025. The contracting process for the grants awarded in 2026 is still underway due to delays in the federal process this year.

In addition to those FHP-funded projects, we led or partnered on about 15 other projects this year across Iowa, Minnesota and Wisconsin.

We are always happy to talk to landowners interested in habitat restoration, so reach out to myself or Paul Krahn with prospective project ideas. Thank you to those individuals and chapters who have shared such leads. When sharing project ideas, if you have already gathered feedback from your chapter, DNR or the landowner, please pass that along as well, since we start our project vetting process with research about the site, the watershed and the landowner.

Thank you for your continued support of the Driftless Area Restoration Effort. We look forward to seeing many of you in February at the Wisconsin Council's annual meeting and banquet and at our Driftless Symposium.

# Become a "Friend" this year

*Consider becoming a "Friend" of Wisconsin TU or a supporter of our Watershed Access Fund public access grant program.*

**By Kim McCarthy, Council Grant Program Coordinator**

As we begin 2026 the Friends of Wisconsin TU program is already working at full speed to help chapters with their habitat work during the upcoming work season. Chapters submitted their 2025 Year End Reports last November and all Wisconsin chapters have received applications for new 2026 grants. All chapter applications will be due by January 15, 2026. Applications received by that date will be considered by a committee consisting of the State Council Vice Chair and the State Council Regional Vice Chairs. Chapters approved to receive a Friends of Wisconsin TU grant will then be able to receive their 2026 grant from Council Treasurer Scott Wagner at the our annual meeting in February.

Chapters can apply for up to $2,500. The Friends of Wisconsin TU program is supported by contributions from our TU members and others, and 100 percent of those donations are distributed as grants to chapters. Over the years the program has developed a very loyal group of donors who recognize the value of habitat work on trout streams. The Council greatly appreciates those donors and guarantees them that their donations will only be used for habitat work.

*Donations to the Friends of Wisconsin TU grant program are tax deductible. The Wisconsin Council of Trout Unlimited is a 501(c)(3) organization, so donations to our Friends of Wisconsin TU and Watershed Access Fund grant programs are tax exempt.*

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Beginning in tax year 2026 a new tax law change will make it easier to donate cash to charitable organizations to receive a tax benefit. Donors making cash donations can deduct up to $2,000 annually directly from their taxable income. Important to note is that taxpayers do not have to itemize deductions to receive this benefit. You will need to save proof that the donations were made to charitable organizations, so be sure to save the "thank you" letters sent to you by organizations to which you've made donations. Hopefully this new tax code provision will lead to increased donations to our grant programs.

The number of chapters taking advantage of Friends of Wisconsin TU grants to help fund habitat work has grown greatly in the last few years, and 2026 should be no exception, as chapters utilize the grants to make trout fishing better in Wisconsin.

### Watershed Access Fund

The Watershed Access Fund supports publicly available trout fishing opportunities in Wisconsin. Like the Council's Friends of Wisconsin TU grant program, the Watershed Access Fund is supported completely by donations from members and friends. Thank you to our generous donors for making these public access acquisitions possible.

The Watershed Access Fund is always looking for new opportunities to add more public fishing. Use of the fund is quite flexible, and can be used to purchase property outright or for easements. The fund is typically used in partnership with other organizations, and we have built some great partnerships over the years. If you or your chapter become aware that a parcel with good fishing opportunities may become available, please get in touch with me or someone else at the Council.

## Show us your Wisconsin TU license plates!

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

# Mining update

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

Hello from the Northwoods.

I am looking at the Montreal River out my window, currently frozen over and covered in snow. This moment of reflection reminds me why I share this mining update, and why I feel lucky to have an opportunity to do so: It's all about the water.

According to the Wisconsin DNR, "Wisconsin has more than 12,600 rivers and streams in total that meander their way through 84,000 miles of varying terrain. Of that, there are nearly 2,700 trout streams in Wisconsin. Placed end to end, they would stretch more than 10,370 miles."

Even this broad and general description is impressive, and it proves a point: Wisconsin has natural resources that far out-value any potential short-term economic gains that may threaten our landscape, such as mining.

## GreenLight Metals (GLM)

In early December, GreenLight Metals (GLM), submitted a new exploration drilling permit application to Wisconsin DNR for exploration drilling on the Soo Line 40 parcel which is in the Chequamegon National Forest in Taylor County on the North Fork of the Yellow River.

The Bend Soo Line 2026 project proposes up to 20 drill holes on up to 15 drill sites for a total of up to 23,000 feet of borehole. As of late December, the Notice of Intent (NOI) was under Wisconsin DNR review.

We intend to assure that material submitted to both the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) for drilling in the same vicinity are also applied to this new DNR application.

## Mining news at the federal level

Congress is actively working on multiple laws that could greatly expand mining of critical minerals and loosen environmental/regulatory constraints, including here at home in Wisconsin. We are closely following two specific pieces of federal legislation: (1) Critical Mineral Dominance Act (H.R. 4090) which would codify recent executive-orders aimed at boosting domestic mining and hard-rock mineral production; as well as (2) Mining Regulatory Clarity Act of 2025 (H.R. 1366) which would weaken environmental protections related to mining.

Under pressure from the mining sector and President Trump copper has now been officially added to the U.S. Critical Minerals List despite its abundance and availability.

In November 2025, the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), under U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) management, released an updated "List of Critical Minerals," expanding the roster from 50 to 60 minerals with ten minerals added including boron, copper, lead, metallurgical coal, phosphate, potash, rhenium, silicon, silver and uranium. The addition of copper to the CML may make smaller copper deposits in our state and region more economically viable, so we will closely follow this development.

## Controversy continues near Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW)

As we went to press, and despite existing federal mining lease blocks and strong opposition from local environmental groups like Friends of the Boundary Waters, Twin Metals Minnesota (via Franconia Metals) had submitted an exploratory drilling application for state/private land near Birch Lake, which is adjacent to the BWCAW.

The Minnesota DNR had 20 days to respond to the filing, which would have expired in December, though we expect legal wrangling will keep this issue "live" all winter.

## Rights of nature and mining

An idea that has been gaining traction lately involves granting the natural world "Rights of Nature." Similar to the idea of granting corporations citizenship, the concept of "Rights of Nature" is to grant legal standing to things like Manoomin, or wild rice, or even specific bodies of water, as a potential new legal path to protection. Given more than 500 such resolutions have been passed worldwide, including some in Wisconsin, this is an issue worth learning about.

If you have any questions or comments, feel free to contact me about all things mining. You can also visit River Alliance of Wisconsin's Mining Page for online resources dedicated to mining education, and you can also sign up for our "Mining Updates" emails at https://wisconsinrivers.org/mining/

You can reach Johnson Bridgwater at jbridgwater@wisconsinrivers.org



# Watershed Access Fund: Obtaining public access

**The Watershed Access Fund has been used to secure numerous parcels that are now available for public fishing. We continue to look for more parcels to secure with this program and we ask members and chapters to stay alert for parcels becoming available and to let the Council know. Perhaps this grant program can help you secure public fishing access in your area.**

## Our Watershed Access Fund Contributors

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Jeffrey Bartynski Eau Claire, WI
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**TU CHAPTERS**
Antigo Chapter Antigo, WI
Kiap-TU-Wish Chap. Hudson,WI
Lakeshore Chapter Sheb. Falls
Marinette Chapter Marinette,WI
SE Wis. Chapter Milwaukee, WI

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

# Unique event features coldwater fish research

*Annual coldwater fish science meeting co-hosted by the Coulee Region Chapter and UW-LaCrosse features student research on a variety of coldwater fish and their habitats.*

**By Jason Freund**

The annual coldwater fish science meeting our chapter co-hosts on the UW-LaCrosse campus is maybe my favorite evening of the year and the marriage of the job that pays me and the one that does not - that of chapter president.

The evening is an opportunity for our students to showcase their efforts and share their research findings with a friendly audience. That audience is always bolstered by the power of extra credit. We turn out 50 or more students from Organismal Biology and Ecology courses that are there for extra points. But I get to read some of their write-ups and they really do enjoy the evenings and they get a chance to see what their fellow students are doing.

The crowd - always our largest of the year – ranges from 18 to 80 years old. For more than an hour, we learned about research that the students and Wisconsin DNR fisheries biologists have been conducting.

## DNR fisheries biologists

The evening started with a talk by DNR fisheries staff from the LaCrosse office. We have a great relationship with our two great local biologists. Senior Fisheries Biologist Kirk Olson and Fisheries Biologist Tommy Hill. They presented their summer work which was a bit about trend sites, or streams that are sampled each year, and their work in the Coon Creek watershed, which was the summer's targeted watershed.

Hill began with a discussion explaining DNR sampling, such as how trend sites are sampled each year. There are a at least three stream reaches, 35 times the mean stream width in length or at least 150 meters. These trend sites are used to assess changes to streams over time and to better understand year-to-year variability in trout populations across the region.

They use a rotational watershed approach, where they will sample every major watershed in their four-county area about every seven years. This allows a more in-depth analysis of conditions in each watershed and a chance to compare conditions at seven year intervals. Recent survey reports out of La Crosse are:

- West Fork Kickapoo
- Bear Creek (Upper Kickapoo River)
- Lower LaCrosse River and Halfway Creek
- Southern Crawford County
- 2025 Wadable Streams Trout Population Report for LaCrosse, Monroe, Crawford and Vernon Counties
- 2024 Wadable Streams Trout Population Report for LaCrosse, Monroe, Crawford and Vernon Counties
- 2021-2023 Wadable Streams Trout Population Report for LaCrosse, Monroe, Crawford and Vernon Counties

*For more than an hour, we learned about research that the students and Wisconsin DNR fisheries biologists have been doing.*

## Interesting history

Kirk went on to talk about the data and wove in some interesting pieces of history. Some of the first watershed-based work in the country occurred near Coon Valley in the Coon Creek watershed. I have written a number of posts about how Driftless Area trout streams are in much better condition than they had been historically (visit the linked posts at the bottom of this post for more). Today, the streams of the upper Coon Creek watershed are home to some of the highest trout densities in the state.

Of particularly interest was a look at trout populations and size structure over time. Wild, self-sustaining trout are more common than they were historically (1950 to maybe the early 1990's) but down a bit from historic highs in the late 1990s to early 2000's.


**FINISHING UP HIS MASTER'S DEGREE**
Evan Sirianni is finishing up his Master's degree at UW-LaCrosse and did a great job presenting his research findings.


**PRESENTING HIS RESEARCH PLANS FOR SPRING AND SUMMER**
First-year master's student Kyle Kamm presents his research plan for this spring and summer.

In most streams, these are stream-bred non-native brown trout that may have followed a population trajectory similar to many invasive species, where populations reach a maximum and then slowly level off to a more moderate density.

Look for more information about the Coon Creek Watershed study when it is published both here and on the Coulee Region Chapter's Facebook page.

## Water temperatures in the Coon Creek Watershed

Two undergraduate students, Audrey Sorensen and Emma Walkowiak, presented data from temperature loggers they placed in the Coon Creek watershed (with my help). These data will be an important part of the upcoming comprehensive watershed study. We cooperated with Kirk and Tommy, our local fisheries biologists, along with those in the WDNR Watershed program on the project. We placed about two dozen temperature loggers in the spring and retrieved (most of them) after the trout season had concluded.

*Wild, self-sustaining trout are more common than they were historically (1950 to maybe the early 1990's) but down a bit from historic highs in the late 1990s to early 2000's.*

Audrey (left) and Emma (right) presented data from temperature loggers that they placed in the watershed to support the WDNR comprehensive watershed for the Coon Creek Watershed.

Emma and Audrey presented last year as well - and about five or so other times, including at the Driftless Science Symposium. Last year, we placed temperature loggers across a larger geographic area; this year, they were concentrated in the Coon Creek Watershed. These loggers belonged to the Coulee Region Chapter, the DNR and our research lab.

One interesting finding was that all but a couple of streams reached their summer maximum temperature on June 22. Last year's data showed much more variation in when each stream's summer maximum temperatures occurred. Looking at air temperatures above, it is quite obvious that the overnight temperatures in the mid- to high-70's did not allow streams to cool off overnight as they typically do.

## Pammel Creek/ORA Trails Community Trail Farm brook trout populations

Our lab group has adopted Pammel Creek on the Outdoor Recreation Alliance (ORA) Trail Community Trail Farm property on the east side of LaCrosse. This 250-acre property will be transformed into a recreational and educational facility over the next number of years. Plans are to remove some of the sediment deposited along the stream banks and remove non-native riparian plants like buckthorn and honeysuckle. Being so close to the UW-LaCrosse campus, many classes, students and faculty have teamed up with ORA Trails to study this property and assist with its ecological restoration. Project Administrator Josh Hein has been a wonderful partner in our lab's efforts.

We have been out sampling brook trout redds (nests) the last two falls and we are starting to accumulate a dataset on the populations of brook trout and their lengths and weights. These data will serve as the "before" data to assess how restoration of the stream changes brook trout population parameters.

Sam Anderson, a sophomore at UW-L, and Madison Wall, a soon-to-be graduate of UW-L, presented the lab's data from Pammel Creek. About two dozen students - both undergraduate and graduate students - have been part of this research the last couple of years.

Brook trout populations are above Driftless Area median values - meaning they are more common in Pammel Creek than there are in your average Driftless Area stream. The average density has been

around 2,000 fish per mile. And redd surveys are ongoing with the peak number of redds occurring in mid- to late-November, which is later than many people think they can spawn.

One finding of particular interest is that brook trout were nearly an inch longer in the fall of this year than they were in the fall of 2024. Was it due to a mild winter, a summer more conducive to growth, the improvements to a machinery crossing or some other factors? We don't know, but we'll continue to study the stream and we even have plans to snorkel it this spring to look for brook trout emerging from those redds. These emergence dates and densities, along with data from four temperature loggers, should provide us with more information about this wild, self-sustaining brook trout population.

## Effects of geology on brook and brown trout production and biomass

The fourth talk of the evening was Kyle Kamm's presentation about research he will conduct this spring and summer. Kyle is a first-year master's student who is advised by myself and Dr. David Schumann. His research is a collaborative project with the DNR and Kirk Olson is a committee member. The research is an extension of research by graduate student Brandon Thill that started our journey looking at how geology affects water temperatures, habitat and trout population characteristics.

Kyle is in his first semester at UW-L and comes to us from UW-Stevens Point. In their first semester, master's students spend a lot of time reading, to get to know their subject, along with planning for their research. Kyle has come up with a plan for this summer and shared it at the event in his first graduate school presentation. He has a lot to make sense of, such as understanding geology and how it affects water temperatures, quantity and quality; fish sampling and how to estimate production and biomass, differences in the biology of brook trout and brown trout, and a number of other components to his research. Planning is paramount to a successful research project and Kyle is well on his way to a good and interesting project.

> *"We have been out sampling brook trout redds (nests) the last two falls and we are starting to accumulate a dataset on the populations of brook trout and their lengths and weights."*

Those who regularly read my blog may recognize the topic of P:B ratios. Kyle's research will be our lab's first application of P:B ratios. He has worked with Kirk Olson to select study sites based on combinations of geology and trout assemblage type. One of the difficult parts of the planning process is always around the question of what is feasible. Kyle has determined that he will sample three reaches in three different streams in each combination of geology and trout type.

## Distribution of mottled and slimy sculpin in the Kickapoo River watershed

Let's change the topic from trout to my favorite fish: Sculpin. Evan Sirianni was the last speaker of the evening. He comes to us from UW-River Falls and the DNR's Hayward office. He is a second year master's student at LaCrosse. His project had him collecting fish and habitat data from 60 streams in the Kickapoo River watershed. It was funded by a grant from TU DARE and the National Fish Habitat Partnership.

While Kyle is in the planning stages, Evan is working on wrapping up his research and is well into writing his thesis. Mottled and slimy sculpin are native to the Driftless Area. They are closely related and difficult to tell apart for the average lay person, but not for Evan. Like most non-game fishes, we know less about them than we would like, but grant funding to study non-game species is always more difficult to find.

Evan's objectives were to better understand sculpin distribution and relate their presence or absence on environmental variables. He found sculpin to be present in just under half of the sites he sampled. Mottled sculpin were in more streams, while slimy sculpin were uncommon and thus more difficult to determine the reasons for their presence or absence. A number of environmental variables such as dissolved oxygen, aquatic vegetation, current velocity and stream temperature affected their presence and absence.

One of the most challenging parts of Evan's research is that much of what we see today is likely an artifact of poor agricultural practices that occurred many decades ago. Sculpin are sensitive to sedimentation and our area has a history of sedimentation unlike almost anywhere in the world. I have to think that sculpin were once much more common and widely distributed in the Driftless Area. The DNR is reintroducing them to part of their range and Evan's work should help select sites where they are most likely to be successfully restored.

## The wrap-up

This is a great opportunity for students to share their research and for students to get to see what resource professionals from the DNR do as part of their jobs. I'm always happy for the number of people who come and listen. And we're all thankful for the Wisconsin DNR La Crosse fisheries crew for their support of these projects, especially Kirk's willingness to serve as a committee member for our graduate students.

For those of you in the Madison area, I look forward to presenting some version of this information as a guest speaker at the April 14 meeting of the Southern Wisconsin Chapter.


**DNR STAFF SHARE THEIR RESEARCH DATA**
Kirk Olson (left) and Tommy Hill present their summer sampling data.


**STUDENTS REPORT ON THEIR PAMMEL CREEK RESEARCH**
Sam Anderson (left) and Madison Wall presented the lab group's research on Pammel Creek, a small brook trout stream on the outskirts of La Crosse.

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***Spring Creek**, from page 1*

Techniques used for this project included channel shaping, tag alder suppression, tree plantings and the installation of complex wood and rock structure. In 2013, a similar project was completed on Spring Creek that resulted in greater numbers of large trout.

Channel shaping increased run and pool depth while stream width was narrowed. This was done by creating point bars and islands on inside bends and in wide shallow areas. Point bars and islands were constructed using spoils dug from the newly shaped channel.

The narrowed and deeper stream profile also help the stream scour down to desirable gravel and rubble substrates. Channel shaping also increases the thalweg velocity of the stream, helping maintain cold water temperatures and provide areas for silt and sediment to settle out in slower and shallower slack areas.

Along with the channel shaping, large wood and rock habitat were added to provide overhead cover for trout.

In total, three log sills, 80 whole trees and 80 rocks were added to the stream. Log sills are complex wood structures constructed from whole trees, large limbs and brush. They were placed on outside bends to provide complex overhead cover for trout.

The rock was used to help anchor large wood as well as aiding in collecting future recruiting wood to the river.

Tag alder brushing was conducted to suppress tag alder growth and encourage the recruitment of native trees.

While tag alder does provide overhead cover, it does not provide great bank stabilization. Tag alder within the project site was very dense causing bank instability, sedimentation, suppression of the recruitment of native tree species and limited fishing opportunity.

In May of 2025, trees were planted in the 2024 project section as part of a cooperative workday with Trout Unlimited. The planting consisted of 1,600 seedlings and 35 park stock trees. The tree planting will help suppress tag alder regrowth and recruit mature trees within the riparian corridor of Spring Creek.

In the future, this will provide shade and large wood habitat recruitment to the stream. Additional trees will be planted in the 2025 project section during the spring of 2026.

The overall goals of this project were to narrow and increase depth of the stream channel, increase the amount of complex wood and rock habitat in the stream and suppress tag alder growth while encouraging recruitment of mature timber into the riparian area.

This project increased the resting and foraging habitat and improved spawning sites for trout.

## Funded by the Inland Trout Stamp program

This project was completely funded through Inland Trout Stamp funds and donations from TU chapters in northeastern Wisconsin. Project costs for fiscal year 2025 were $16,459 and for fiscal year 2026 were $18,564. TU chapters donated $21,000 in both 2024 and 2025 to help fund the crew that completed this project, along with other trout projects in Lincoln and Langlade Counties.

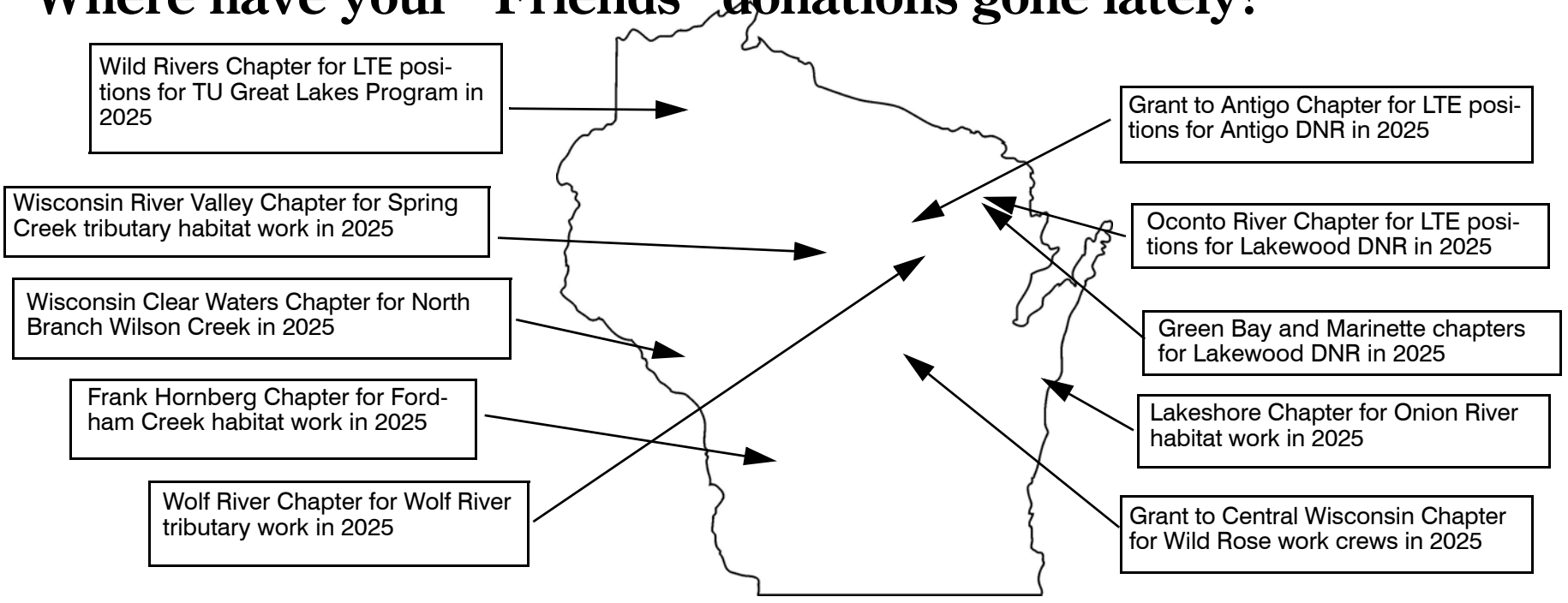
Future plans for Spring Creek include completing the remaining 1,200 feet of Spring Creek down to the Prairie River. We also plan to do some dredging of Spring Lake, a natural spring pond where native trout would benefit from the increased depth and living space that dredging would provide.

You can reach DNR Fisheries Biologist Taylor Curran at 608-509-5496 or taylor.curran@wisconsin.gov.

# Become a “Friend” and support habitat work

The 2026 Friends of Wisconsin TU grant season is under way. We’ll award grants in February. This program would not be possible without the generous donations from TU members and friends like you. Please consider becoming a “Friend” of Wisconsin Trout Unlimited by supporting habitat work on Wisconsin’s best trout streams.

## Where have your “Friends” donations gone lately?

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# Reading the water with AI:

*How artificial intelligence can change the way we evaluate the health of Wisconsin's trout streams, and how you can get involved.*

**By Stream Ecologist Mike Miller, Wisconsin DNR**

In 1972, the Federal Water Pollution Control Act Amendments, also known as "The Clean Water Act," established a framework for protecting water quality and regulating pollution discharges in the United States. The act led to extensive water-quality testing of lakes, streams and rivers and has been largely successful in assessing and improving the ecological health of the nation's waters.

With adequate control of point source pollution in the U.S., such as smokestacks and discharge pipes, today's main threats to streams come from more diffuse and variable sources of polluted runoff from farm fields and suburban and urban landscapes.

This "nonpoint-source" pollution is generally more difficult and costly to measure accurately using common water-quality testing methods.

Unfortunately, collecting enough water samples to accurately assess a pollution issue or the overall water quality of a stream is often prohibitively expensive.

Since the 1980s, there has been greater reliance on aquatic invertebrates, fish and more recently diatoms (single-celled algae with silica shells) as biological indicators of stream and river health. Because these plants and animals spend most or all of their lives in the water, they are continuously exposed to various environmental stressors, such as water pollutants, and integrate the effects of multiple stressors and changing pollutant concentrations over time.

Within each of these groups of organisms used in "biotic indexes," tolerances to natural conditions like water temperature, or various types and levels of environmental degradation often vary among species. Anglers see this firsthand when the fish species they encounter differ among stream reaches or streams of different quality, or when they notice differences in the types or numbers of larval or adult aquatic insects present. Understanding the "tolerance values" of different stream inhabitants, noting their presence or absence, determining the proportion of each in a sample, and sometimes measuring other assemblage attributes, provides essential data for biological assessments.

Aquatic macroinvertebrate indices are used by state and federal agencies, researchers and volunteer monitors to assess streams in Wisconsin. The DNR collects about 250 stream and river macroinvertebrate samples annually for laboratory analysis. Considering the state's 42,000 miles of flowing water, only a small portion of these waterways are evaluated each year using macroinvertebrate data. Data collected by citizen scientists and others can help address data gaps.

## Identification challenges

Over the years, having knelt streamside peering into sample trays with hundreds of students, field trip attendees, TU members and volunteer stream monitors, it's clear to me that accurately identifying aquatic invertebrates in the field is difficult. Many of the specimens collected are larval insects, which often look very different from their adult terrestrial forms. While most people can recognize an adult dragonfly and, of course, a mosquito, fewer can identify their immature aquatic stages. The wide variety of similar-looking aquatic insect species also means that distinguishing one from another often requires examining small body parts—such as the presence, location, or shape of gills—making accurate streamside identification very difficult without microscopes, proper lighting, detailed taxonomic keys, and extensive knowledge of invertebrate anatomy.

Additionally, the macroinvertebrate indexes used in the field by most volunteer monitors are, by necessity, taxonomically coarse. They are usually at the order level, such as distinguishing mayflies from caddisflies, even though it is well known that there is often significant variation in environmental tolerances among aquatic invertebrate families, genera or species within an order. These factors can lead to imprecise or inaccurate assessments of stream health.

## A proposal to TU members

I hope that Wisconsin TU members will consider expanding their network of volunteer stream monitors to support a collaborative computer vision project that transforms current citizen scientist monitoring data into a more effective automated tool for identifying aquatic invertebrates and assessing stream health.

Since volunteers across Wisconsin already collect and sort benthic macroinvertebrates to evaluate water quality, increasing the number of participants and adopting a standardized photography protocol would help create a comprehensive dataset of stream invertebrate images needed to train a computer vision model to identify future stream survey images and compute stream health scores. Uploading these images to a centralized data platform would effectively crowdsource the thousands of training images required for model development. This initiative will not only enhance the ecological knowledge of the individuals involved; it will also enable citizens to monitor Wisconsin's stream resources more accurately and potentially engage younger generations who are strongly connected to their personal electronic devices but have weaker ties to nature.

## Training Computer Vision Models

Training a computer to recognize images involves "showing" it thousands of labeled images so it can learn to identify patterns on its own. Instead of seeing a picture as a single object like a human does, the computer sees a large grid of numbers representing the color and brightness of each pixel in the image. During training, these numbers are fed into a complex mathematical model that passes the data through layers of number filters called "neural networks" that look for specific features, starting with simple edges or curves and then building up to complex shapes like legs or eyes.

At first, the computer simply guesses what the image is; if it guesses "cat" when the label says, "freshwater shrimp," the system calculates the error and adjusts its internal settings to correct the image identification model. By repeating this process millions of times with different aquatic invertebrate images, the computer develops an ability to distinguish between image features, eventually learning to accurately recognize objects in pictures it has never seen before.

## Storage and initial application of stream invertebrate images

iNaturalist is a popular citizen science platform and social network designed to connect people with nature while gathering valuable biodiversity data for scientific research. It was founded in 2008 by students at UC Berkeley and later developed through a collaboration between the California Academy of Sciences and the National Geographic Society.

It is a free app that allows users to upload photos or audio recordings of animals, plants or fungi collected in the field. The platform then uses computer vision technology to automatically suggest species identifications for the photographs submitted. A community of experts verifies the identities of images used to train the iNaturalist identification models.

Once an image submitted by iNaturalist user is validated, the collection information—including location coordinates if the submitter consents—becomes open-source and is shared with individuals and scientific organizations worldwide. This helps researchers track species distributions, monitor invasive species, and better understand the impacts of climate change and other ecosystem threats. iNaturalist currently has 1.3 million users, has recently surpassed 50 million images in its library, and aims to identify more than 400,000 different organisms.

Currently, iNaturalist's ability to identify stream invertebrates is relatively limited compared to its proficiency with trees and many other plants and animals. Capturing clear images of small, fast-moving creatures for computer training is challenging; also, many aquatic invertebrate species look very similar to each other, with distinguishing features that are small and often subtly different. Additionally, aquatic invertebrate species tend to be much more numerous than other plants or animals, both on the planet and on the website. Adding more aquatic invertebrate images to the iNaturalist library will help improve its identification abilities.

iNaturalist allows members to create individual projects, enabling collaborators to manage datasets most relevant to specific areas or projects. Consistently collecting aquatic invertebrate images—such as by using a white background from a plastic sorting or ice cube tray and photographing animals at similar magnifications and distances—will lead to the efficient development of an accurate identification model.

## Image capture for computer vision model training

The biggest challenge for this project will be gathering enough accurately labeled aquatic invertebrate images to train the computer vision model. The number of open-access aquatic invertebrate image libraries is growing and will be mined for this purpose. In addition, aquatic invertebrate taxonomists will be consulted to help determine which aquatic invertebrate Orders and Families can most likely be identified from field photographs of the specimens collected in Wisconsin. Presumably, most or all of the common stream invertebrates can be identified to the Order level (e.g., distinguishing a mayfly from a caddisfly) from clear photographs. Likely, more precise Family-level identifications can also be made for many, but not all, common aquatic insects and other stream invertebrates. For example, most caddisflies from Wisconsin can usually be identified to the Family level by their case construction or the absence of cases, but some mayfly families—where identification often involves examining gills or other small body structures—may not always be feasible from low magnification photographs.

Some of iNaturalist's vision models are freely accessible, and there could be advantages to creating a test version of an aquatic invertebrate identification model using an existing iNaturalist algorithm. In early December, UW-Madison announced the creation of the College of Computing and Artificial Intelligence, which is scheduled to open in 2026. In my discussions with UW computer scientists, they note that the main obstacle in developing a vision model is having enough labeled images for training. If we can develop this dataset, it's likely UW will support the project.

## Development of a Project Workgroup

If Wisconsin TU members decide to support this effort, many possess interests and skills that could help make this project successful. I will send out a general invitation in early 2026. The project will benefit from individuals with various interests and skill sets, including:

### Aquatic invertebrate taxonomy and ecology.

Knowledge of phone photography features, techniques, and accessories such as phone tripods and macro lens attachments.

Familiarity with iNaturalist and/or willingness to engage with others on iNaturalist or forums, especially with experience in insect or other small organism groups that face challenges similar to aquatic invertebrate identification.

Importantly, having enough "Observers" (iNaturalist's term for members who submit images to the website).

"Identifiers" are iNaturalist members who can identify the organisms in the submitted photos.

Presumably, image sensors and artificial intelligence technologies will continue to improve, enabling better use of these and other tools for assessing and managing aquatic resources through AI. This project aims to be a significant step toward improved evaluation and management of Wisconsin's stream resources.

You can reach Mike Miller at michaela.miller@wisconsin.gov

# Trout concerns and the beaver management plan update

**Matthew Mitro, Wisconsin DNR Office of Applied Science, Fisheries Research**

The Wisconsin DNR's 2015 beaver management plan laid out an approach and recommendations for managing diverse interests and concerns about beaver, to be carried out during the 2015-2025 period.

With a decade having past, the DNR formed an advisory committee this past autumn to review our progress in implementing the 2015 beaver management plan. The advisory committee is structured similarly to the beaver task force that worked on the 2015 management plan, with representation from the DNR, other government agencies, tribal members and stakeholders with interests in conservation, fishing, hunting and trapping.

The 2015 beaver management plan continued to recognize the long-held concern that the degradation of trout habitat by beaver is a threat to wild trout fisheries in Wisconsin streams. As such, the 2015 plan continued to allow for control of beaver and removal of beaver dams to manage trout fisheries in select coldwater streams where needed.

The Wisconsin DNR has contracted with Wildlife Services, a program in the U.S. Department of Agriculture, to control beaver on a subset of trout streams.

Wisconsin has about 38,000 perennial stream miles, of which about 13,000 stream miles are classified trout streams. Beaver control was used from 2020-2024 to maintain free-flowing streams for trout in which flow is not obstructed by beaver dams on about 1,500 stream miles (11.5 percent of classified trout stream miles or 3.9 percent of all stream miles).

During that five-year period, about 27 percent of beaver control in Wisconsin reported by stream or site has been supported by the DNR for trout management purposes. Most beaver control (73 percent) was for other purposes including to prevent flooding that may damage roads and other infrastructure and to protect other natural resources, like wild rice lakes, from changes in habitat that would be unsuitable for sustaining those valuable resources

The 2015 beaver management plan also recognized that more research was needed to better understand how beavers influence Midwestern streams.

The statewide research on trout-beaver interactions in coldwater streams that I have been working on came out of the research recommendations in the 2015 plan. Over the course of this study, I have shared observations and results in multiple public presentations and in articles in *Wisconsin Trout*.

The fieldwork component of the study has largely concluded in 2025, with limited monitoring to continue in a subset of study streams. A couple streams will follow the continued impact of beaver colonization and dam building, and beaver control will be resumed to monitor stream habitat and trout population recovery following the removal of beaver dams.

## Key observations

Here are some key observations from the trout-beaver study that I shared with the current beaver management plan advisory committee:

Beaver dams in streams can lead to more larger trout. Larger trout, for example, can be readily caught when beaver dams form deep pools in otherwise small streams in which larger trout are typically less common. However, as the dammed pools fill with silt, deep pool habitat is lost and numbers of large trout dwindle.

An interesting observation on brown trout in Elk Creek, in Richland and Vernon counties, was that a beaver dam built sometime after October was found by April to have led to the production of unusually fat trout that were observed gorging on cranefly larvae. The loosely packed material in newly created dams was found to be ideal habitat for cranefly larvae. Cranefly larvae were absent from older dams that were more heavily packed with fine sediments. Larger trout were absent near older dams as well.

Beavers appear abundant, particularly in Driftless Area streams. The main experimental approach used in the study was to remove beaver control from streams in which free-flowing conditions had long been maintained. Beavers usually showed up and built dams within the first or second year following the cessation of beaver control and ultimately did so in 18 of 23 study streams.

## Beaver dams can warm trout streams

Beaver dams can warm trout streams. The warming is often subtle and not detrimental to trout, particularly in streams with abundant springs. But in some cases, the warming can be catastrophic.

In Marinette County's Holmes Creek, a beaver dam in conjunction with a railroad berm created a nine-acre pool that changed the thermal class of the upper portion of the stream from cold to warm such that it no longer supported brook trout. Fortunately, coldwater springs cooled downstream portions of the stream where brook trout could still be found.

Beaver dams effected major changes in physical stream habitat including significant siltation of the stream bed. In northern streams, single beaver dams created pools measuring many acres in size. In Driftless Area streams, beaver dams generally created pools with smaller surface area, but dams were often numerous, creating long sequences of silted pools.

Beaver dams and concomitant changes in physical stream habitat resulted in an increase in the number of fish species tolerant of poor habitat conditions. A pristine trout stream may have only two fish species present: brook trout and mottled sculpin, both intolerant of degraded habitat. A good trout stream may have other fish species present, but they generally are uncommon or in low abundance.

When stream conditions deteriorate because of increased siltation or warming, fishes such as central mudminnow, creek chub, western blacknose dace, and white sucker, among many others, proliferate, and trout become less common. Over the course of the trout-beaver study, we have encountered 41 different non-trout fish species in streams with beaver dams, with as many as 16 non-trout fish species occurring in a single stream.

Beaver dams block the movement of trout under normal low flow conditions. We demonstrated this in two Driftless Area streams by PIT-tagging trout and using PIT tag detection antennas to track tagged trout attempting to move upstream past beaver dams. Trout passage by beaver dams was limited to brief times of high flow following significant rainfall, which temporarily topped dams or created side channels around dams.

Lower trout abundances in streams with many beaver dams are attributable to dams blocking trout movement and burying spawning gravels under silt. When sections of a stream are bounded upstream and downstream by beaver dams, recruitment of new trout becomes limited. Trout have difficulty moving into stream sections bounded by beaver dams. And spawning areas are lost between dams as the streambed is buried in silt.

Trophy-sized brown trout 18 to 22 inches or greater in length are largely absent from Driftless Area streams bounded by beaver dams. We routinely caught at least one or two trout of that length annually in over a decade of electrofishing surveys in Elk Creek prior to the proliferation of beaver dams in that stream.

As multiple beaver dams were built and persisted over time, we stopped seeing any trout over 16 inches except downstream of the furthest downstream dam. Large trout are likely moving extensively in connected stream systems like Elk Creek and the Kickapoo River, with trout growing larger in bigger downstream waters and moving into smaller upstream waters for cooler stream temperatures during summer and to spawn during autumn.

## Balancing act

Beavers play an important ecological role in Wisconsin. They provide benefits to the ecology of some species and landscapes and costs to others. The beaver management plan is an attempt to balance the many competing perspectives of anglers, hunters, trappers, conservationists, landowners, and the public in general.

After the beaver management plan advisory committee has made its recommendations, the public will have the opportunity to provide comment on the beaver management plan by participating in in-person or online public meetings and providing comments to the DNR. Keep an eye on the DNR website in 2026 for how you can participate and provide your input.

# What will your legacy be?

The Wisconsin Council now has a permanent endowment fund called The Wisconsin 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.

More information on all of these options is available by contacting Marta Weldon, Director of Philanthropy at the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin at (608) 409-3112, or at Marta.Weldon@WisConservation.org.

# The Wisconsin Women's Fly Fishing Clinics, where fish rise, and so do women

Each June, tucked into the rolling, crinkle-cut hills of the Driftless Area, something slightly magical—and occasionally hilarious—happens. Dozens of women gather with rods, nerves, snacks and the determination of someone who has decided they're ready to learn new skills, make new friends, and build their confidence. We're talking about the Wisconsin Women's Fly Fishing Clinics (WWFFC), offered through TU's Southern Wisconsin Chapter, with support from many other Midwest chapters. When and how did it all begin?

## Origins: black coffee, big ideas and four brave teachers

In 2007, Tina Murray turned to Laura MacFarland over what must have been very strong coffee and asked, "Want to help me start a women's fly-fishing clinic?"

Laura replied, "Great idea. I'm in."

And with that, the spark was lit.

The early goals were simple and ambitious all at once: Affordable clinics, onsite teaching and learning, high-quality instruction and a conservation focus.

It took three years to gather four fly-fishing women who were brave enough to teach it. In 2010, the clinics launched with 18 participants and four fearless instructors: Tina Murray, Laura MacFarland, Nikki Seger and Donna Smith.

They hoped for interest. They got a stampede. Clinics filled instantly. Waiting lists grew. The demand for a clinic like this became instantly obvious.

## What happens at a clinic?

Participants arrive at the beginner's clinic on Friday and leave Sunday looking slightly sunburned, a little exhausted, deeply proud and frequently calculating how to rearrange their lives to fish more.

Topics covered include knot tying, casting, insect identification, reading water and how to manage a fly line without accidentally knitting a sweater.

An annual highlight at the clinics is the program put on by DNR Stream Ecologist Mike Miller. Since 2010 Saturdays include Mike's legendary entomology and fish-shocking ride of educational joy. It's part science, part comedy, part "Oh wow, bugs have amazing life cycles."

Tina estimates she walked 500 miles during that first beginner's session, darting between participants like a caffeinated border collie. Although she was excited about the clinic's initial success, and the participants' enthusiasm, she also felt overwhelmed and realized the unmet potential yet sheer level of details to make the clinics happen. She went looking for the "best of the best of the Midwest." Geri Meyer, Marlene Huston, Janet Viet, Pam Van Erem, Nancy Barrons and a few others came on board.

## Growing pains and growing leaders

Women kept coming. They loved the clinics, the camaraderie, the safe space to learn and, for some, the radical experience of not being judged for not knowing something.

Tears at the end of the weekend became common. Not sad tears—more like "I haven't felt this supported in decades, and I'm not ready for this to end" tears. The instructors realized they had created a life-changing experience for women.

By 2013, instructor-to-participant ratios had improved from the original 1:5 to 1:3. The ultimate goal was to provide one-on-one instruction, at least when out on the water, but there just weren't enough women fly fishers to meet demand. So, the team came to a bold conclusion: If we can't find more women instructors, we'll create them.

## The River Buddy revolution

Launched in 2014, the River Buddy Program trains women to mentor newer anglers and encourages them to take risks, spiral them up towards teaching by starting where they know and building from there. The program builds their confidence by showing them that they know more than the people they will be teaching. Women who had doubted themselves for years suddenly saw that they could be leaders. All they needed was the right kind of support, the resources, low-pressure practice and a community cheering them on.

This program became the backbone of future leadership development and proved that confidence and competence grow best together.

*By 2024, new leaders ran the clinics with the founding members proudly watching from the background like sentimental parents at a school play.*

## "We Want an Intermediate Class!" (…Sort Of)

By 2013, graduates started asking, "What's next?"

Clinic leaders, already stretched thinner than 6X tippet, weren't sure. But they listened.

They met all winter and built a three-day intermediate clinic focused on actual fishing time where women could ask their questions as they were trying to do it. And then…almost no one signed up. Our fly didn't have a hook, but we were unsure why. Tina called the women who'd requested it and heard the same answer repeatedly: "I don't think I'm good enough for an intermediate class." Ah yes, the classic combination of self-doubt and underestimation.

They changed the name to: Women's On the Water Skills Clinic – Intermediate, or Wowsc-i for short.

It filled instantly and a waiting list quickly grew.

## Wowsc-i: Where the water does the teaching

With help from Sue Fey, Henry Nehls-Lowe, Dave Fowler, Tom Thrall, the SWTU board and a small army of SWTU volunteers, Wowsc-i eventually became a one-on-one, on-the-water learning extravaganza. Mentors were recruited from any chapter interested in participating and many good mentors stepped forward. Women fish with three different mentors, gaining new perspectives, techniques and experience.

WWFFC also created workshops teaching Wowsc-i participants how to ask for help, how to communicate what they want to learn, and how to not feel bad about repeating the same question. Mentors were patient, positive and delightful.

The clinics have been so successful that in 2015 TU National sent a contingent to study how WWFFC produced such consistently high-quality outcomes. Today, chapters far and wide support and help in multiple ways, including mentoring at the June clinics.

## Sustainability: Passing the torch without dropping it

By 2018, the original leadership team realized the clinics were too big and too important to rest on the shoulders of only a few. If any one of them "fell into a creek and never came out," it could jeopardize the entire program.

In 2019 we invited leaders, mentors and River Buddies to take another step up the ladder of leadership by trying on teaching roles. Many courageously stepped up with enthusiasm. Teaching, they learned, was more than having technical skills; it was also about delivery, patience and understanding how people learn best.

Then COVID hit. No clinics in 2020. In 2021 beginner clinics couldn't run safely indoors, but Wowsc-i could function since most of the teaching was outdoors. The unexpected pause allowed for a major leadership development push—2.5 days of intensive instructor training, skill-sharing, and team building. Fourteen amazing women stepped up and participated in skill workshops and learned teaching strategies. Then they practiced in small groups, teaching to one another.

By 2024, new leaders ran the clinics with the founding members proudly watching from the background like sentimental parents at a school play. We couldn't be prouder of these women's extraordinary efforts, dedication of time and energy and seamless transition of duties to lead these clinics.

## A new era of leadership

WWFFC has grown from four instructors in 2010 to nearly 20 women who help regularly with 18 women who now take on leadership roles. Women come from all corners of the U.S. to be involved.

These women didn't just step up for the June clinics—they blossomed. They became TU officers, event organizers, committee leaders and catalysts for change in their home TU chapters.

We would like to give a shout out to leaders Jane Lehman DePrey, Amy Koltz, Lisa Wilson, Lisa Gilmore, LuAnn Greiner, Leslie Linserr, Hillary Penella, Susan Jester, Celia Groff, Hannah Matousek, Sarah Gottfredsen, Jane McMahon, Sheila McGuirk, Shelby Vikkers, Nome Buckman and Erica Hickey.

Our senior "Elders" are Donna Smith, Nikki Seger, Pam Van Erem, and myself, Tina Murray.

We want to thank past River Buddies who helped us along: Jody Millar, Kate Lodge, Willa Campbell, Melis Arik, Colleen Kinsey, Judy Rowe, Dani Long, Robin Miller, Amy Klusmeier, Lisa Powell and many more.

We welcome our new up-and-coming River Buddies Katie Halmo, Jenny Klepper, Christine Kirkhoffer, Heather Wisner, Court Gnash, Jayden Hranicka and Liz Laing.

And of course, we remember with love those we've lost: Janet Viet, Carol McMurphy and Sue Fey. They helped shape the soul of the clinics.

## We welcome your support

There are countless ways to support the effort of these clinics. If

**CLINICS HAVE CREATED A GROWING COMMUNITY**

The Wisconsin Women's Fly Fishing Clinics aren't simply classes. They are a community. They are confidence builders. They create a place where women rediscover themselves, or discover parts they didn't know existed. Laughter is common, encouragement is constant and the fish are occasionally cooperative.


you tie flies, we are always looking for donated flies. Not only do we supply the beginning clinic participants with a stocked fly box, but we provide some for those mentors, guides and instructors who may not yet tie their own.

Consider becoming an on-the-water mentor. We're always looking for volunteers who are willing to take participants out for three sessions across two days. For more information contact Lisa Wilson lawfinnee@gmail.com.

To keep the clinics affordable to all, we offer six scholarships annually. Consider donating to our scholarship program by sending your contributions to SWTU, P.O. Box 45555, Madison, WI 53744-5555. Be sure to put WWFFC in the "Memo" space on your check.

We're always looking for raffle items such as new or gently used gear, packs, fly boxes, tools, rods, reels, women's or men's fishing clothing, lanyards, fly-tying materials (organized), novelty items and other treasures.

### Regional contacts:

- Green Bay Area: Pam Van Erem pam.vanerem@gmail.com
- Madison area: Tina Murray swtu.women.diversity@gmail.com
- Milwaukee area: Amy Koltz akoltz@hotmail.com
- Viroqua area: Donna Smith dsmithflygirl@gmail.com

### Final cast

The Wisconsin Women's Fly Fishing Clinics aren't simply classes. They are a community. They are confidence builders. They create a place where women rediscover themselves, or discover parts they didn't know existed. Laughter is common, encouragement is constant and the fish are occasionally cooperative.

Every June, in valleys of the Driftless Area, women rise. And sometimes…the trout do, too.

# Wisconsin Women Fly Fishing Clinics building future leaders

*Council's free Women's Intro to Fly Fishing Clinic Saturday, Feb. 7 during annual meeting.*

The Wisconsin Women Fly Fishing Clinics (WWFFC) have developed a distinctive training and teaching model designed to cultivate leadership, expand opportunities for women and create a pathway for learning and stepping forward as a TU leader. This model emphasizes starting where each participant feels most comfortable and steadily growing through guided practice in new skill areas. Once women feel competent and confident in those areas, they are encouraged to stretch further by practicing teaching in their less familiar zones—with the support of other women leaders.

### A partnership in leadership development

The Wisconsin Council of TU, along with several TU chapters, provides meaningful opportunities to develop and elevate women leaders. Few investments offer a greater return than the WWFFC presence at these events. One notable example is the State Council's free Intro to Fly Fishing Clinic, held each February for approximately 20 women. This event serves as a dynamic training ground, allowing women to grow simultaneously as learners, instructors and leaders.

### An intentional team structure

It is both a clinic and a parallel training session for women volunteers to begin leadership training. They learn how to present information, demonstrate tasks required to run a supportive clinic, receive and give support to other women leaders and more. Through this approach, newcomers begin their teaching progression with guidance and real-time practice accelerating their ability to step forward as a leader.


### Two clinics, one purpose

In effect, two clinics occur simultaneously, including a teaching clinic where a new leader courageously steps forward and practices teaching, with support from WWFFC leaders and team members. It is also a leadership-development clinic, where up-and-coming instructors are shown small sections of clinic topics they are encouraged to practice teaching to the Intro group, again with plenty of support and encouragement. Both groups work toward building confidence and competence.

This dual-clinic system is a strategic investment by the Wisconsin Council of TU to grow new leaders across all facets of TU's mission, to elevate the teaching capacity of individuals, to expand the community of women confident in fly fishing and conservation stewardship and to increase participation of women in their TU chapter and councils.

# Linn Beck selected as a TU Trustee

*He will receive the Council's highest award at this year's banquet.*

Linn Beck's passion for trout fishing began on the Tomorrow River, where caught his first trout on opening day at the age of 15. That first trout certainly hooked Linn for a lifetime.

As with most of us, our late teens and 20s are a traverse of highs and lows, compounded with moves, job changes and romance. Trout Unlimited membership came to Linn "on and off" through the 1980s and then again in 1996. By 1999, he went all in, signing up as a life member.

"I was always active monetarily from the get-go," Linn recalls. "I donated to TU National's Embrace-A-Stream grant program every year, attended chapter banquets and supported local donation requests."

As his work life became a little more settled, Linn had some time to become more involved with his Central Wisconsin Chapter. He served in successive roles as water quality monitoring coordinator, workday coordinator and chapter president. By 2012 Wisconsin Council Chair Henry Koltz tapped Linn as his successor. Linn served two exemplary terms as council chair, followed with two terms as the Wisconsin Council's National Leadership Council (NLC) Representative.

Most volunteers would be happy to rest on a bed of laurels the size Linn has produced, however Linn is not yet ready for rest. In 2025 Linn applied for an opening on the TU National Board of Trustees. From a field of more than 30 applicants, Linn was selected by a unanimous vote of the National Leadership Council to be a grassroots trustee.

Clearly leadership roles are a natural fit for Linn, but his talent doesn't stop with leadership. "In 2013 Bob Haase and I hatched the idea of forming a youth camp," Linn reflects. "We put together a curriculum, age limits, location and began seeking volunteers."

The chapters were very supportive, and began sponsoring youth from their areas. Members from various chapters stepped up to serve as instructors, mentors, committee members and much much more.

Fast forward 12 years and we can proudly say that we've introduced fishing to more than 200 boys and girls as a result of Linn and Bob's grand idea, and their tireless efforts since that early beginning. How's that for leadership?

For Linn's devotion to youth education, he was honored with the 2022 Conservation Award for Youth Education at the TU National meeting in Portland, Maine. At the state level Linn has received the Youth Education Service Award and the Gold Trout Award.

At the Wisconsin Council Awards Banquet Feb. 7, Linn will be recognized for all of his efforts described above and his recent ascent to the TU Board of Trustees. He will receives the Council's Resource Award of Merit. Only the most luminous dignitaries have received this award. Lets put our hands together for Linn, he's done so much for each of us.

Unfortunately, at the time of our banquet, Linn's newest and most significant Trout Unlimited role requires him to be in attendance at his first meeting of the TU Trustees in Washington, D.C.

So, for the first time in years, if not decades, Linn Beck will be physically absent from our banquet, but we all know he'll be there in spirit, and the banquet hall will be abuzz with talk about Linn.

Fret not, however, as the Council is planning a reception just for Linn, somewhere in the Oshkosh area in the not-too-distant future. Stay tuned to *Wisconsin Trout*, the Council's Facebook Page and website, and keep an eye on your email inbox for more details on this event. We're looking forward to celebrating Linn's accomplishments and passion for TU.

*—Past Chair Scott Allen*

**LINN BECK'S SERVICE TO TU SEEMS TO HAVE NO BOUNDS**
At their national meeting in Maine in 2022, TU National awarded Linn Beck their Conservation Award for Youth Education. He's also received numerous awards from his Central Wisconsin Chapter and the Wisconsin Council over the years.

*Book Reviews with Duke Welter*

# The pheasant tail nymph takes center stage

## Book features pheasant tail flies in all styles—nymphs, beadheads, jigheads, soft hackles, flymphs, emergers and more.

One of the best flies a trout angler can use, the pheasant tail nymph, or "PT" for short, deserves to be revisited and appreciated by each generation of fly anglers. This book, written by three well-known anglers and conservationists, is a lovely retelling of the fly's tying and use, augmented by good stories and recipes for using this ubiquitous feather to tie varied styles.

Across the country, you can find pheasants along roadways, bopped by cars and trucks, so there's a ready supply even if you don't hunt them. If you do, or know someone who does, you may well have a supply in your storage bins. Among the panoply of road killed critters, pheasant and squirrel are probably the most frequently found that fit well into fly patterns. My own freezer has a section of shelf filled with opaque plastic bags harboring such critters, de-bugging in borax and awaiting use at the tying vise. My wife has learned to avoid that section, needless to say.

### Highly regarded authors

So, having a new book to examine this respected fly is a worthy effort, and these authors know it well.

Mathews founded Blue Ribbon Fly Shop in West Yellowstone decades ago, has written several books about the Yellowstone area's fishing and flies, and gets to test his theories on the Madison River outside his door.

Chouinard is the founder of Patagonia, Inc., and fly-fishes the world.

Mazzo, from Milan, Italy, has fished widely and instructed fly anglers at all levels.

The book is beautifully photographed both with fishing scenery and detailed tying photos. But with a nod to today's complementary publishing, each segment has a QR code to a video illustrating the story or fly being demonstrated. Nice touch, and it should appeal to different kinds of learners.

### All fly styles are featured

What's truly novel about the book is how it . It also features helpful instructions for how to fish them. The authors also update the centuries-old concept with modern hooks and materials, such as the Zelon that Mathews swears by for shucks on his caddis and mayfly emergers.

Now, these authors clearly favor using the two main center feathers of the male ring-necked pheasant, and they like the natural colors. There are other, broader worlds for tyers to consider, and you should. These feathers lend themselves to dying, and experimenting with tail feathers dyed black, blue, olive, burgundy or black can give you a broader palette, especially for flies you'll be using in shallow stream water. As the water gets deeper, colors become less distinguishable to the fish.

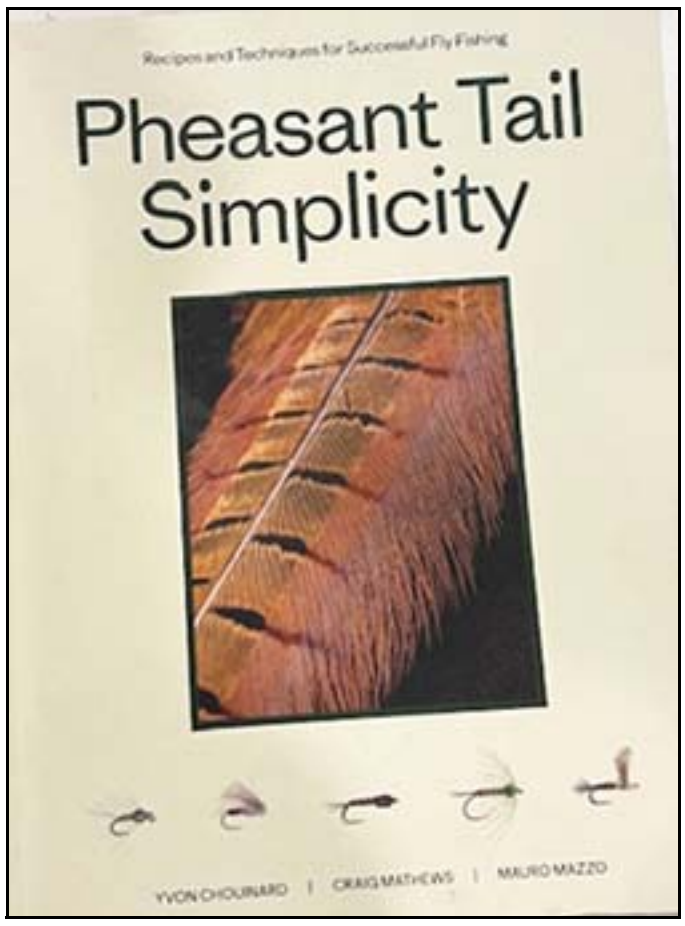
### Nearly every feather's usable

Most every feather on a pheasant, hen or cock, can be put into good flies. If you want to learn more about that, Google "Jack Gartside Tying with Pheasant Feathers," which details using practically every feather on a pheasant for some effective fly or another. His Sparrow and Gartside Hopper are classics, developed by a guy who tied flies for food and gas during many summers camping in Yellowstone National Park.

Similarly, the book doesn't get into the history of the PT nymph. Generally, credit goes to Frank Sawyer, an English gamekeeper who in 1958 authored "Nymphs and the Trout" with the simple PT pattern he's developed. He offered others which are also simple ties and nearly as effective.

It's accurate to say the pheasant tail nymph and its variations are among the easiest to tie and most effective of subsurface flies for trout, whether fished as nymphs or wet flies. This book will help you tie pretty much every fly you need in the genre, and will entertain you as you go. That's not a bad combination.

*Pheasant Tail Simplicity: Recipes and Techniques for Successful Fly Fishing, Yvon Chouinard, Craig Mathews, Maro Mazzo; Patagonia Works, Ventura, California, 2025, 167 pages, $25.*



# Trout fishing for the health of it

**Words and photo by Phil Porter**

The other day I was catching up with an old friend when the conversation turned to hobbies and what keeps us occupied. When he asked what I do to stay healthy, I responded that I fish a lot, which led to a pause on the other end of the line, as he is not a fisherman. He followed with a quizzical inquiry: "Is there much exercise in fishing?" I said "actually, there is."

When I asked him how he keeps health, I learned that he follows a routine common to many people these days: Drive to a gym several times per week, alternating between cardio days and weight lifting.

A few days later I was fishing with a friend who is in his mid-70s. Unprompted, he offered insight about how fishing has kept him young and helped him lose weight and regain flexibility, particularly since he has developed the habit of getting in the water rather than fishing from the banks. At that point we got into an in-depth discussion of the exercise involved in fishing. I had never really considered trout fishing from an exercise/health perspective, but the two conversations in rapid succession got me thinking about whether I was deluding myself or actually had a solid argument. I put on my medical cap and started sifting through articles I have read recently as well as concepts that I learned remotely.

In my early days of trout fishing I used an app called "Map my walk," which relies on GPS data from your phone to determine how far you have traveled by foot. It was not unusual for me to log as much as 8-10 miles of walking on a well-paced half day of fishing.

Add in the fact that you are walking half the time against current in water that is anywhere from calf to waist deep, and I'd say you have some decent resistance training, which is good for building strength and endurance. In fact, for health and longevity, daily body resistance training is often considered one of the most important factors, as it is critical for heart, bone and metabolic health.

You may have heard of the recent "weighted vest" craze, which involves donning a training vest while walking. This is a type of resistance training. I would say a fishing vest loaded with flies, tippet, floatant and other sundries would qualify as a training vest. When I'm heading back downstream, usually having overstayed my time at the creek, I typically pick up the pace, which gets my heart beating faster and gets me into the cardio zone of exercise. Consider also that the water in which we wade in these parts of the country is typically 45-65°F, which adds in a component of thermogenesis, a fancy word for burning calories to keep warm, adding additional strain to the cardiovascular system, in a good way. Crawling in and out of the creek and over logs and rocks amounts to stretching exercises, increasing flexibility and balance. None of us wants to fall and get water into our waders. When my wife suggested years ago that I should start doing yoga, my response was, "I already do. It's called creek fishing."

Trout fishing is completely in sync with many of the current theories for the optimal way to exercise, especially for older people. To stay healthy as we age, experts recommend a combination of aerobic, whole-body (especially core) muscle-strengthening and balance exercises. The low-impact, slow, repetitive movements required for fishing check many of these boxes. Consider the surge in popularity of tai chi, which combines these types of movements with mindfulness, another buzz word that I hear a lot in health literature these days. Reading the water, strategizing how to move through the creek without spooking the fish, and planning your next cast certainly incorporates components of mindfulness and being "present," free of other distractions.

There are other health-related advantages offered by fishing which are currently in vogue and supported by medical studies. Regular exposure to nature has myriad benefits, including lowering blood pressure, levels of stress hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline, and inflammation. The National Institute of Health website quotes a 2021 review of existing experimental studies which revealed positive associations between exposure to nature and improved cognitive function, brain activity, immune function (increasing natural killer cells, which tackle viruses), blood pressure, mental health (reduced stress and anxiety, increased general sense of well-being), cardiovascular health and sleep.

You may be familiar with "forest bathing," in which one thoughtfully immerses oneself in nature, engaging all of the senses and paying attention to minute details. This can be done, for example, by slowly walking barefoot through the woods. Do any of these general concepts sound familiar? I would argue that there is something very special about being in the water, feeling the tug of current against you and being in tune with a rising fish, hatching aquatic insects or migratory birds passing overhead.

Lastly, most of us acknowledge that one of the best things about trout fishing is that it inevitably takes us to beautiful outdoor places. Time alone doing an unstructured activity in a pristine environment with clear air and water carries many innate benefits. The fact that you are thinking and problem-solving in a novel and ever-changing environment fits the criteria for many mental exercises aimed at dementia prevention and slowing cognitive decline.

One of the wonderful additional aspects of fishing is that, especially when adjusted for changing capabilities as we age, it is a life-long sport with low injury potential. The exact benefit we reap from fishing likely changes over time for each of us. For example, a younger person raising children and working an active job 50 hours a week may not need the physical component but may gain the most from stress relief, while an older retired individual may see the maximal exercise and cognitive dividends.

So the next time someone asks what you do for your health, please remember that you can emphatically say "I trout fish!" in response. It may not be the reason we do it, but it certainly is a welcome fringe benefit.

**TALK ABOUT ANYTIME FITNESS. HERE'S THE BEST TYPE OF GYM THERE IS.**

# Trout Unlimited applauds introduction of federal legislation to streamline floodplain restoration

*Current rules designed for regulating development, not restoration, have unintentionally discouraged beneficial ecological work.*

**By Jamie Vaughan, Great Lakes Engagement Manager**

Federal lawmakers, including Representatives Bryan Steil (WI-01), Troy Downing (MT-02), Janelle Bynum (OR-02), and Marie Gluesenkamp Perez (WA-03) have introduced the bipartisan Floodplain Enhancement and Recovery Act to reduce regulatory barriers that slow or prevent ecosystem restoration in Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)-mapped floodplains. The House bill mirrors legislation already introduced in the Senate (S.1564).

The legislation aims to streamline approvals for low-risk floodplain restoration projects by reducing costly permitting fees, shortening review timelines, and allowing certified engineers to verify that projects will not harm infrastructure. Current FEMA rules—especially the No-Rise Rule—were designed for regulating development, not restoration, and have unintentionally discouraged beneficial ecological work.

Trout Unlimited and other environmental organizations across the country, including the Wisconsin Wetlands Association, American Rivers and the National Association of Conservation Districts, strongly support the bill, emphasizing that reconnecting rivers with their natural floodplains reduces flood risks, improves water quality, enhances wildlife habitat and lowers long-term community costs. Wisconsin, with approximately 84,000 miles of rivers and many degraded or disconnected floodplains, stands to gain environmental and public-safety benefits from these reforms.

> *"Bureaucratic red tape should not stall common sense conservation projects."*
>
> *Rep. Bryan Steil*

Lawmakers describe the bill as a common-sense reform that removes unnecessary red tape and empowers local communities to advance conservation projects. Both the House and Senate versions are awaiting committee hearings.

"Bureaucratic red tape should not stall common sense conservation projects," said Steil. "The Floodplain Enhancement and Recovery Act eases administrative burdens and empowers Wisconsin communities to make our waterways healthier, strengthen our resilience to floods, and enhance ecosystems across the nation. I'm proud to help lead the effort to ensure Wisconsin's conservation projects are completed on time, strengthening our environment and reducing flood risks in our community."

Trout Unlimited staff in Wisconsin from the DARE and Great Lakes programs, along with counterparts nationwide, have worked collaboratively to support these legislative updates, which will help streamline critical restoration efforts. Trout Unlimited is grateful to the members of Congress who are championing this legislation and urge their colleagues to support and pass the Floodplain Enhancement and Recovery Act.

Scott Allen, TU

**ELVOY CREEK FLOODPLAINS**
Floodplains play a critical – if often underappreciated – role in maintaining stream and watershed health.

# High levels of PFAS found in eaglet blood

By Gillian Pomplun

Wisconsin DNR Wildlife Biologist Dan Goltz, based out of the Viroqua office, gave a presentation recently entitled "Bald Eagle Status and Monitoring in Wisconsin."

"Eagles have a wide geographical presence, both in Wisconsin and throughout the U.S., wherever there's good habitat," Goltz explained. "We know that their reproduction is sensitive to contaminants, and they live and forage in aquatic habitats, where different types of pollution is often concentrated, and so they've been proven useful as an indicator species of ecosystem health."

Goltz said the DNR's survey started in 1973, when eagle populations were in collapse from use of the pesticide DDT, and also encompassed the impacts of PCBs present in the Fox River Valley, Green Bay and Lake Michigan from dumping by paper mills. However, since the survey restarted in 2022 after a four-year pause, the focus has shifted to emerging contaminants like PFAS.

"The group of chemicals known as PFAS is contributing a huge load to eagles in the middle stretches of the Wisconsin River and the Lower Wisconsin River, as well as other parts of the state," Goltz explained. "Part of the reason for these really high levels of PFAS in particular in the middle and lower Wisconsin River isn't necessarily associated with one point source, like a factory along the river, but rather just that the Wisconsin River drains such a big watershed, that these chemicals are just ending up there."

He said that while eagle reproduction rebounded after use of DDT was banned, and the impacts of PCBs declined after the Fox River was dredged, "emerging contaminants, especially per- and polyfluorinated compounds, are increasing, and we need to figure out more specifically how those are impacting eagles and other wildlife species."

## It takes a team

Goltz said he has now joined in the work with UW-Madison Sea Grant researchers Gavin Dehnert and Emily Cornelius Ruhs. Dehnert is an emerging contaminants scientist/bander, and Cornelius Ruhs is an ecoimmunologist. The two are project co-leads for Sea Grant's Great Lakes Eagle Health Project, working under project lead DNR Fish & Wildlife Toxicologist Sean Strom.

Their multidisciplinary project team consists of federal, state and academic researchers and technicians from their many project sponsors, including Wisconsin Sea Grant (part of the UW-Madison Aquatic Sciences Center), Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC), the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and the Field Museum of Natural History (FMNH).

The project has tracked reproduction success and contaminant levels in eagles across Wisconsin since 1990, with an emphasis on eagles nesting along the Great Lakes shorelines. The team is studying how contamination influences eagle health, which can also tell us how pollution impacts ecosystems and people.

The two main goals of this study are to assess the concentration and source of PFAS contamination in the dietary niche of bald eagles at known PFAS-contaminated sites; and to compare the physiological and immunological health of eagles in Wisconsin across a contamination gradient.

"In 2023, we sampled nests along Lake Superior and the Apostle Islands, and in 2024 we were back at Lake Michigan, Lake Superior and the Apostle Islands. This past summer, we did the Wisconsin River again," Goltz said. "Next summer, we're going to do the Mississippi River, and then the St. Croix and so on."

Goltz said that PFOS are really high in the middle and lower Wisconsin River. This can have a negative impact on endocrines, and that can impact eagles' thyroid function, decrease reproductive and hatching success, and affect nesting behavior.

"In summary, PFAS were detected in every bald eagle population that we sampled. Most of the populations are below current thresholds for PFOS, but individuals might be above it in certain areas," Goltz explained. "Thresholds for other PFAS are not well established or established at all. So we are using blood from an eaglet to tell us about how healthy the ecosystem is, and how the health of that ecosystem changes over time.

One of the main points we all need to consider is that eagles are eating the same fish and game that many humans are eating.

## History of surveys

According to Goltz, the DNR conducted bald eagle surveys from 1973 to 2018. The surveys involved what is called an "occupancy flight" via airplane in late March to survey all known nests to see if adults were present, and if nesting activity was occurring. Nests were classified as either active or inactive. Then in mid-May, another flight called a "productivity flight" would determine if there were young in the nests, and to count the number of young.

The number of occupied eagle nests across the state increased dramatically between 1973 and 2018, increasing from around 100 in 1973 to over 1,500 in 2018.

Goltz said the DNR's eaglet sampling effort was first referred to as the Wisconsin Bald Eagle Bio-Sentinel Program. It sampled eagle populations in different regions of the state for DDE, a compound that is the byproduct of the pesticide DDT.

Widespread use of DDT from 1947 to 1970 had caused eagle populations to decline drastically. DDE causes the shells of eggs of eagles to become weak and fragile, and the weight of the adult eagle incubating the egg would cause it to fracture. Use of DDT was banned in 1972.

Even as late as the period 1990 to 2002, eaglet blood sampling was still revealing elevated levels of DDE. Levels above the 11 micrograms threshold which can be lethal to eagles.

"In some of the same territories that we visited again in 2011 or 2012, you can see that much of the DDE was getting leached out of the system or no longer available to eagles," Goltz stated. "So, we saw a significant change over time, but there were still elevated levels in Green Bay and Lake Michigan, likely a legacy of use of DDT in the orchards in Door County."

**STUDYING THE EFFECTS OF CONTAMINANTS ON OUR NATIONAL BIRD**
Sea Grant researchers Emily Cornelius Ruhs and Gavin Dehnert are seen in the Lower Wisconsin State Riverway near Avoca during some of their eagle monitoring activities. The two are partnering with WDNR, and federal and tribal partners, to sample the blood of eaglets for emerging contaminants.

## Other issues

The program also looked at PCBs, a contaminant particularly prevalent in the Fox River Valley, Green Bay and Lake Michigan.

"I think, 350 tons of PCBs were dumped into the Fox River by paper mills that resulted in degraded fish and wildlife habitat, impaired avian reproduction, and still results in fish consumption advisories in some areas," Goltz explained. "Going back to that 12-year time period from 1990 to 2002, sampling showed elevated levels of PCBs along the Lower Fox River. And then, fast forward to 2011 and 2012, the levels of PCBs had declined drastically on the Fox River above the dam at De Pere, and that's because of the dredging and clean-up of the sediment in the Fox River. That got the PCBs out of the system for those birds, but we still see elevated levels out in Green Bay."

Goltz said the program also looks at lead in eagle blood, which was the second leading cause of eagle mortality in data from the study in the 2000-2007 time frame.

"Our wildlife health lab did necropsies on over 500 eagles in the early 2000s, and attributed the cause of mortality to different categories. Trauma was the most common cause of death, and then lead toxicity was tied for second with unknown causes."

In the trauma category, vehicle collisions were the most common cause of eagle deaths.

Eagle deaths from lead poisoning peak in November and December in Wisconsin, which he links to use of ammunition containing lead during deer hunting.

"There's a direct link between deer that are shot with lead core bullets being left on the landscape and eagle mortality," Goltz explained. "What happens with lead core bullets is that they fragment into hundreds of tiny little flecks, which in analysis almost appear like lead dust."

"As an alternative, there are a lot of factory pre-loaded ammunition that you can buy where the bullets are solid copper, and they don't have any lead in them," Goltz said. "Just a tiny little bit of lead is enough to kill an eagle. So if you think of it like a number four bird shot that you might use for waterfowl, or if you were able to cut that up into five different pieces and feed one piece of that to an adult eagle, that would be enough to kill that bird."

## Why monitor eagles?

Goltz listed the reasons why eagle-monitoring programs are important:

- established monitoring programs exist
- eagles have a wide geographic presence
- eagles are sensitive, as apex predators, to contaminants
- eagles live and forage in aquatic habitats where pollution is often concentrated
- eagles have a proven utility as an indicator species
- monitoring provides insight to contaminant exposure in Wisconsin wildlife, and is useful for multiple agencies and programs.

He said the objectives of the eagle-monitoring program are to:

- determine levels of contaminants in blood plasma from the Green Bay/Lake Michigan/Lower Fox River eagle population between 1990 and 2013, and since then, in other regions of the state
- examine the relationship between contaminant levels and reproductive rates
- explore trends of newly emerging contaminants
- assess the utility of bald eagles as indicators of environmental health and change.

Goltz detailed the methodology of the monitoring work they do. First, reproductive rates of nests are assessed by aerial survey out of a plane and citizen science. Then, when the eaglets are 5-8 weeks old, their blood plasma is analyzed for organic contaminants.

# Chapter News

## Aldo Leopold Chapter

Winter is in full swing for the Aldo Leopold Chapter, and members and friends are dusting off their vises and coming down to the monthly chapter Bar Flies events in Baraboo, Lodi and Beaver Dam. Please visit www.facebook.com/aldoleopoldtu/events for dates and times and visit www.simplebooklet.com/alderforkjournalsummer fall2025 for the latest Alder Fork Journal. We are also taking suggestions for riparian zones to work on this spring. We are accepting literary or visual art for the winter edition of the Alder Fork Journal, so please get involved and reach out to alderforkjournal@gmail.com.

*—Matthew Duffy*

ANTIGO CHAPTER MEMBERS SHARED THEIR CASTING SKILLS

## Antigo Chapter

In early December we held our annual Northeast Region meeting. I'm so proud of the work our chapters can accomplish when we pool our resources.

The reports given by the chapters and agencies were amazing. The projects and community service is what I believe makes our TU presence in Wisconsin one of the best. Our region stepped up and funded $60,000 to the requesting agencies for coldwater care, DNR projects in our area and support for TU's Great Lakes Team.

Our chapter is looking at Saturday, March 21 for our annual fundraiser at Northstar banquet hall.

Last fall we started constructing a new fishing dock to be placed at Garski Flowage. Most of the framing and flooring is finished and we plan to install it this spring.

We started our banquet meetings in December.

Thank you to everyone in our chapter, the community and our local businesses for all their good work and support.

*—Scott Henricks*

## Central Wisconsin Chapter

Our Central Sands Trout River Series is a new chapter program created by Tom Bishop, Mark Hoffman, Bob Haase and Tom Lager, with the help of others. The program will focus on the ecology of the river, access points, effective flyfishing techniques and flies to use on the stream. The first session is Jan. 17 at the Knuth Brewery in Ripon, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

In December we participated in the 10th Annual Central Regional Meeting of the DNR Fisheries and Habitat Restoration Team. This planning session for 2026 included our chapter and the Fox Valley, ShawPaca and Frank Hornberg chapters.

We provide monthly education programs following our board meetings. We now hold these meetings and programs at The Winneconne Public library. The September program was "Night of the Favorite Fly," organized by Tom Meyer, Wayne Parmley and others.

In October, Al Sanders discussed euro-nymphing, while in November Jeff Treu discussed spey-fishing techniques. In December Steve Nelson presented "Three Down and Dirty Flies," including tying techniques.

Upcoming educational programs include Fly Fishing Adventures by Steve Heuser on Jan. 14 and Night of the Caddis presented by Bob Haase, Tom Meyer and others on Feb. 11.

Trout fest is at the Mount Morris Camp and Convention Center from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Feb. 28. It will features seminars about fly fishing and environmental topics and a variety of vendors, gear to purchase and raffles. It is a time to laugh, share fishing stories and have fun.

In October the DNR held its 3rd Annual Redd Survey Training seminar at the Wild Rose Fisheries Habitat Station. DNR Fisheries Biologist Steven DeVitt outlined the redd survey process. Shawn Sullivan also presented a review. Then Steve and the DNR staff provided the field-education portion of the seminar on the Mecan River, where participants learned to identify trout redds. They also learned how to use an app to record their observations and conduct their own surveys.

Our chapter was happy to provide breakfast and lunch for the event. If you have any questions about this, contact Steve Devitt at steven.devitt@wisconsin.gov.

River Keepers currently monitors 31 streams with 105 volunteers. The Riverkeepers monitor the streams/rivers from May through October with submission of their data to the SWIMs data base. The Annual River keepers Award was given to Mandy and Adam Dorsch who monitor Lunch and Little Lunch Creek including maintaining thermistor placement.Water Action Volunteers (WAV) Riverkeepers educator Emily Heald, and WAV program coordinator Katie Bradford gave presentations that were well received. The group added new monitoring sites in 2025, including Tagatz Creek, Caves Creek, Davies Creek, Peterson Creek and Chaffee Creek.

Our workdays are May through September, and the program is well managed by Mike Northam. In 2025 we focused on the Mecan River and the West Branch of the White River. At one of our work days we hosted a TU CARES environmental event. Shawn Sullivan and his DNR staff head up our work days, volunteering their Saturdays to help our chapter improve our coldwater resources. We are grateful for their service and education.

State Sen. Cabral-Guevara and TU CARES leaders met in early December to discuss and visit the Lake Drive culvert project. Past Council Chair and current Advocacy Chair Mike Kuhr joined representatives from the Central Wisconsin and Fox Valley chapters to explain about TU CARES, TU and the coldwater restoration and preservation activities in the Central Sands area.

If you are interested in attending our Dan Harmon III Fly Fishing School, contact Joe Peikert. It fills up fast, so don't delay. The fee for the seminar is $275.

I'm proud to lead such an active TU chapter. Please know that all the work we do is making a real difference. We could not have done this without the awesome support of every one of our members. I would like to thank all our volunteers for sharing their precious time with our organization.

We have a lot of fun. Come join in. We need folks with all types of skills and interests for all types of activities: Communications, website, social media, TroutFest, Riverkeepers, fly-tying events, the banquet, work days. If you can spare a little time, come join us in any way you can. You will meet great people and have some fun…all while making a difference.

*—Laura Tucker*

## Coulee Region Chapter

We are well into our member-event season. In September Driftless Angler Head Guide Nick Voss shared late-season fishing tips and discussed conditions during the season that were unusual or changing. A decent-sized group of chapter members and a few out-of-towners enjoyed the presentation.

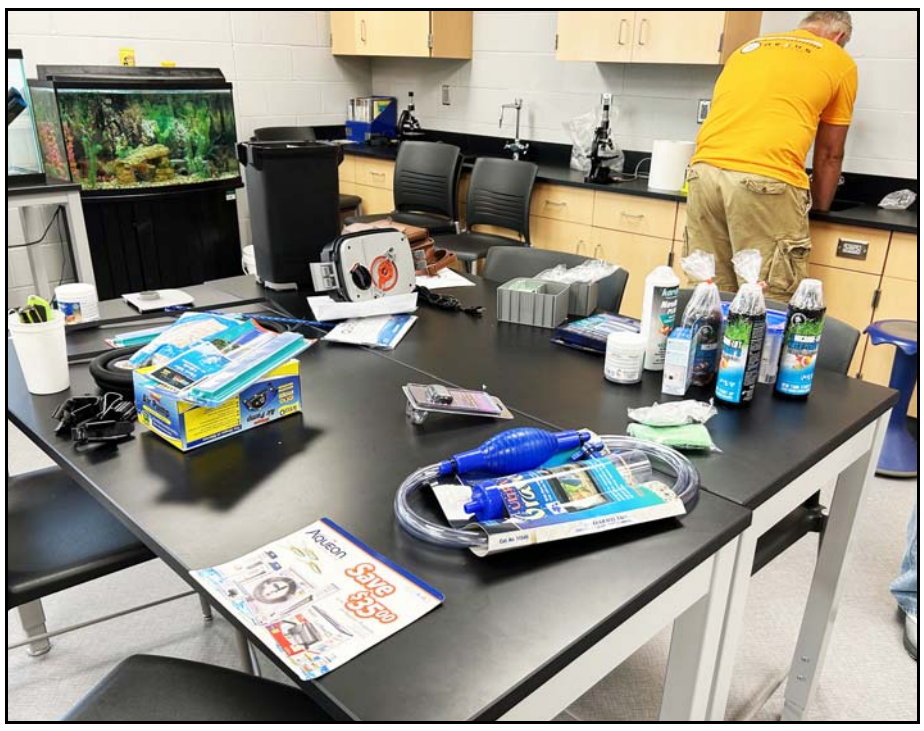
In October we invited nearby chapters Nohr, Blackhawk and Aldo Leopold for a joint meeting in Richland Center. WDNR Coldwater Fisheries Research Scientist Matt Mitro discussed his research on trout/beaver impacts on Elk Creek.

November featured the annual Fish Science Talk by the UW-La Crosse Freshwater Ecology and Management Club (FEMC). Ecology students give us presentations about their research on our fresh water resources. DNR Fisheries Biologists Tommy Hill and Kirk Olson presented an overview of the Coon Creek comprehensive watershed study and talked about their field work season.

Then we heard from Audrey Sorenson and Emma Walkowiak, both undergraduate students using water temperature loggers to discuss variability in trout streams in the central Driftless Area. We are getting some interesting data from the temp loggers, but a few have apparently grown legs and walked away from their last known location. If anyone sees a stray temp logger in a stream, please send it home.

Sam Anderson and FEMC President Madison Wall reported on exciting and encouraging findings with native brook trout populations and redd surveys in Pammel Creek on the ORA Community Trail Farms property. It was good to hear that the brook trout population in this stream is still quite healthy and naturally reproducing at a good rate. The high number of redds and the long spawn period is also encouraging.

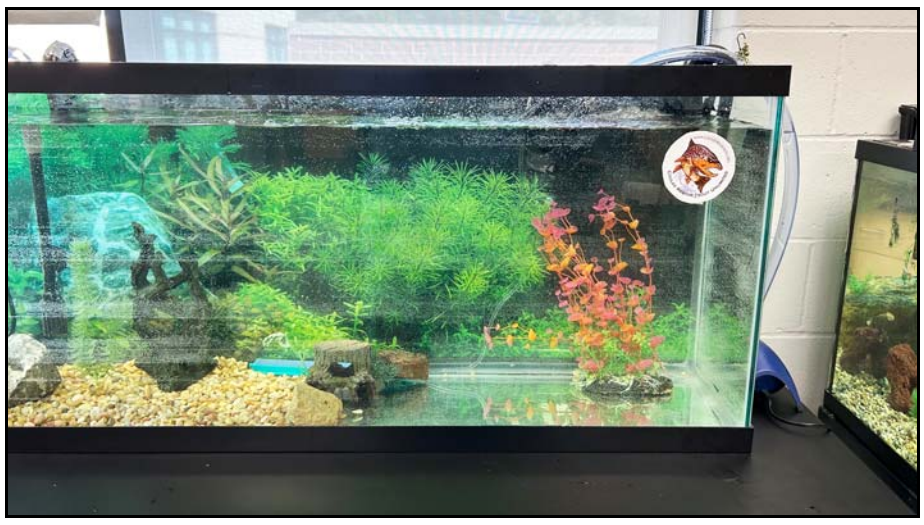
The next presentation was from graduate student Kyle Kamm, who previewed his upcoming research on production and biomass of brook and brown trout in southwestern Wisconsin Driftless Area streams. The last speaker for the evening changed the subject from trout to sculpins. Graduate student Evan Sirianni shared his research findings about the occurrence patterns of



Deb Muresan

PREPPING SUPPLIES FOR HOLMEN MIDDLE SCHOOL'S TIC PROGRAM

# Chapter News



Deb Muresan

**HOLMEN MIDDLE SCHOOL'S TIC TANK AWAITING TROUT EGGS**

mottled sculpin and slimy sculpin in the Kickapoo River drainage. The good news is that sculpin are still out there, but unfortunately they are not as populous as they once were.

December featured our holiday party at Christos Taverna in La Crosse. It included a Fly Exchange – bring 3 and take 3 -- to inspire us during the winter fly-tying season.

On Jan. 21 at the American Legion Hall in Sparta, Vernon County Conservationist David Hettenbach and Monroe County Land Conservation Director Robert Micheel will speak about conservation efforts in their respective counties.

Feb. 27 is our Annual Banquet and Fundraiser at Cedar Creek Country Club in Onalaska. We are changing things up this year to keep it fun, with a local speaker and a different type of raffle/silent auction format. Come join us.

We're also planning to have a speaker for our March 18 meeting in Viroqua, but we're still working on that.

On April 15 in Viroqua, Bob Trevis, author of Troutchaser's Guide to the Driftless Area, will present a special presentation on "Opportunities in the Driftless beyond Viroqua."

May 20 is our annual picnic, although we have yet to determine the location.

You can find details on all of our upcoming events and activities at couleeregiontu.org.

We have one new Trout In the Classroom (TIC) setup this year, at Longfellow Middle School in La Crosse. We have two existing setups at Holmen Middle School and Lemonweir Academy in Mauston. We took care of setup and tune-ups in early October to be ready for the delivery of the trout eggs.

We also with Logan High School's outdoor literacy class. As in previous years, the class is reading "A River Runs Through It," by Norman Maclean. The program helps connect students to reading, nature and themselves. Our chapter vice president and youth education coordinator Brad Berger teamed up with our chapter's two FFI-certified casting instructors to connect these students to the book and perhaps one day, a trout.

The chapter welcomed two new board members, Joseph Meyer and Steve Miller. We are excited to have them join the board to fill the two vacancies created by the Welters, who left the Coulee Region for a place further up north. Coincidentally, both the new board members are our Certified Casting Instructors.

Along with other TU chapters, we had been actively supporting efforts to acquire a parcel of land along the Seas Branch and its convergence with the West Fork Kickapoo River. Our chapter members and supporters pledged $14,525 to help the effort. Unfortunately, the property owners have rejected the offer from the DNR and have declined to provide a reason. This result is disappointing, considering the initial positive signs from the owners and an offer very close to the asking price. Our fundraising efforts demonstrate that TU chapters and supporters are willing to financially support the procurement of more publicly accessible fishing opportunities. Thank you to everyone who supported this public access opportunity.

Our Annual Banquet is Feb. 27 at the Cedar Creek Country Club in Onalaska. Not only is this a time to enjoy a social occasion with our fellow TU members, but it is our biggest fundraising event. Projects and events require funding and your support is important to us. We plan to discuss our exciting partnership with ORA Community Trail Farm and the restoration of Pammel Creek, as well as new ways to support the chapter. There will be good food, conversations and fish talk. You can find tickets at couleeregiontu.org.

We are deeply saddened by the passing of John Townsell, a tireless member of our board of directors for many years. He supported the chapter in as many ways as possible. He will be sorely missed by his colleagues and friends in the Coulee Region. We offer our condolences to his family and friends.

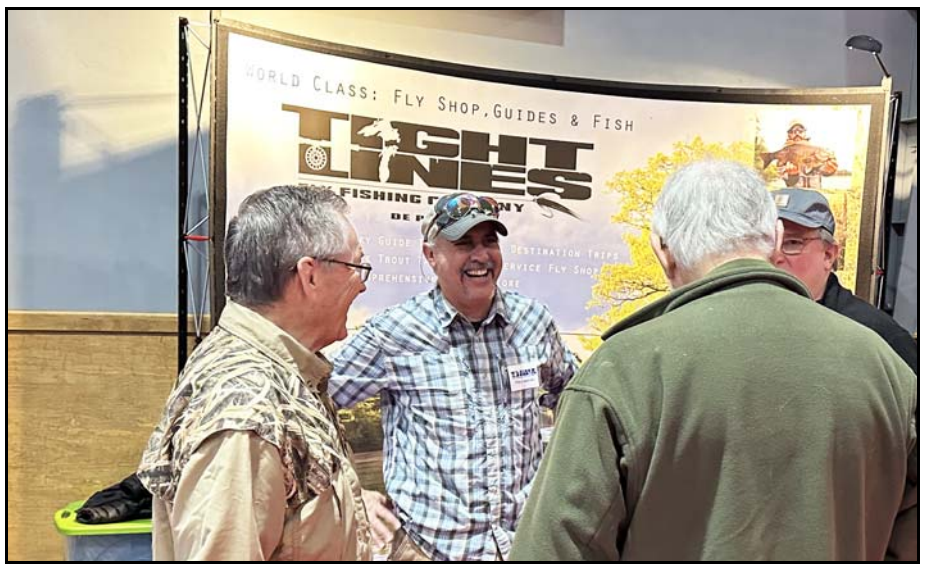
*—Deb Muresan*

## Fox Valley Chapter

Cabin Fever Day (CFD) is a significant part of the Fox Valley Chapter's culture. This year we expanded the scope of our event and selected the Fox Cities Exhibition Center as our venue. Also, we have a main Sponsor that brought many new possibilities to our event. Scheels will now sponsor our stage events and has offered a number of high-end items for the event.

You can park in the ramp all day for $6. The doors open at 10 a.m. on Jan. 24. Drawing for prizes will begin after our last speakers for the day. See our website at https://foxvalleytu.org/for discounts on early purchase of tickets.

Come hungry. On the Fritz Concessions will be serving up classic




Doug Nelson

**THANK YOU TIM LANDWEHR AND SCOTT GRADY**

American favorites. Enjoy a variety of tasty options and beverages while you explore the event, attend presentations and connect with fellow anglers.

CFD offers the opportunity to learn new things to enhance your angling adventures. Here are some of the presentations for this year:

- Streamer Tactics – Chris Firkus & Ted Conachen
- Tightline & Euro Nymphing Tactics – Al Sanders
- Anatomy of a U.P. Fishing Season – Tim Schulz
- Presentation and Strategies for Fishing the Driftless – Dale Osthoff
- Beginner and Intermediate Fly Tying – Bill Sherer

General fishing programs cover open-water and ice-fishing tactics for species like bass, northern pike, and musky. Topics will include seasonal strategies, gear tips and more.

Whether you're passionate about trout or looking to expand your skills across multiple species, these sessions are packed with practical advice and insider knowledge.

A variety of rod representatives will have an impressive selection of rods for you to try. Whether you're a seasoned angler looking to test the latest gear or a beginner curious about the sport, this is your opportunity to step up, grab a rod and feel the rhythm of fly casting.

Beyond learning and connecting, you could take home incredible prizes. Throughout the event, you'll have many ways to win, including:

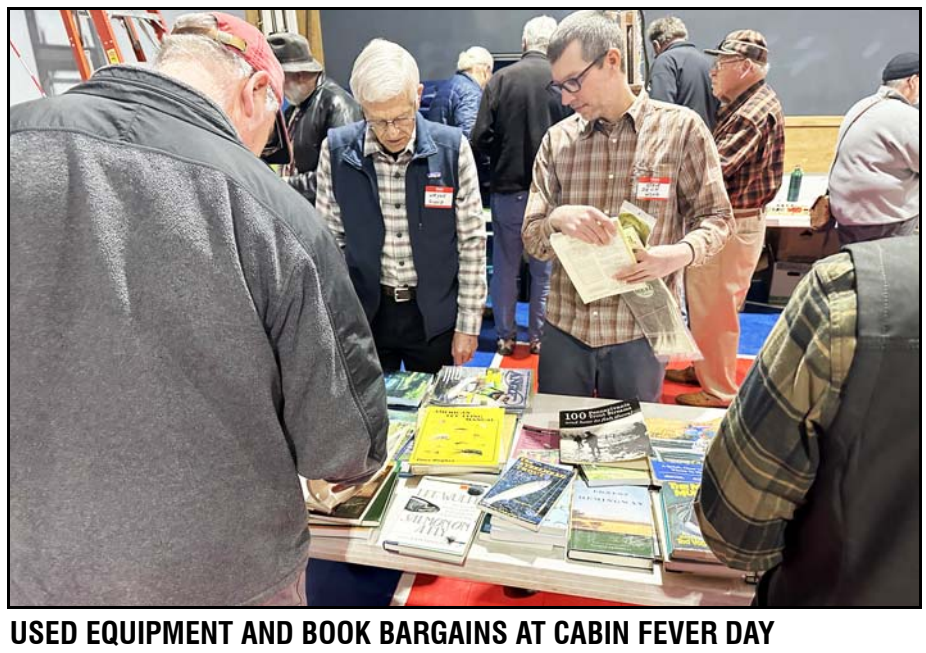
- General Door Prizes – Just for attending!
- 50/50 Raffle – Walk away with cash!
- Bucket Raffle – Enter to win amazing gear and fishing essentials.
- Silent Auction – Bid on unique items and experiences you won't find anywhere else.
- Build Your Own Bamboo Fly Rod Raffle

At Cabin Fever Day 2026 we will have a raffle of only 100 tickets, at $25 apiece, for a chance to win the opportunity to build a custom bamboo rod of your choice while mentored by Scott Grady himself. Not only will this be matched to your preferred fishing experience but will be a legacy rod that you built. The drawing will be at 3 p.m. of the event and you will work with Scott on a schedule this spring to bring your rod to life. With 100 entries, your odds of winning are good. Don't miss out.

We have several high-end items that will make your ticket purchases worth the investment. For the fly anglers we have an Orvis Helios D 905-4 Rod worth nearly $1,100. For spin casters we'll have a selection of spinning rods and reels for everything from walleye to bass, such as a TFO Resolve Bass Spinning Rod with a retail price of almost $300. We'll have a youth package for fly fishing and one for spin fishing. The total value of our bucket raffle items will exceed $12,000 this year.

The exhibitor floor will feature an outstanding lineup of local fly/tackle shops, professional guide services, and specialty vendors offering gear, flies, and expert advice. Whether you're looking to upgrade your equipment, plan your next adventure or connect with passionate anglers, this is your chance to explore and learn all in one place. We hope to see you January 24th in Appleton.

We've been active in a number of other activities since last fall. December featured our Christmas Special Meeting where we called on people to present information about



Doug Nelson

**USED EQUIPMENT AND BOOK BARGAINS AT CABIN FEVER DAY**

# Chapter News

Doug Nelson

**FOX VALLEY'S CABIN FEVER DAY. WORTH THE TRIP, NO MATTER HOW FAR.**

Tony Pudlo

**TIE FLIES AND MAKE FRIENDS AT STONE FLY SOCIALS**

the Council's Youth Fishing Camp and a photo experience of Yellowstone National Park. We invited people who may have youth who want to go to the camp to find out about it and also invited our campers from past years. Doug Nelson presented a photographic program on Yellowstone National Park for all of our families to enjoy.

In January, we were presented with a unique opportunity. The Appleton Area School District conducts a Wellness Fair for its 2,000-plus employees. We'll be there to explain to them how trout fishing, especially in mother nature's most beautiful places, can improve mental and physical health. We'll show them that the places trout live offer natural beauty, fresh air, and a genuine experience that purifies the soul.

TU CARES and Wisconsin Council leaders hosted Sen. Rachael Cabral-Guevara (19th Assembly District) in Wautoma to discuss and tour trout stream restorations in the Central Sands region. The group presented an overview of TU's involvement in the area highlighting the importance of public lands, and future projects regarding statewide priorities. Senator Cabral-Guevara expressed her support for the TU goals

After the meeting, the group toured the site of a culvert replacement project in the West Branch of the White River watershed on Lake Drive. This project highlighted how TU and the county can share culvert and bridge replacement costs. We thank Sen. Cabral-Guevara for her time, legislative insights and support of our work to improve conditions in our local waterways. See the photo on page 1 of this issue of *Wisconsin Trout*.

Our famous Stone Fly Socials begin Jan. 13 at the Stone Yard off CTY JJ on East Edgewood Drive at 7 p.m. We will meet every two weeks on Tuesdays, at the same time and place March 24. Please bring your friends, neighbors relatives to a great time of sharing in the off season. See the many kinds of flies created by our members to attract that big fish.

You don't have to tie to have fun at this event. Learn about making jigs for ice fishing and possibly, how to build spinners. Our own bug expert, Tom Lager, can help you design flies that match the behavior of natural trout food. Join us for a great way to shake off a bit of the winter doldrums. We'll see you there.

We really want to offer a huge thanks to two people who have contributed so much to our CFD's success over the years. We have come to count on them, but not take their generosity for granted. They are also long-time sponsors of CFD who have supported us from our earliest events.

Scott Grady builds beautiful handmade bamboo rods. Each rod is planned to fit the casting style and skill of the person for whom it is constructed, as well as the anticipated fishing conditions. Over the years he has donated more than $60,000 worth of rods to various TU organizations. We have raffled his rods at many CFDs, and we are very grateful to have enjoyed this relationship. This year, in addition to donating a rod, Scott is offering an opportunity for a lucky winner to build their own rod using his expertise and equipment. This is a unique opportunity and a limited number of chances will be sold at this year's Cabin Fever Day. Visit his booth this year to see the quality of his work.

Tim Landwehr, owner of Tightlines Fly Shop, has also been a huge supporter and a sponsor for more than two decades. Tim's shop between Appleton and Green Bay is the place to go for quality smallmouth fishing trips, some of the best equipment and supplies for fishing and fly tying, and information on current conditions. Tim has helped us with donated or discounted merchandise, consultation on the items we purchase for bucket raffles, and always provides entertaining presentations at Cabin Fever Days. You'll enjoy stopping by his booth for lively conversation, good advice and to meet with friends.

We hope to see many of our friends from all over the state at CFD this year. Your kindness and lively conversations make it something unique in our state.

—*Tony Pudlo*

## Green Bay Chapter

September featured our annual chapter picnic. John Deuchert treated attendees to chapter-provided grilled burgers and hot dogs. Thank you to everyone who came out for food, fun and laughter.

In October, Door County Land Trust Executive Director Emily Wood joined us for her presentation entitled "Improving Fish Habitat Through Land Protection."

In November we welcomed Wisconsin Conservation Voters' Jessica Nemchek, who shared a presentation entitled "Your Right to Know What's in Your Water." Both presentations were very insightful and well-received.

We held our Annual Awards Dinner & Holiday Party in December. It was a wonderful evening featuring an all-you-can-eat home-style chicken dinner, followed by our award presentations. The evening commenced with all our guests taking home Seroogy's chocolate.

For 2025, we recognized six amazing recipients.

Rick Jacob was this year's recipient of our President's Club Award, which we typically give to a "newer" member who has demonstrated a high level of activity within the chapter. This award comes with a GBTU personalized clothing item of the individual's choosing.

For his undying contributions, and giving freely of his time, money and talent for many years, we recognized John Deuchert with our Distinguished Service Award.

We presented Kim McCarthy with our Member of the Year Award. He has worked with our chapter's TIC program, leads the Council's two grant programs, helps with public fishing acquisitions, works with our WITU Northeast Regional Meeting and much much more. He has always been an invaluable resource to the Green Bay Chapter, the Council and National TU.

We participated in the WITU Northeast Regional Meeting in December, with five other chapters. In total we provided $60,000 for trout habitat work to be performed by Antigo DNR, Lakewood DNR and TU's Great Lakes Stream Team. The now-dechartered Northwoods Chapter also contributed $7,800.

A huge "thank you" goes out to all the agencies and staff for their work, and to the chapters for their financial commitments, and to Regional Chair Dale Lange for organizing and running the meeting, and to the Council's Friends of Wisconsin TU grant program for providing $2,500 matching grants.

Our Banquet Committee, led by Chair Carla Zimmerman, continues to meet and plan for our 50th Annual (Golden) Conservation Banquet. We are proud to announce that most of our prizes have already been secured. We are now working on sponsors and ticket sales. Please consider celebrating this monumental achievement with us at Stadium View Bar and Grill on February 19. Tickets are $50, a table of eight is $350, and various sponsorship levels are available. If interested, please contact Dave Ostanek at dave.n.trout@gmail.com.

We continue to hold our VSP program at the First Presbyterian Church in De Pere. Every other Monday starting at 4:30 p.m., veterans and volunteers gather to learn fly-tying and socialize. If you are a veteran who would like to participate, or if you would like to volunteer, please contact our Veterans Program Coordinator Paul Kruse at kruser2@new.rr.com or 920-639-2361. All experience levels are welcome.

For more information on the Green Bay Chapter of Trout Unlimited, check out our new website at greenbay.tu.org, as well as our social media.

—*Adrian Meseberg*

Adrian Meseberg

**KIM MCCARTHY RECEIVED GBTU'S MEMBER OF THE YEAR AWARD**

# Chapter News

Adrian Meseberg

**JOHN DEUCHERT RECEIVED GBTU'S DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD**


Adrian Meseberg

**RICK JACOB RECEIVED GBTU'S PRESIDENT'S CLUB AWARD**

## Harry and Laura Nohr Chapter

Our Fennimore TIC program has hatching eggs. The current stream restoration project at the Snowbottom Wildlife Area is about 75 percent completed, and we got an extension on the state grant. We'll return to finish it this spring.

Our Lie and Tie at the Dodger Bowl in Dodgeville is at 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, Jan. 22. It will feature a Zoom presentation by Lance Eagan.

In October we did a brushing workday on the Blue River at the County Highway I crossing, north of Montfort.

We continue to discuss the best ways to memorialize our beloved and sorely missed Carol Murphy.

We're making preparations for our spring banquet in May.

*—Brian Larson*

## Kiap TU Wish Chapter

Our October chapter meeting featured a presentation on "The Footsteps we walk in—the paths we help others make: Being Mentored and Mentoring in Outdoor Life and Conservation." The presenter was TU's own Peter Jonas. Until recently he was the partnership specialist for TU DARE.

Peter asked us to focus on who taught each of us to fish and who helped us embrace our own personal conservation ethic. Finally, he asked us to consider how we have helped pass on this way of life to others. Peter also discussed mentoring and being mentored.

November featured a presentation from Steve Leonard and Marty Engel of the Kinnickinnic River Land Trust (KRLT). Steve Leonard is KRLT's director and Marty Engel is the organization's land stewardship manager. They gave an update on the restoration effort at the Headwaters Preserve, the work St. Croix County and farmers are doing in the upper Kinnickinnic River watershed to protect water quality, and new educational programs.

December featured our Holiday Award Banquet, a social event with entertainment provided by singer/musician/songwriter Chris Silver. We sponsored a fly swap, white-elephant gift exchange and we held an ugly sweater contest.

In October members Suzanne Constantini, Ed Constantini, Gary Horvath and Scott Wagner met with State Sen. Rob Stafsholt and the Council Past Chair and Advocacy Director Mike Kuhr along the Moody family property on the Kinnickinnic River. This was the site of a recent stream-improvement project in St. Croix County. The Knowles Nelson Stewardship Program funded the public fishing easement and Wisconsin Inland Trout Stamp dollars helped fund bank stabilization and installation of in-stream habitat in this flood-prone area. We had a candid discussion regarding the stewardship program, trout stamp program and other conservation issues with the senator.

Habitat Coordinator Randy Arnold organized volunteers Ron Reigle, Jeff Himes, Dave Gregg and Tom Anderson for some October buckthorn control. They applied foliar herbicide to three sites on the upper Kinnickinnic River where we have done buckthorn and box elder removal in the past. The sites were the Steeple Drive location on the Kinni where we worked this past winter, the easement just below the County Road JJ bridge and the site near the Aldi's parking lot in River Falls.

In November we held two workdays in preparation for the Annual Greenwood Elementary service-learning day. Volunteers cut buckthorn and box elder trees along the Kinnickinnic River and stacked them for burning. Volunteers included Kim Schwinghammer, Chris Jurss, Ron Reigle, Dave Gregg, John Skelton, Tom Anderson, Tom Whitten, Randy Arnold and Mike Stofferahn.

November featured the Service-Learning Day. Approximately 55 third-graders, along with teachers and chaperones, turned out to help burn buckthorn, honeysuckle and box elder slash which had been cut earlier. The site was at the corner of Quarry Road and Main Street in River Falls behind the First Covenant Church. This has become an annual event where we work with Greenwood to provide this opportunity for the kids to get involved with our chapter's habitat work.

The grade was split into two groups with the first arriving at 12:45 and working for 50 minutes before being relieved by the second busload of students. By 3:00 the kids were on their way back to school and we were able to relax and watch the fire burn down before dousing it with water and heading for home.

Special thanks to our chapter volunteers; Michele Bevis, Dave Gregg, Loren Haas, Perry Anderson, Trish Hannah, Tom Schnadt, Monta Hayner and Randy Arnold.

*—Gary Horvath*

Randy Arnold

**KIAP-TU-WISH VOLUNTEERS AT GREENWOOD SERVICE-LEARNING DAY**
From left are Michele Bevis, Dave Gregg, Loren Haas, Perry Anderson, Trish Hannah, Tom Schnadt, and Monta Hayner.

Tom Schnadt

**GREENWOOD ELEMENTARY STUDENTS ON THEIR SERVICE-LEARNING DAY**

Mike Kuhr

**ON THE BANKS OF THE KINNI**
Scott Wagner, Gary Horvath, Sen. Rob Stafsholt, Suzanne & Ed Constantini and landowner Robert Moody, on the banks of the Kinnickinnic River.

# Chapter News

Mark Paese

**LAKESHORE CHAPTER VOLUNTEERS PLACE A COMMEMORATIVE BENCH**

## Lakeshore Chapter

Greetings trout lovers and conservationists. The Lakeshore Chapter began the final quarter of the year with a productive October work day. A dozen volunteers cleared angler trails along a stretch of the Onion River that hadn't seen much attention for a while. We removed downed willows and installed a commemorative bench along a peaceful stretch of the stream. This was a great way to finish our conservation work for 2025.

Across our 10 workdays and numerous other "weekday streamer" events, 40 different volunteers contributed more than 450 hours of hands-on conservation work in the Onion River Public Fishery area in 2025. Many thanks go to every person who volunteered, and especially to our DNR team of Drew Wallace, Tanya Meives and Alec Meyer.

At our October meeting we had an excellent presentation from DNR Stream Ecologist Mike Miller about the growing threat of neonicitoids. Thank you, Mike, for making the trip and sharing your knowledge. After that rather disturbing presentation, we got some happier news from our fish biologist, Drew Wallace. Drew shared the most recent shocking survey results for Sheboygan County trout streams. The results highlighted both the positive young-of-the-year numbers, as well as significant abundance and good size representation of brown trout in the Onion River watershed. The stream and the work we do on it is showing very positive results.

Drew also presented data for Nichols Creek, where brown and brook trout numbers remain solid. This data, along with data from other streams in the North Branch Milwaukee River watershed indicate potential for population improvements and improved angler access.

This population data coupled with data gathered from a Nichols Creek habitat study done last year, and the coming removal of the Cascade millpond dam on Nichols Creek, represent very exciting opportunities for ecological improvement for coldwater species in this watershed.

Our December Christmas party and year-end bash took place at Laack's Hall in Sheboygan Falls. We had a great meal, live music, a slide presentation and our annual awards for outstanding contributions to the Lakeshore Chapter and our mission.

Our guest speaker was Tom Sather, Wisconsin State Coordinator for Reel Recovery. Many thanks to Tom for making the trip to Sheboygan to share his passion for this amazing program.

Following Tom's presentation we culminated the evening by recognizing outstanding contributions to Lakeshore TU and our mission. This year we recognized three outstanding individuals:

We presented Myk Hranicka with our Leadership Award. Myk is tireless in his dedication to both our chapter and the Wisconsin Council of Trout Unlimited. Myk serves on our board while also serving as Council Chair of Wisconsin TU. He is always at our workdays, meetings and events, and he's always willing to do the hard work to make a difference. Myk is a passionate advocate for TU, our chapter, our environment and especially our coldwater resources. Myk is also the first from our chapter to step up to a leadership role with the State Council, serving first as vice chair and now as chair. Congratulations Myk and thank you for all that you do for TU.

Our Lifetime Achievement award went to Gordy Martin. Gordy has been a TU member since 1993 and was chapter president from 2008 to 2018. He's a fishing guide in the Sheboygan area and a passionate supporter of TU. While Gordy's guide work often takes him away from day-to-day chapter operations, he's always willing to donate a guided trop for our fundraising efforts. He's always available to help with casting or fly-tying, or for a chapter presentation. It was a great way to thank Gordy for all he's done for the Lakeshore Chapter and the Council.

We bestowed upon DNR Fisheries Technician Tanya Meives our Distinguished Conservationist & Public Servant award for her substantial coldwater restoration work during her career.

Hired in 1992, Tanya has designed projects and operated the heavy equipment to improve many miles of trout water in Sheboygan, Ozaukee, Walworth, Langlade and Lincoln counties. She can operate any heavy equipment and is a magician with a skid loader. The volume of work she has done is staggering and too voluminous to list here.

One highlight of her career is the work she did with John Nelson and the Lakeshore Chapter on Silver Springs (Mill Creek) and the Kamrath properties in the early 2000's.

These earlier projects were crucial to the ultimate restoration of the Onion River to the Class 1 trout fishery that we have today. This was all made possible by her heavy-equipment work, restoring these spring creeks to their natural flow. Tanya continues to be a tremendous asset to our chapter, our environment and the citizens of the Wisconsin. Thank you, Tanya.

*—Al Wortz*

## Marinette County

The Marinette County Chapter had a very successful fundraising banquet in April, so we were able to help fund this year's Antigo and the Lakewood habitat crews, TU Great Lakes Stream Restoration efforts and U.S. Forst Service projects. We also had some youth fishing days and worked with high school students on fly casting. We also helped on some of the summer stream work projects. We also started monthly programs in October and have had guest presenters. In February we will be putting on trout fishing classes and demonstrating fly casting at the outdoors show in Marinette in March.

*—Dale Lange*

**OCONTO CHAPTER MENTORS AND GILLETT AND SURING STUDENTS**

## Oconto River Chapter

We were invited to help teach students from Gillett and Suring high schools how to cast a fly rod. The opportunity arose as part of a" Life Sports" Class taught by Jill Halla of Gillett and Mary Smith of Suring. The class includes a unit on fishing. Students were taught basics on different styles of fishing including spinning, baitcasting, flyfishing and how to prepare your rods reels and lines for fishing. More than 35 students participated in the casting demonstrations with "hands on" individual instruction out on the football field. A skilled group of TU instructors gave mostly one-on-one lessons in effective fly casting, using chapter-provided rods. Only a few students had used a fly rod before, and several had never fished at all.

In September these students took a field trip to Lyman Wocking's Pond to use what they had learned in the fishing segment of the class. Each fish caught was logged as to species, length and captor. Students caught and released more than 100 fish. For some of them it was the first fish they'd ever caught.

We extend our appreciation to the many chapter members and friends who helped mentor students and ensure the event's success. Special acknowledgement goes to event organizers Dale Halla and Lyman Wocking. The chapter has conducted this program each spring and fall semester for the past four years.

For more information on chapter events, activities and other information, go to ocontoriver.org.

*—Tom Klatt*

## Southeast Wisconsin Chapter

SEWTU's fall was particularly busy with a mix of habitat workdays, veterans' outreach, community events, chapter meetings and the F3T Fly Fishing Film Festival.

SEWTU hosted the F3T Fly Fishing Filmfest in September. The evening featured a series of fly-fishing short films, along with door prizes including a fishing kayak. Raffle prizes included guided and mentored fishing trips, fly rods and reels, fly-fishing gear, fine wine and bourbon, and smaller prize packages. Attendance was very good but not record setting. We did, however, enjoy one of the best fundraising events in recent chapter history. My thanks to all the generous donors, members and our equally generous guests.

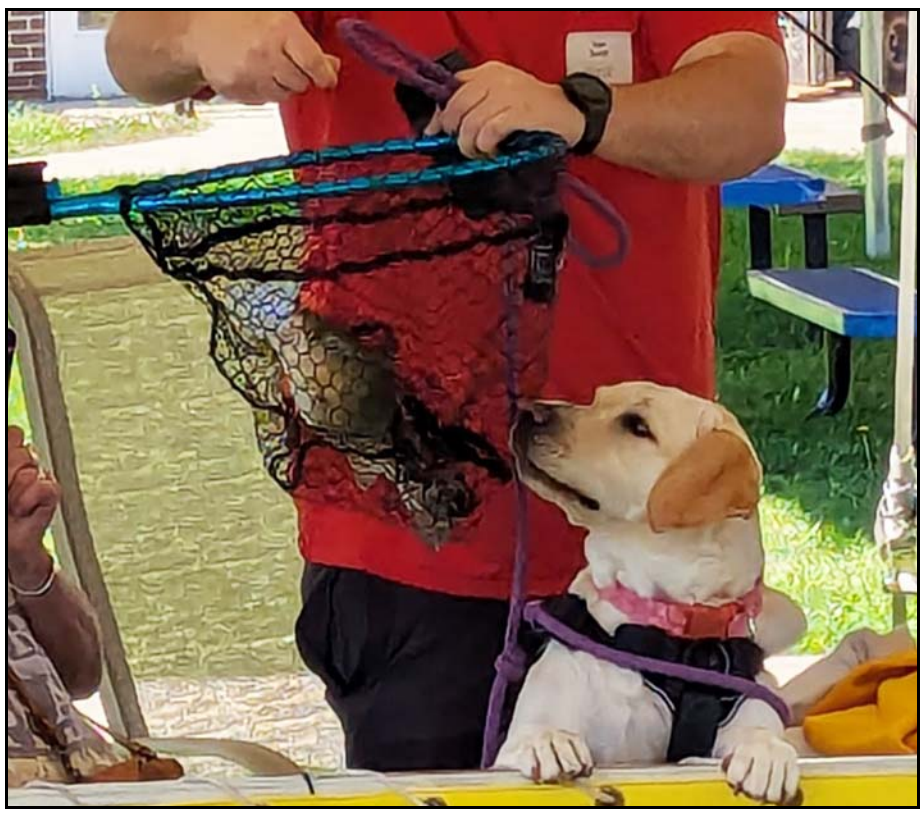
Our October meeting presented us with a challenge due to the last-minute cancellation of our speaker who bowed out due to illness. We punted and offered a social evening consisting of the remaining three films of the F3T Filmfest that we were unable to show at the Filmfest due to time constraints. This turned out to be a very enjoyable, well-attended relaxed evening with much trout conversation and good laughs all around.

In November our renaissance man, Andrew Green, showed us a detailed look into the art of building a wood strip canoe. It was a most detailed and interesting presentation into the creation of this elegant type of watercraft. As it turns out, SEWTU has a few other wood strip

**ANDREW GREEN WALKS SEWTU MEMBERS THROUGH THE PROCESS**

Andrew Green demonstrates the process of creating a wood-strip canoe. It was a most detailed and interesting presentation into the creation of this elegant type of watercraft. Andrew also added some updates on flyfishing for bonefish in Belize as part of this great evening.

# Chapter News



**SERVICE DOG INSPECTING THIS STRANGE SLIMY CRITTER**

builders and some good questions and interesting answers emerged. Andrew also added some updates on flyfishing for bonefish in Belize as part of this great evening.

Habitat workdays are an important part of our chapter's activities. Our September workday was delayed until October due to adverse weather. About 30 high school freshmen biology students volunteered to remove invasive buckthorn and clean debris from Rosenow Creek. It was part of Oconomowoc's High School freshman volunteer day where freshman spend time volunteering on various community projects. Then they make a presentation on their project and discuss its benefit to the community. The students also got to see some instream electroshocking of the stream's native brook trout.

Also in October 14 volunteers from our chapter and Illinois' Oak Brook Chapter joined forces at Whitewater Creek in Walworth County just southeast of Whitewater. It has been a couple of years since TU has worked on Whitewater Creek which is part of the watershed that includes Bluff Creek in northwest Walworth County, where we have done extensive work. The volunteers installed 44 biologs in the creek just south of Millis Road and backfilled.

The rescheduled September workday also took place in October. Eight veteran volunteers gathered at the Scuppernong River in Waukesha County. With two DNR Fisheries technicians, the volunteers installed biologs in the upper portion of the river near the Hotel Springs and the headwater spring complex. The river bottom here has a thick layer of very mucky marl. This forced the workers in the river to use a tool called a mudlicker or coot pole to occasionally free themselves out of the muck. Mucky conditions also called for a unique canoe and rope delivery system to deliver biologs to the volunteers. It was another successful weekday workday.

After this workday, our good friend and DNR fish biologist Ben called and said, we didn't need to schedule a November workday as we had met all the goals for projects in his area. We're all proud of what these tireless volunteers accomplished this year.

Also in October our volunteers had to split forces. One team manned a booth, distributed TU information, answered questions and gave fly-casting lessons at Shorewood's Fish and Feather Festival at Hubbard Park on the Milwaukee River. We also gave fly fishing instruction and provided TU information and answered all manner of fish questions at the DNR Steelhead Open House at their salmon and steelhead processing facility on the Root River in Racine.

This fall's veteran's outreach included the annual Veterans Home Fisheree at the Wisconsin Veterans Home in Union Grove. The event featured a stocked portable trout pond manned by volunteers who helped the disabled vets catch some rainbow trout which were immediately delivered to a crew of volunteers who filleted the catch. The kitchen personnel were on-site to prepare fresh-fried trout for the hungry veterans and their families. Volunteers came from our chapter, local fishing clubs and local volunteer firefighters, along with the dedicated caregivers who serve these veterans.

Veteran's activities include fly tying and rod building groups in Elkhorn and Waterford, which are going to kick off this fall and winter at various American Legion Posts and VFW locations. The TBI group led by the Southern Wisconsin Chapter of TU also gets some support from SEWTU in their volunteer efforts.

Thanks to all our dedicated chapter members who helped in so many ways.

*—Rick Larkin and Ken Rizzo*

**SEWTU VOLUNTEERS UTILIZING THEIR CANOE BIOLOG SHUTTLE SYSTEM**
Southeast Wisconsin Chapter volunteers try out the new canoe biolog shuttle on the mucky Scuppernong River.

Dyan Lesnik

**SWTU HOLD ITS FINAL WORK DAY OF THE YEAR ON DEER CREEK**
At its last workday of 2026, the SWTU crew pauses along Deer Creek after taking out the dense understory of honeysuckle and small box elders so a professional crew can more easily begin the restoration.

Jim Hess

**CLEARING THE PATH**
The Southern Wisconsin Chapter's workday on the Upper Yahara River was in a suburban area of DeForest, and Mike Kuhr cleverly put a honeysuckle limb to use clearing the walking trail of limbs and leaves.

## Southern Wisconsin Chapter

SWTU hit winter in full stride, completing a full array of stream workdays and hosting a series of excellent and engaging chapter gatherings.

A total of 131 volunteers helped on our fall workdays, bringing our total number of volunteers for the year to 216. Improved waterways include Garfoot, Big Spring, Ley and Deer creeks, as well as the Sugar and Yahara rivers. We earned a few months of winter respite, but we'll be back at it this spring.

Our monthly gatherings are at Schwoegler Lanes in Madison. All are welcome the second Tuesday of most months, except during summer. Recent gatherings featured Kyle Zempel on Patagonia adventures, DNR intern Emily Wille and Fish Biologist Tim Parks on some interesting stream findings and Ben Lubchansky on keeping and eating trout. There are many streams where our resource professional wish more people would keep fish.

Looking ahead, we are hosting a Fly Tying Jamboree in January. In February we are excited to hear from DNR Fish Biologist Kasey Yallaly, from the northern Driftless Area. March features our legendary Meicher Madness Auction. April will feature Jason Freund, an expert trout angler and fly tyer, a fun blogger and a professor at UW La-Crosse who is conducting some interesting research into brook trout and some other inhabitants of their streams.

By the time you read this, our free fly-tying courses will be underway. Also, we want to make sure everyone knows about the Vets on the Fly winter activities. All veterans and their families are welcome. For more information we have a link to their Facebook page on our website at swtu.org, where you can also find out about all of our upcoming activities and events.

*—Drew Kasel*

# Chapter News


**WILD RIVERS CHAPTER ADOPTED TWO FISHERY AREAS IN 2025**
The chapter officially adopted the White River Fishery Area in Bayfield County and the Clam River Fishery Area in Burnett County. Their commitment to these fishery areas includes thousands of dollars and many volunteer hours to assist the DNR over the course of three years.

## Wild Rivers Chapter

It has been a busy year for the Wild Rivers Chapter. We worked on numerous stream projects across northwest Wisconsin, and we taught fly tying and fly casting to kids. Probably the biggest thing we did in 2025 was adopt two state fishery areas, the White River in Bayfield County and the Clam River in Burnett County. Our commitment to these fishery areas includes thousands of dollars and many volunteer hours to assist the DNR over the course of three years.

We plan on championing more northwest Wisconsin watersheds in 2026, including improving fishermen access on some of local trout streams. We are also updating our chapter's mission statement and strategic plan.

Instead of holding an Expo in 2026, we are going to have our first ever Wild Rivers Chapter Coldwater Conservation Symposium and Banquet on April 18 at Lakewoods Resort in Cable. Mark your calendars and keep an eye on our website and newsletters for more information.

Last fall we dedicated a bench to David Wahl. Through his generous donations, we have been able to work on numerous coldwater stream conservation projects across northwest Wisconsin. David is a dedicated coldwater conservation champion, avid fly fisherman, upland bird hunter and is a wonderful and dear friend.

Also, a special thank you to John Gribble for his wonderful donation to our chapter.

We are in the process of coordinating with Jamie Vaughn from TU Great Lakes Team for a fly tying extravaganza in March 2026 at the Sawmill Saloon in Seeley, WI.

*—John Simonson*

## Wisconsin Clear Waters Chapter

The Wisconsin Clear Waters Chapter has been getting organized for the new year with the election of new officers. Peter Jonas will transition into the president role, Eliot Westman will take on the treasurer's position and Bob Mitchell will serve as secretary. A big thanks to William Heth for his years served as president and outgoing treasurer Tom Sather for the outstanding job he has done keeping us well balanced. Both will continue as a resource while the new officers transition in.

We continue to support TIC programs in our local schools. In October we approved spending $600 to support the purchase of a chiller so that Prairie Farm School could begin a TIC program. When Downsville Elementary School closed, their TIC materials were transferred to Knapp Elementary School. A big thanks to Dale Dahlke for his work on this.

In recognition of our often common goals, we donated $250 to the Wisconsin Wetlands Association. We appreciate that healthy wetlands support healthy streams and lakes.

Our first 2025/26 winter-season member meeting was held in October at the Chippewa River Distillery and Brewster Bros. Brewing Company in Chippewa Falls. Guest speaker Chris Firkus presented a program entitled "Streamer Fishing in the Driftless. Big Flies for Big Trout." Chris went into great detail on his techniques for catching big brown trout in the Driftless Area. Eyes opened wide when he described heavy, short leaders and his method for enticing a second hit after a missed attempt, by slapping the fly down hard in the spot of the miss.


**WISCONSIN VERSUS IOWA ACCESS LAWS DISCUSSED**
When Tom Rhoads described the restrictive stream access in Iowa, it made us better appreciate our Wisconsin stream access.


**BANFF FILM FESTIVAL COMES TO EAU CLAIRE**
Incoming Wisconsin Clearwaters Chapter President Peter Jonas and guests at the Banff Mountain Film Festival World Tour at the Eau Claire Pablo Center.

Our November meeting at the Brewing Projekt in Eau Claire featured guest speaker Tom Rhoads from Bear Creek Anglers in Decorah, Iowa, where the trout season is open year round. In addition to sharing his knowledge of Iowa streams, Tom went into detail on his strategies for winter fishing.

December featured our member holiday gathering at the Brewing Projekt, where we feasted on crusted smoked salmon, an outrageous cheese tray and other delights. A big shout out to Peter Jonas for organizing the event.

In December, along with the Chippewa Valley Ruffed Grouse Society, Landmark Conservancy and Pheasants Forever, we hosted the Banff Mountain Film Festival World Tour at the Pablo Center in Eau Claire. Volunteers staffed a display table to share our organization's mission and swap fishing stories with attendees.

We hope to see you at our winter stream improvement work days. We're working on dates and locations. If you are interested in joining our chapter's work crew, please send an email with your contact information to Matt Wysocki at mattwysocki1@gmail.com. Matt will get you on the notification list for upcoming projects.

*—Bob Mitchell*

## Wisconsin River Valley Chapter

First off, a warm welcome to our new members from Oneida and Vilas counties, formerly members of the Northwoods Chapter. We are happy to have you. In an effort to connect with our new members, we will begin to livestream our presentations on the "Wisconsin River Valley Trout Unlimited" Facebook page. Please "Like" and "Follow" the page. This will give members and friends who are unable to attend in person the ability to participate virtually. The presentations will be recorded and available for viewing at any time.

We also have a new Instagram account. If you would like to share pictures of a good day on the water, an incredible bug hatch, or a scene with a river running through it. You can post it on our Instagram account at "wisrivervalleytroutunlimited."

In September we gathered at Sconnis Alehouse & Eatery, ate a lot of pizza and chatted about the things we had done over the summer and thoughts for the coming year.

October featured our annual Plover River Stream Study at the Legion Memorial Park in Hatley. Thanks to Perry Nikolai, Alan Hauber and John Meachen for assisting the Wausau East students and Mr. Ekiss' IB Biology class with identifying insects. We also got to meet the chemistry and physics students. We were awarded a beautiful sunny day for this event. It was more like a picnic. After collecting insects and having lunch the kids had a little time to toss a frisbee, a football or just lounge in the grass and soak up sunshine. Thank you to the DNR crew for bringing their stream-shocking equipment. It's nice to see the big healthy brown trout living there.

In October, Tim Waters, a local writer from the Langlade area in Eastern Langlade County, came to the Sawmill Brewery to talk to us about various Midwest writers. Nearly everyone has heard of or read John Gierach, originally from Illinois. Norman Maclean, Author of "A River Runs Through It," was originally from Iowa. Gordon MacQuarrie, who wrote stories of hunting and fishing, and the semi-fictional organization known as The Old Duck Hunters Association, was from Superior. Thomas McGuane, from Michigan, has many fiction and non-fiction works.

Michigan judge John Voelker (pen name Robert Traver) was the author of "Trout Madness, Being a Dissertation on the Symptoms and Pathology of the Incurable Disease by One of its Victims." Jerry Dennis, also a Michigan native, has written several books, with "A Place on the Water" being one of his best. Ted Leeson from Beloit penned the book "The Habit of Rivers."

# Chapter News

Waters himself has written a book about the Wolf River. Published in 2024, the book highlights his journals while fishing the Wolf since 1998. In that time he's caught more than 2,500 trout, hiked more than 1,500 miles and fished nearly 3,500 hours. Thank you, Tim, for coming to talk to our members.

Conservation Program Manager Tom Boisvert from the Lincoln County Land Services Department shared some of the preliminary results from Phase 1 of their culvert inventory efforts, which we had supported with a $2,000 donation. The results reflect crossings within eight Lincoln County townships.

Aquatic Organism Passage: 25% of assessed crossings were a complete barrier to aquatic organism passage. 30% of assessed crossings were a barrier at most flows to aquatic organism passage. 25% of assessed crossings were a barrier at high flows to aquatic organism passage. 53.5% of assessed crossings were undersized. 90% of assessed crossings did not meet buried depth standards.

Stream Crossing Condition: 3 crossings exhibited severe deterioration. 28 crossings exhibited major deterioration with evidence of piping. 26 crossings exhibited major deterioration. Although a fair number of crossings are showing elevated deterioration, over 50% of crossings were in moderate to good condition."

Our chapter will provide an additional $2,000 to this culvert project for 2026. Tom will be speaking to our chapter at a presentation on March 10 at Sawmill Brewing.

In November Sophia Peissig gave us a presentation entitled "Adventures of a fisheries technician: My summer protecting cutthroat trout." Thank you, Sophia.

In December our TIC eggs hatched. John Muir Middle School Science Teacher Pete Colwell and his students are looking after and learning about these new little fry. There were very few bad eggs and non-surviving alevins. Many thanks go out to Al Hauber, Kirk Stark and Perry Nikolai for putting this together.

**Upcoming events & activities**

Our chapter presentations are typically held in Wausau or Merrill, with a social time from 6 p.m. to 6:45 p.m., followed by chapter news and an informative and entertaining presentation.

January 13 will feature "An Evening With the DNR" at Sconni's Alehouse & Eatery in Wausau. Learn about current and upcoming chapter projects and the state of our trout waters. It will be presented by Taylor Curran and other DNR staff.

February 11 is the 2026 International Fly-Fishing Film Tour (IF4) at the UW-Stevens Point Center for Civil Engagement in Wausau. This is our annual fundraiser. Your support for this event goes back into our local streams in the form of stream restorations, tree plantings and supports LTE crews and helps with youth events and equipment for our TIC programs. Tickets are available at www.flyfilmfest.com. Please join us so we can continue to protect the beautiful places that trout call home.

On March 10 at the Sawmill Brewery in Merrill the subject is "Culverts, Fish, and Water Action Volunteers," It will be presented by Tom Boisvert, conservation program manager for the Lincoln County Land Services Department.

On April 14 at Sconni's Alehouse & Eatery in Wausau, Jake Pease will discuss "Steelhead Fishing Great Lakes Tributaries."

On May 12 at the Sawmill Brewery in Merrill, Bob Paine will discuss "Fly Design for Both Tyers and Non-Tyers Alike."

*—Linda Lehman*

# The trout and I both need a break

**By Peter Jonas,**
**TUDARE Partnership Specialist**

Peter Jonas

**IT'S ONLY SLIGHTLY EASIER TO TAKE A BREAK FROM TROUT FISHING WHEN THE STREAMS ARE THIS GLOOMY**

I get a pretty serious case of the blues when the Wisconsin trout season ends. The past few years, warm weather has lasted well into October, and late season terrestrial fishing has been epic. So, I end the season in a kind of manic flurry because the fishing is great and the sand is falling through the hourglass. When the end comes, it comes hard, and I'm never ready for it.

Even though I must personally deal with an emotional sag during Wisconsin's two and a half month closed inland trout season, I have come to see there is some wisdom to be gained in pausing my normal fishing routine.

Aldo Leopold's concept of voluntary restraint is an idea that has helped me understand these months with more perspective. In Sand County Almanac, Leopold writes, "there is value in any experience that exercises those ethical restraints collectively called 'sportsmanship.'"

But what exactly is the value? When I must stop fishing for a bit, it is a reminder that even though I have some sense of ownership (meaning accountability or responsibility) of the streams I care about and the trout that inhabit them, the trout are not there for me, or my entertainment or even my edification. A trout's life is fiercely focused on living for its own sake.

## Leopoldian restrain

In the middle of October, we set aside some time to allow wild trout to make their babies in peace, and live their trout lives without us around. It is a holy sabbath of sorts. We exercise a bit of Leopoldian restraint in acknowledgment that the trout's reproductive task is arduous and pestering them in their bedrooms is bad manners.

Even if biologists determine that we could safely fish for inland trout year-round, the respect we show to the fish by giving them a couple of months of privacy might continue to be worthwhile as an "ethical restraint" that nurtures our character development as anglers.

The enforced pause in our fishing routine is also a subtle (and for me needed) reminder that there are ultimately more important things than fishing. Somehow life will go on until March, the month I typically pick up a rod again to fish for inland trout.

During the late August to early October frenzy, tasks get put off and relationships get neglected. My ability to live like a responsible adult has never been stellar, and either fishing or thinking about fishing constantly doesn't improve it.

The other day I was sitting in a coffee clutch of new friends, and I realized something was different. My mind wasn't preoccupied with recurrent thoughts like, "My time would have been better spent if I ditched these guys and fished a local creek for a few hours." Or "What day this week can I carve out a few hours to get away to X Creek?"

What I realized is that instead of thinking about these questions, I was simply present in the moment and relishing the company of others like a normal, sane person. Honestly, the trout aren't the only ones that need a break come October 15. I need one, too.

## A personal note

I have been honored to be elected as president of the Wisconsin Clear Waters Chapter, and I will begin my term this month January. As Trout Unlimited wisely prohibits paid staff from serving as officers on chapter boards, I have resigned from my position at TUDARE. Working for TUDARE has been a great experience and learning opportunity, but I am ready to fully retire. I am excited about remaining involved in stream restoration projects as a volunteer and chapter leader. I also intend to continue writing about conservation issues and fishing for *Wisconsin Trout*. Trout Unlimited is a tremendous community of coldwater conservationist and anglers. I am grateful that TU provides many opportunities for all of us to use our skills and talents to improve and protect the watersheds we love.

# Crash course on restoration projects

*In the first of several installments about how the Great Lakes Team completes a project, we take a look at initial project development and scoping.*

**By Chris Collier, Great Lakes Program Manager**

I thought it would be helpful to share a series of articles focused on how our Great Lakes Team completes projects from early project development through post-construction monitoring. In each of these articles, I will provide a case study from one of our projects. My hope is this series will give you a clearer picture of what goes into these projects, while sharing helpful knowledge that might help chapters and their partners with *their* projects.

This first installment will focus on project development and scoping. This step in our project life cycle is almost always the least technically difficult, but if taken seriously it can help navigate or avoid complications in the more technical parts of a project.

Project scoping can be limited to a single meeting, but for some projects can involve multiple meetings and collecting basic data to determine if a project is feasible and what unique complications may need to be accounted for. In my experience, project scoping is most successful when it includes internal and external team coordination, basic site data collection and introducing regulatory partners to the project.

TU CARES

**TU CARES VOLUNTEERS AND TU'S CHRIS COLLIER AT A MECAN RIVER SITE TOUR**
TU's Chris Collier visits potential culvert replacement sites with TU CARES volunteers to discuss the opportunities and difficulties at sites in the Mecan River watershed.

## A gathering of team members is essential

For our projects, internal and external coordination involves getting the appropriate TU team members and external partners to a meeting, preferably at the project location, to discuss project goals and methods. This allows us to see if there are any concerns from partners before spending significant staff hours on a project. External partners can also provide unique perspectives that results in ideas our team hasn't thought of. For this meeting to be a success we've found that having the project team, potential funders, permitting staff and landowners attend will help avoid future headaches and create the best brainstorming opportunities.

Secondly, taking the time to have the scoping meeting at the project site can provide you and the project partners with a chance to collect basic data and discover potential complications in the process. This doesn't mean collecting detailed data for engineering or design purposes but being able to hop in stream and look at a reference reach, see if there are nearby modifications, like a dam, that your project would have to consider, or learn of other site features that could affect a project can save design revisions and project costs in the future. This work can also help get a jump start on fundraising efforts by providing a rough estimate of the project size and complexity.

I want to give a shoutout to our regulatory partners, especially those at the DNR. Regulators don't often get the most positive reviews, but through my career I've learned that when you take the time to bring them in early, rather than waiting until you have a project design, you can save yourself time, money, and an explosion of four-letter words. By getting your regulatory partners in the field they can identify areas to address in project planning like wetlands, high quality habitats, floodplain considerations, and endangered species occurrences. Knowing about these items early on, you can incorporate them into the design process rather than having to revise completed designs during a permitting review. The disclaimer here is that our regulatory partners are often stretched thin and can't make time for every meeting. However, simply making them aware of a project or having a virtual or in-office meeting with them can provide similar benefits to having them in the field.

In closing, with today's technology and fast paced environment, it's easy to get a thumbs up from partners or your team to move forward on a project by email or a web-call. However, the value of an in-person kick off meeting can't be understated, and the potential headaches that can be avoided and ideas that can be brainstormed on-site are well worth an extra trip to the field.

## Case Study: McDonald Creek, Oconto County

The McDonald Creek at Parkway Road fish passage project was one of the first projects I explored after joining TU in 2019. The site was identified by the DNR and had all the makings of an impactful and simple project. This included having a recommended culvert replacement size, affordable cost-estimate, was on a class 1 trout stream, and had strong local support.

However, the project partners only ever talked about this project in passing and "site-visits" were limited to jumping out of the car to look at the crossing while driving up north.

It was a year into the exploration of the project when someone asked if had the survey data to know how deep to set the new culvert? We did not, so our TU team offered to collect that data.

Following our survey, we had a sinking feeling that this project was going to be much larger than our back of bar napkin concept designs.

First, the stream was approximately three times wider than the new proposed structure. Second, upstream of the crossing McDonald Creek had been channelized into a road-side ditch. Third, there was an unnamed waterway flowing into the crossing along with McDonald Creek.

Together, these issues added layers of complexity and costs to the project. Fortunately, these issues didn't kill the project, but they did delay construction from 2020 until 2023 and added significant design and construction costs.

We would certainly have benefited from a project-partner meeting at the site and collecting some basic stream data. This would have helped us keep the project on a shorter construction timeline by understanding our engineering and funding needs from the start instead of a year into the project's evolution.

Trout Unlimited

**A NICE BROOKIE MAKES ALL THE HARD WORK WORTH IT, BUT SOME HEADACHES CAN BE AVOIDED**
Brook trout like this make projects like the one on McDonald Creek worth the effort and headaches that could have been avoided with a project scoping site visit.

# TU's Great Lakes Team Update

*It's "indoor season" for the Great Lakes Team, and that means grant writing, reporting and planning...for another successful field season.*

**HEALTHY BROWN TROUT FROM THE FLAG RIVER**
TU Seasonal Technician Willow Pingel found this large brown trout while surveying the Flag River.

**By Danielle Nelson**

Sitting in my office watching it snow, I can't help but think about how long ago field season seems. In reality, it's been just a few months since we wrapped up our 2025 field work and transitioned to our largely indoor season of grant writing, reporting and planning. This is a perfect opportunity for us to give you an update on our field work in 2025 and share some great photos.

We welcomed back two wonderful returning technicians, Tyler and Willow, and welcomed two others, Nolan and Monika, for their first season with us in Wisconsin. After a very cold and rainy week in May of joint training on road-stream crossing inventories in the Central Sands with DNR and other Driftless-Area crews, they were off to northern Wisconsin for the rest of the summer.

This season, our focus area for road-stream crossing inventories spanned Ashland and Bayfield counties, specifically the Fish Creek and White River watersheds. Throughout the field season, our team visited 330 potential road-stream crossing locations. These "potential culvert" locations were low spots in the landscape, or spots where it looked like a road and stream intersected on satellite or other aerial imagery. "Potential culverts" were mapped prior to the field season using remote sensing tools such as GIS (Geographic Information Systems) and LiDAR (Light Detecting and Ranging) elevation data.

These tools make field planning a breeze, but we still need the all-important seasonal field crew to visit each site to confirm the presence or absence of a culvert. Once they find a culvert, they complete an inventory using the Great Lakes Stream Crossing Inventory Method. This year, our crew completed 243 of these crucial inventories.

Road-stream crossing inventories are an important first step to help TU Great Lakes staff find potential barriers to brook trout movement. Once we find barriers using road-stream crossing inventories, we can work with partners and funders to plan future aquatic organism passage (AOP) improvement projects.

To view completed inventories on the Great Lakes Road Stream Crossing Inventory Database, you can visit this website hosted by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources: https://great-lakes-stream-crossing-inventory-michigan.hub.arcgis.com.

Later in the field season, we also got plenty of electroshocking days in, which are a personal favorite of mine and a hit with our seasonal crews.

One of our monitoring initiatives that requires electroshocking is an effort to quantify the impacts that our on-the-ground projects have on fish populations, and to use that fish data to demonstrate to project planners and funders the impacts of AOP improvement projects on fish diversity, abundance and size classes.

To complete this monitoring work, we use electroshocking equipment to survey fish populations near an AOP structure (usually a culvert) that is going to be replaced and compare that to a nearby control reach in the same stream. These surveys are repeated for 2-3 years before a project happens and another 2-3 years after a project has been completed.

**HARVEY CREEK BROOK TROUT SHOWS ITS TRUE COLORS**

It's fun to see what lives in our streams and we get a great snapshot of what the fish community looks like at our project sites compared to the community in undisturbed reaches.

As part of this monitoring, our Wisconsin staff completed electroshocking surveys at six sites: Harvey Creek in Marinette County, the South Branch Oconto River in Oconto County, near a former logging dam on the North Branch Oconto River in Forest County, Rock Creek in Forest County, Alvin Creek in Forest County, Pikes Creek in Bayfield County and near a former logging dam on Brule Springs in Forest County.

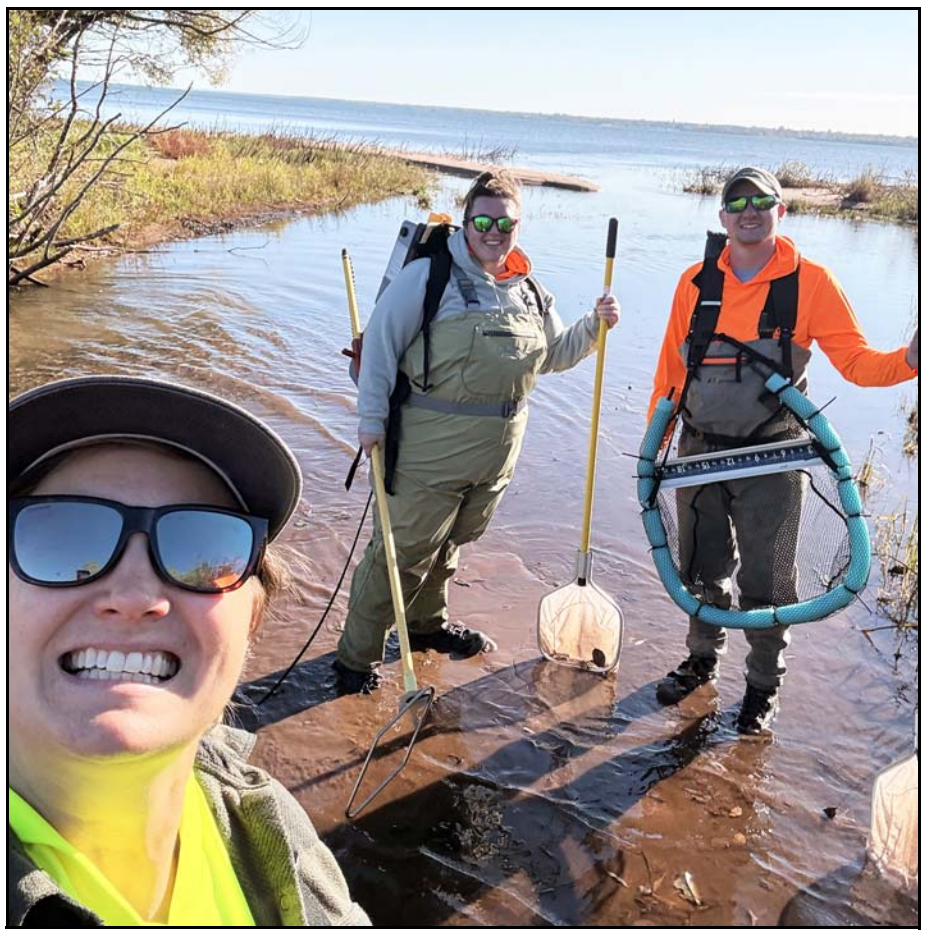
While it's still too soon to provide data from these long-term monitoring projects, I'm encouraged by positive changes to the numbers and relative health of brook trout communities at the sites we've been monitoring for multiple years.

Lastly, our staff and seasonal technicians spent time this fall electrofishing Lake Superior-run streams in Bayfield County to sample for brook trout that might be spending part of their life history in Lake Superior. These "coaster" brook trout were once abundant in Wisconsin's Lake Superior streams but are now exceedingly rare due to historic overfishing and habitat changes.

Our goals with this coaster monitoring project were to weigh and measure brook trout in lake-run streams and collect fin clips for genetic analysis. As part of this effort, we sampled eight stream reaches in the Flag River, Lost Creek, Thompson Creek and Whittlesey Creek.

This work is in its early stages in Wisconsin but will continue during the next few field seasons to get a glimpse into the status of "coaster" populations in our beloved Lake Superior tributaries.

I'm already looking forward to next season's field adventures and can't wait to share them with you. For more information on any of our monitoring efforts in Wisconsin, please contact Danielle Nelson at Danielle.Nelson@tu.org.



**A CHILLY FALL MORNING, BUT A GORGEOUS ONE FOR SAMPLING**
From left: Danielle Nelson, Willow Pingel and Tyler Olson arrive at the mouth of Whittlesey Creek at Lake Superior on a chilly fall morning to begin coaster brook trout sampling.