



Wisconsin Council of Trout Unlimited
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Wisconsin Trout

Spring 2026

Building momentum

We're building momentum towards a \$6 adjustment to our Inland Trout Stamp.

By Council Advocacy Coordinator
Mike Kuhr

Our push to make more investments in trout habitat throughout Wisconsin took another step forward in March. Bills authored by Sen. Rachael Cabral-Guevara and Rep. Duke Tucker were introduced in the state legislature that would adjust the inland waters trout stamp for inflation by \$6 (from \$10 to \$16).

Increased trout stamp funding for habitat projects has been a priority for the Wisconsin Council of TU during each of the last four budget cycles. The last two state budgets proposed by the Governor have included Inland Waters Trout Stamp increases, but each time the legislature has pulled this provision out when drafting and passing their own budget proposals. Our advocacy work appears to be paying off, as we're seeing legislators become more open to the idea of a trout

stamp inflation adjustment.

Thanks to the urging of our volunteer advocates, we were able to pull together several key co-sponsors for the bills in the legislature. The Wisconsin Council of Trout Unlimited would like to thank the authors and co-sponsors in the legislature for standing up and supporting trout stream habitat work across Wisconsin.

All of this is great progress, but we're far from the finish line. By the time you are reading this, the legislature will have finished up its work for the year, so we'll need to come back in January and be ready to advocate for the re-introduction of these bills in the next legislative session and ultimately, the next state budget.

Our attention in April will turn to Wisconsin's Spring Hearings, which will be held in person on Monday, April 13. Online voting will be available from April 13-15.

See **STAMP**, page 3



Mike Kuhr

KINNI SUPPORTED WITH STEWARDSHIP AND TROUT STAMP FUNDS

This stretch of the Kinnickinnic River just outside of River Falls features a public fishing access easement acquired through the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program. Bank shaping and in-stream habitat work was funded by the Inland Waters Trout Stamp.

Chapters across the state receive Friends grants

Chapters across the state will be supporting habitat work on many miles of publicly fishable trout streams in Wisconsin this year, thanks to our Friends of Wisconsin TU grant program.

The Friends program will provide \$32,500 for these projects and

work crews. All chapters will also be matching their grant amount.

The chapters and the projects or work crews that Friends of Wisconsin TU grants will support this year include:

- Wisconsin River Valley, for habitat work on Spring Creek

- Wild Rivers, for TU Great Lakes program labor
- Lakeshore, for habitat work on Ben Nutt Creek
- Blackhawk, for the Southern Wisconsin habitat crew
- Coulee Region, for habitat/restoration work on Pammel Creek
- Green Bay, for a DNR habitat crew in northeast Wisconsin
- Fox Valley, for the Wild Rose habitat crew
- Central Wisconsin, for the Wild Rose habitat crew
- Antigo, for the Antigo DNR habitat crew
- Wolf River, for habitat work/beaver control on Wolf River tribs
- Wisconsin Clear Waters, for habitat improvement on the North Branch of Wilson Creek
- Shaw-Paca, for the Wild Rose habitat crew
- Oconto River, for a DNR habitat crew in northeast Wisconsin

All of the donors who make the Friends program possible deserve a big "Thank You" for their generosity.

All of the good habitat work taking place because of the Friends of Wisconsin TU grant program would not be possible without the contributions of our loyal donors.

Remember that the Friends (and Watershed Access Fund) programs are considered 501(c)(3) charitable programs, meaning that donations are tax deductible.

Also, rest assured that Friends funds are only used on publicly accessible streams. We know that our donors expect the funds to be spent on publicly accessible property and we fully honor those expectations.

—Grant Program Coordinator Kim McCarthy



FRIENDS GRANT WILL SUPPORT NINE MILE CREEK

Next meeting May 30 at the West Fork Sports Club

The purpose of a Wisconsin Council meeting is to provide a venue for the many unique chapters and their members and leaders to share ideas and work through questions and decisions to the benefit of all chapters.

By chance, the "spring" meeting has been held in recent years at the West Fork Sports Club, which means there's another agenda beyond the meeting agenda. That would be fishing, of course.

As always, everyone's invited to our next meeting at 9 a.m. Saturday, May 30. To suggest an agenda item, send it to Chair Myk Hranicka at jdrflooring@gmail.com. Lunch will be served, so please RSVP to Myk if you plan to attend.

Camping is available at the club and elsewhere. Lodging options abound, and there is ample trout water in the area, to say the least. If you're new to the area, there are plenty of folks who will be happy to point you in the right direction, or perhaps even show you. See you there.



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

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Southern Wisconsin (#061): Steve Musser; www.swtu.org
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State Council Leaders

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TU National Board of Trustees: Linn Beck; 920-216-7408; chlbeck@att.net

TU National is there to help

Do you have a question about your membership status? Are you moving, and you'd like to inform us of the address change so you don't miss an issue of your local chapter newsletter, or Wisconsin Trout or Trout Magazine? Have you changed your email address or phone number and would like TU to know? You can easily find answers to these and many other questions by calling Trout Unlimited customer service at 1-800-834-2419. They are very friendly and very helpful.

WISCONSIN TROUT

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

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State Council Officers

Executive Committee includes officers and vice chairs

Myk Hranicka, Chair	Scott Allen, Vice Chair
Boyd Roessler, Secretary	Scott Wagner, Treasurer

STAMP, from page 1

We’ve worked with the Natural Resources Board to include question number 17 on the Spring Hearing Questionnaire which reads:

17. Do you support a \$6 increase to the inland waters trout stamp (from \$10 to \$16), which has not changed since 2006?

We encourage our members to participate in the Spring Hearing process and vote on these important questions. Results will give us a good idea of how much support there is for the proposed increase.

Once we have the Spring Hearing results, we will turn our attention to summer advocacy efforts with elected officials.

We’ve had great success providing “stream walks” for local legislators, local chapter leaders, and council advocacy leaders. We’d like to schedule as many of these stream walks as possible with key legislators this summer.

If you have a local project that you’d like to show off, please contact me at mikek.trout@yahoo.com and I’d be happy to work with your chapter and local elected officials to schedule a stream walk.

We typically spend about an hour on site. Preferred sites have parking available for several vehicles, stream banks that are easy to walk and a site that shows off the importance of state investments through the stew-

ardship and trout stamp programs.

Thank you for your continued advocacy efforts. Together we’re making key strides towards getting the Inland Waters Trout Stamp inflation adjustment to the finish line.

Funding runs out at the end of the fiscal year in June, leaving questions as to the future of subprograms like the streambank protection program, which provides angler access to trout streams running through private property.

Legislators turn out the lights on Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program

The Stewardship Program was created in 1989 to preserve important natural communities, protect water quality and fisheries and expand opportunities for outdoor recreation. These investments in public lands have led to an outdoor recre-

ation boom in Wisconsin, generating more than \$12 billion dollars of economic activity last year.

In 1993, the Stewardship Program was renamed the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship program after two of Wisconsin’s revered conservation leaders, Warren Knowles (Republican governor 1965-1971) and Gaylord Nelson (Democratic governor 1959-1963, U.S. Senator 1964-1981).

The program was reauthorized in 1999, 2007, 2019 and 2021. The last reauthorization runs through June 30, 2026. For the first time in the program’s history, it was not re-authorized through the state budget process in 2025.

Since then, both political parties have proposed bills to extend the program. Unfortunately, lawmakers have failed to reach a compromise on extending the popular program. Funding runs out at the end of the fiscal year in June, leaving questions as to the future of subprograms like the streambank protection program, which provides angler access to trout streams running through private property.

We hope the next legislative session and budget talks will bring better news for the stewardship program. We will continue working with our partners in the sporting community and the outdoor recreation community to advocate for a robust Stewardship program that

benefits all Wisconsinites. Language outlining the structure of the program remain engrained in state statute. It will be up to future elected leaders to choose to fund Wisconsin’s iconic public lands initiative in the next budget cycle.

Trout Stamp Bills

Authors:
Sen. Rachael Cabral Guevara (R - Fox Crossing)
Rep. Duke Tucker (R - Grantsburg)

Co-Sponsors:
Sen. Habush-Sinykin (D - Whitefish Bay)
Sen. Pfaff (D - Onalaska)
Sen. Smith (D - Brunswick)
Rep. Bare (D - Verona)
Rep. Brown (D - Whitewater)
Rep. Callahan (R - Tomahawk)
Rep. Joers (D - Waunakee)
Rep. Kaufert (R - Neenah)
Rep. Kitchens (R - Sturg. Bay)
Rep. Kurtz (R - Wonewoc)
Rep. Miresse (D - Stevens Point)
Rep. Mursau (R - Crivitz)
Rep. O'Connor (R - F. Du Lac)
Rep. Sinicki (D - Milwaukee)
Rep. Stroud (D - Ashland)
Rep. Udell (D - Fitchburg)

Chapters, members celebrate in Oshkosh

From across this beautiful state we travelled, some from right there in town or the nearby Central Sands, or just up the Valley in Neenah, Menasha, Green Bay and beyond. Others made the not-so-long drive up our east coast from their haunts in the southeast. And many others pushed themselves south and eastward from their entrenched northwoods hideaways and Driftless Area homesteads. And many like me ventured on a path toward the holy land of Lambeau Field, but stopping short and grabbing a comfy room at the newly remodeled hotel.

We’re talking about the annual pilgrimage to the annual State Council Banquet in Oshkosh, where we celebrate some honorable people and groups, and raise some money to support our chapters, our vets, our youth, our mission and our favorite causes.

Many folks like me show up on Friday night, excited to reconnect with old friends and venture out to a nearby establishment for crunchy cod, dipped in tartar sauce, a slice of local pizza pie or a burger smothered in cheddar, onions, bacon and mushrooms.

Later, we gather around the hotel bar (if only because this is Wisconsin) to continue our conversations, meet new friends, hug old friends and talk about anything we’d like, but often circling back to things TU related.

Saturday’s meeting is, of course, where the serious work gets done. This venue is one of the few opportunities each year for chapter members and leaders to come together to share ideas and hammer out differences for the good of TU.

After a day in a meeting room, everyone’s excited to shift gears, enjoy friendly company and share in some food and drink to the sounds of some very talented musicians. While you’re doing that, you can also explore the year’s collection of raffle prizes and auction items

This year’s banquet featured a raffle for a hand-crafted fly-tying

desk from Randy Arnold of the KipTuWish Chapter and a one-week Canada fly-in fishing trip donated by God’s River Lodge in northern Manitoba. Both items sold out their 100 tickets early in the evening. Additionally, 60 bucket raffles and silent auctions were very popular,

bringing in more than \$9,000. In total, the event raised \$16,000.

Most importantly, we honored several selfless and passionate individuals and one amazing chapter with our annual Council awards. Photos and details of this year’s awardees begin on page 14.

You’re invited and welcome to attend the Council’s 2027 Awards Banquet on Saturday, Jan. 23 at the Oshkosh Convention Center. And consider coming up on Friday night to catch up with TU friends old and new, perhaps at a traditional fish fry. You won’t regret it.

The Wisconsin Council of Trout Unlimited

would like to thank the following
2026 Banquet Sponsors for their support:

WATERSHED LEVEL:
Trout Lines Travel Company
Lee Wulff TU
Southeastern Wisconsin TU

TRIBUTARY LEVEL:
Kathleen Falk
Marissa Genske & Family
Gordon Grieshaber
Guideline Studios LLC
Michael San Dretto
Kim McCarthy

RIVER LEVEL:
Michael Staggs

HEADWATERS LEVEL:
Robert Bechard
Todd & Stephanie Franklin
Graeme Hodson
Merjent
Dennis Vanden Bloomen
Duke & Kristal Welter

Together, along with our donors and attendees, we raised over
\$25,000 for cold water conservation in Wisconsin.
THANK YOU.



THE COUNCIL YOUTH FISHING CAMP IS AUGUST 13-16

Council youth fishing camp registration off to strong start

As anticipated, the Council Youth Fishing Camp is filling fast. We already have eight campers registered. We also have several youths interested and I have sent out brochures for them and their parents. I will reach out to the corresponding chapters if they decide they would like to attend.

If your chapter has a youth in mind or you are actively searching for a youth to sponsor, please reach out and let me know so I can reserve a spot for you. We'll hold these spots until May 31. The camp will be held at Pine Lake Bible Camp in Waupaca from Thursday, August 13 through Sunday, August 16. I am happy to report that the cost for the chapter will remain at \$250 per youth. If you'd like additional information about the camp and its itinerary, please let me know.

If you are interested in helping us out as a weekend mentor or as a Sunday only fish-a-long mentor, we still have several openings. The camp will pay for your lodging and meals if you stay with us at the camp. You don't have to be familiar with fishing in the Central Sands on the Sunday adventure, as we provide maps and coordinates for all the fishing spots we use. Also, all our fishing spots we use for the Sunday fish-a-long will be marked with signage, and DNR staff will be cutting paths to the fishing spots.

If you have any questions or are interested in coming out for the weekend, please contact me at chlbeck@att.net or 920-216-7408.

—Linn Beck, Youth Camp Coordinator

Spring Hearings April 13

Question 17 asks whether you support a \$6 trout stamp increase.

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Wisconsin Conservation Congress (WCC) invite the public to attend the annual Fish and Wildlife Spring Hearings held in every county on Monday, April 13, at 6 p.m. to learn about and provide input on resource management in the state.

You can find the list of hearing locations at widnr.widen.net/s/mcxqjtlpzg/2026_spring_hearing_locations. An opportunity to provide public input online will be available at dnr.wisconsin.gov/about/wcc/springhearing from 6 p.m. on April 13 through 6 p.m. on April 15.

Note that question 17 asks whether you support a \$6 increase to the inland waters trout stamp, which has not changed since 2006.

At the in-person spring hearings, DNR staff and WCC delegates will be on hand to discuss local issues of importance, answer questions from the public and open a dialogue between the public, the DNR and the WCC about areas of interest and concern.

The WCC will also hold delegate elections at each meeting. Two of the five WCC seats will be up for election in each county.

Finally, the public is invited to provide feedback on a variety of fish, wildlife and other natural resources-related topics as part of the spring hearing process. The public is encouraged to provide feedback through a QR code available at spring hearing locations on April 13, or online from 6 p.m. on April 13 through 6 p.m. on April 15. For those who prefer to do so in person, several paper input forms will be available at each in-person meeting.

The Wisconsin Conservation Congress is the only statutory body in the state where the public elects delegates to advise the Natural Resources Board and the DNR on responsibly managing natural resources for present and future generations. The WCC accomplishes this through open, impartial, broad-ranged actions. Learn more about the WCC and how to become involved in resource management decisions on the DNR's Wisconsin Conservation Congress webpage.

Does your fishing car have a TU license plate yet?

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



Council adopts resolution, establishes work group

At the Wisconsin Council's Annual Meeting on Saturday, Feb. 7, council and chapter leaders devoted a good portion of their time to discussing public-access policy on projects in the Driftless Area of Wisconsin. TU's regional Driftless Area Restoration Effort (DARE) Program utilizes federal grant dollars to occasionally do work on private lands without public access. This practice is contradictory to the council and local chapter policy of only doing work where public access is present unless otherwise approved by the council.

The issue came to light with the Fancy Creek project underway in Richland County. Once completed, a one-mile-long ditched section of stream will be put back in its original meandering stream channel. The lower quarter of the project has public fishing access easements on both banks and is adjacent to a state highway. The upper three quarters of the project is protected by a conservation easement through the Mississippi Valley Conservancy, but as of this date, public stream bank access has not been acquired.

The project has a long list of partners, and TU DARE's contribution is being funded by a grant through NRCS (federal farm bill dollars). The NRCS grant scoring system gives points for public access, but it is not a requirement. Early in the process, TUDARE Program Manager Sara Strassman approached the council about the project. Once it was determined that full public access would not likely be granted at the start of work, it was agreed that no council or chapter funds should be used for the project.

It was pointed out during the meeting that Fancy Creek will receive a Coldwater Conservation Fund ("CCF") grant from Trout Unlimited for post-project monitoring. The CCF is a vital source of private, unrestricted funding for TU projects. The mission of the CCF is to support scientific research, on-the-ground projects, and other high-priority work of Trout Unlimited that might not otherwise be funded. The CCF Board of Directors meets annually to determine grant recipients.

Some attendees objected strongly to TUDARE's current policy and the lack of access on the Fancy Creek project citing the disincentive the project provides to landowners who might consider future easements, TUDARE's history of supporting public access, and the high cost of the project without much landowner contribution.

Defenders of the policy cited the project's exceptional wetland and stream restoration and the importance of securing federal funds, which do not require public access, for stream restorations in the Driftless Area.

During the discussion, several people brought forth a resolution that was amended, debated and ultimately passed by the council. This included Peter Jonas of the Wisconsin Clear Waters Chapter, Topf Wells and Michael Williamson of the Southern Wisconsin Chapter and Kim McCarthy of the Green Bay Chapter.

The resolution requires Wisconsin Council leadership to appoint a work group to take a closer look at the issue of public access on projects in the Driftless Area and to make suggested recommendations for the council to consider at its fall meeting.

Thank you to the following leaders for stepping up and offering to serve on this work group: Chris Firkus, Jason Freund, Bill Heth, Henry Koltz, Paul Kruse, Rick Larkin and Duke Welter.

Currently, the council is in the process of selecting an independent facilitator to handle the logistics of the work group meetings and assist in a fair and transparent process.

The resolution also directs the council and work group to assist the TUDARE program manager with restarting regularly scheduled TUDARE Advisory Committee meetings to foster better communication and project awareness between chapter leaders, council representatives and TU National staffers working in the Driftless Area. If your chapter would like to have a representative on this TUDARE Advisory Committee, please contact Council Chair Myk Hranicka.

18th DARE Symposium a success

In February, the 18th annual Driftless Area Symposium in Onalaska hosted more than 115 participants to teach and learn about trout genetics, stocking activities, stream restoration permitting, outreach strategies, beavers, springs and more.

We had more than 30 presenters, including students who shared their research activities. The event included an evening meal and social on Wednesday, with lunch and workshop sessions on Thursday.

The symposium included partner engagement booths and materials from the No765kVLine group, Fishers & Farmers Partnership, Ohio River Basin Fish Habitat Partnership and the Outdoor Recreation Alliance.

The National Fish Habitat Partnership is celebrating its 20th anni-

versary this year and our sister FHPs were in attendance to help spread the word and answer questions. We also welcomed participants from the Upper Midwest Stream Restoration Symposium, which held its annual conference in La Crosse on the preceding days. They invited DARE Coordinator Sara Strassman to present to their event, creating an opportunity for more cross-pollination between Trout Unlimited, the Driftless Area Restoration Effort FHP and the stream restoration practitioner community.

Presentations were recorded during the event and will be posted to the Trout Unlimited Driftless Area Playlist.

—Sara Strassman, DARE Project Coordinator

Canadian company GreenLight Metals continues drilling in national forest

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

Canadian corporation GreenLight Metals (GLM) has been pursuing exploration drilling on the North Fork of the Yellow River in the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest in Taylor County. Currently, GLM is also engaged in a second round of exploration drilling on what is known as the Soo Line 40 parcel, which has privately owned mineral rights. This is also in the Chequamegon National Forest. The drilling is designed to provide information on the size and makeup of the deposit.

Now they are preparing for a third round of drilling adjacent to the Soo Line parcel, which will require a new and distinct federal prospecting permit from BLM because the Soo Line parcel is surrounded by federal mineral ownership (BLM) under federal land owned by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS).

Prospecting applications require submitting a plan of operations (POO) to the local BLM office. Oversight also typically involves the USFS, as is the case in Taylor County.

We were still awaiting an official POO submission as we went to press, and we cannot be certain as to when to expect it, or when to expect the prospecting permit, although it could possibly be this summer.

GLM has been loudly and persistently claiming they plan to turn northern Wisconsin into a mining center, with multiple mines in operation, as well as complete ore processing.

The area GLM wants to mine includes historic sturgeon-spawning waters, is currently home to wood turtles, and is upstream from a tribally significant wild rice bed.

A new giant may be emerging

In late 2025 and early 2026, Lundin Mining Corp. completed the sale of its Eagle Mine and associated Humboldt Mill in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula to Talon Metals Corp., a subsidiary of Rio Tinto. Under a definitive share purchase agreement signed in December 2025, Talon acquired 100 percent of the producing Eagle nickel-copper mine and the processing plant from Lundin in exchange for 275.15 million Talon common shares, with Lundin now owning about 20 percent of Talon.

Completed in January 2026, this purchase makes Talon the only U.S. company owning a primary, producing nickel-copper mine. This also strengthens Talon’s operational base as it targets exploration expansion and broader critical minerals production in both Michigan and Minnesota. Talon is pursuing both the Tamarack Nickel-Copper-Cobalt Mine near Tamarack, Minnesota. They also have 400,000 acres leased in the U.P. where they are actively conducting mineral exploration.

Back 40 Mine update

The current owners of the Back 40 site on the Menominee River seek a merger, which, if approved, will once again mean this proposed mine is back to zero. The Back 40 Mine is a proposed open-pit metallic sulfide mine targeting gold and zinc deposits in Menominee County, Michigan in the South Central part of the Upper Peninsula,

right on the Menominee River.

Gold Resource Corp. (GORO), which acquired the Back 40 from Aquila Resources in 2021, has agreed to merge with Goldgroup Mining, Inc. If finalized, the combined entity, operating as Goldgroup, will take over the proposed Back 40 project. Goldgroup CEO Ralph Shearing said if the merger closes, the company will initiate a new pre-feasibility study to evaluate the project, essentially hitting reset on the entire approval process. While some permits were issued to Aquila in the past, prior to its sale of Back 40 to Gold Resources, the project currently has no permitting. The new owners are expected to restart the state permitting process, following their pre-feasibility study.

Federal legislation

We are following four pieces of federal legislation with potential impacts on Wisconsin.

House Resolution HJR140 would undo mining protections related to the Boundary Waters

Canoe Area Wilderness. HR4090 (U.S. Critical Minerals Dominance Act) and HR1366 (Mining Regulatory Clarity Act) will expedite and increase mining operations on federal lands. In the Senate the “Mining Regulatory Clarity Act (S544)” appears to be making progress.

Feel free to contact me at jbridgwater@wisconsinrivers.org about all things mining. You can also visit River Alliance of Wisconsin’s Mining Page for online resources dedicated to mining education. You can also sign up for our “Mining Updates” email. Visit us at Wisconsinrivers.org.

Watershed Access Fund: Obtaining public access

The Watershed Access Fund supports the acquisition of easements and properties to increase public access on our trout streams. We are currently in negotiations to help acquire a significant amount of access on a well-known northern trout stream. We hope to share more about this in a future issue Wisconsin Trout

Our Watershed Access Fund Contributors

Jason Anderson	Richard Gallig	Hartland, WI
Independence, KY	Gordon Grieshaber	
Elias Anoszko	Mineral Point, WI	
Gary Anoszko	Dousman, WI	
Charles Barnhill	Madison, WI	
Jeffrey Bartynski	Eau Claire, WI	
Jim Bayorgeon	Appleton, WI	
Jim Beecher	Madison, WI	
Mark Bielfuss	New London, WI	
Stephen Born	Madison, WI	
Curtis Brandt	Stoughton, WI	
Ken & Marge Bukowski	Green Bay, WI	
Ron Campbell	Ontario, WI	
Christopher & Katherine Claflin	Linwood, KS	
David & Jill Coenen	Combined Locks, WI	
M.Scott Conner	Oconomowoc, WI	
Terry Cummings	Rhineland, WI	
Dale Dahke	Knapp, WI	
Chuck De Zwarte	Janesville, WI	
Katherine Duplessie	Eau Claire	
Patrick Eagan	Middleton, WI	
Michael Elkins	Mauston, WI	
John & Kathleen Ewen	Neenah, WI	
Kathleen Falk	Madison, WI	
Erik Forsgren	Freemon, WI	
Ronald French	Fitchburg, WI	
Robert Gundrum	Menomonee Falls, WI	
Robert Haglund	Green Bay, WI	
Dean Hagness	Custer, WI	
Henry Haugley	Sun Prairie, WI	
Kurt Helker	McFarland, WI	
Mark Heifner	Appleton, WI	
Robin Hering	Sparta, WI	
Jerome Hero	Kimberly, WI	
Phyliss Hunt	Waupaca, WI	
In Memory of Bob Hunt		
Greg Hyer	Cross Plains, WI	
Thomas Janssen	Appleton, WI	
Ron Jirikowic		
Jeffrey Johnson	St. Croix Falls, WI	
Kent Johnson	Hudson, WI	
Peter Jonas	Arcadia, WI	
James Kellner	Grafton, WI	
Steven Kennedy	Eau Claire, WI	
Kay Koltz	Eagle, WI	
Peter Kurtz	Menominee, WI	
William Lammers	Deer Park, IL	
John Lindberg	Wautoma, WI	
Michael Lutz	Middleton, WI	
Douglas MacFarland		
Don Malchow	Dousman, WI	
	Tomah, WI	

Jeanne & Kim McCarthy	Poynette, WI
Green Bay, WI	
Max Mc Donnell	Stoughton, WI
Ellsworth, WI	
Carolyn McGuire	Peshigo, WI
Marinette, WI	
Peter Meronec	Viroqua, WI
Stevens Point, WI	
Robert Moser	Madison, WI
Milwaukee, WI	
Gene Mueller	Dennis Vanden Bloomen &
Monona, WI	
David & Deb Muresan	Becky Flynn Eau Claire, WI
Viroqua, WI	
In Memory of John Nebel	Greg Vodak Stoughton, WI
Menasha, WI	
Paul Neuman	Scott & Holly Wagner Hudson, WI
Baileys Harbor, WI	
Cheryl & Winston Ostrow	David Wahl Lakewood Ranch, FL
Viroqua, WI	
Randy Rake	Don Welhouse Kaukauna, WI
Helena, MT	
Bob Retko	Topf Wells & Sally Probasco
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Kenneth Rizzo	Madison, WI
Oconomowoc	
David Rohde	Paul Williams Madison, WI
Waukesha, WI	
John Rose	Jim Willis Birchwood, WI
White Lake, WI	
Joseph Saiz	Bill Wisler Dodgeville, WI
Edina, MN	
Jack Saltes	
Mount Horeb, WI	
Charles Sanders	
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Neenah, WI	
Jack Saunders	
Beaver Dam, WI	
Jeff & Mary Schmoeger	
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Daniel Schoenherr	
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Shawano, WI	
Joseph Schroeder	
Germantown, WI	
Daniel Schultz	
Appleton, WI	

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
Wis. Clear Waters	Eau Claire, WI

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

Payable to: Wisconsin Council of Trout Unlimited

MAIL TO: Kim McCarthy	Name
736 Meadowbrook Court	
Green Bay WI 54313	Address
	City, State, Zip
	Phone

Project delay threatens Great Lakes

The last line of defense against invasive carp continues to face challenges.

By Jamie Vaughan, Trout Unlimited Great Lakes Engagement Manager

The future of a long-awaited project to keep invasive carp out of the Great Lakes has become uncertain once again. Just months after President Trump publicly promised to propel the project forward, the effort has come to an unexpected halt.

Lawmakers from Michigan and Illinois are pressing federal officials for answers after learning that the project has been paused for an administrative review, stopping the release of previously approved funding and preventing new contract awards. In a January 15 letter, U.S. Senators Elissa Slotkin and Gary Peters of Michigan and Dick Durbin and Tammy Duckworth of Illinois warned that the unexplained hold could raise costs, delay completion and increase the risk of invasive carp entering the Great Lakes.

Invasive carp have the potential to wreak havoc on the world’s largest freshwater ecosystem. To stop their spread, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) has developed the Brandon Road Interbasin Project. In the works since the early 2000’s, the project is a complex ecosystem protection effort designed to prevent upstream movement of invasive carp and other aquatic nuisance species into the Great Lakes from the Illinois Waterway.

The Brandon Road Interbasin Project, led by the USACE Rock Island District, will use a suite of innovative technologies including air bubble curtains, electrical barriers and acoustic deterrents. Located on the Des Plaines River near Joliet, Illinois, the Brandon Road Lock and Dam serves as the critical control point where these layered defenses can be most effective. This project is widely considered the last, best opportunity to prevent invasive carp from entering the Great Lakes.

Among the four invasive carp species -- bighead, silver, black and grass carp -- bighead and silver carp pose the most immediate threat due to their proximity to Lake Michigan. Introduced in the 1960’s to control vegetation and mistakenly believed to be sterile, these carp reproduced, escaped into the Mississippi River system, and eventually reached the Chicago Area Waterway System connecting to Lake Michigan.

These large, fast-growing fish that can approach or exceed 100 pounds can outcompete native fish and harm native habitats, further destabilizing an ecosystem already strained by other invasive species.

Officials have long feared the fish could slip past Chicago and enter the Great Lakes, threatening the region’s tourism, boating and fishing industries. With Great Lakes fisheries valued at more than \$7 billion annually and supporting more than 75,000 jobs, they are an economic

engine for the nation. Today, the invasive fish are knocking on the doors of the Great Lakes system. USACE project managers are raising the alarm that time is running out. In July 2024, sensors picked up two tagged pregnant silver carp moving toward the lock, the third such incident within a year.

Trout Unlimited has long been advocating for full federal and state funding for the \$1.15 billion dollar project.

At the urging of concerned constituents, Congress appropriated \$274 million, much of which was provided by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, to accompany an additional \$114 million committed by the states of Michigan and Illinois. A key Project Partnership Agreement signed in 2024 advanced the project into the first of three phases of construction.

Despite recent progress, the project has long been plagued by delays and uncertainty.

Progress had been slowed in part by Illinois’ need to secure a small parcel of land from a retired coal-fired power plant. Although state and federal reviews showed contamination risks were low, the issue added time and frustration. Governor Pritzker also voiced concern that only Illinois and Michigan were contributing financially and technically to a project with such broad regional and national importance.

With the agreement finally signed in July 2024, USACE awarded the initial construction contract. By early January 2025, crews were on site removing trees and carving out bedrock for Phase 1. More than

85 percent of the planned excavation, about 30,000 cubic yards of material, was completed within the first months, carefully timed to coincide with a scheduled closure at the nearby Lockport Lock to minimize impacts on navigation.

Amid construction, the project also reached a technological milestone with the installation of a state-of-the-art sonar surveillance system known as LISSA, the Live Imaging Sonar Surveillance Array. Operating around the clock, even in the murky water of the Illinois Waterway, LISSA uses advanced sonar and machine-learning tools to detect, count and characterize fish movement through the lock area. The data collected between April and September 2025 will form the basis of new models predicting the likelihood of carp movement.

Preparations for bidding on the installation of the cutting-edge deterrent technologies are underway, as well as design work for Phase 2, focusing on complex features like the flushing lock and electrical barrier.

The project team continues to push forward, working hard to keep construction on schedule as regional leaders call for an end to the unnecessary delays. Each setback increases the risk that invasive carp could move beyond existing barriers and enter Lake Michigan, risking the devastation of this extraordinary ecosystem. The region’s freshwater resources, and the communities that depend on them, are nationally significant and require the robust and immediate support of the federal government.



USACE Rock Island District

“XCENTRIC RIPPER” BREAKS UP BEDROCK
Contractors used an underwater jackhammer called an “Xcentric Ripper” to break up and remove bedrock from within the river channel below the Brandon Road Lock to make way for the engineered channel for the Brandon Road Interbasin Project.



USACE Rock Island District

CONTRACTORS WORKING THROUGH THE NIGHT
Contractors for the Brandon Road Interbasin Project work through the night to complete rock excavation in the channel of the Illinois Waterway.

What will your legacy be?

The Wisconsin State Council has a permanent endowment fund: 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.

- You can donate to the Wisconsin Council of TU Fund with:**
- A gift of cash
 - A gift of appreciated securities
 - A gift through a personal donor advised fund.
 - By naming this fund as a beneficiary of your will, life insurance policy, IRA or retirement plan.
 - Through a bequest, charitable gift annuity or a life-income fund.

Contact Ben Strand at the Natural Resources Foundation at Ben.Strand@WisConservation.org or 608-409-3133.



What will your legacy be?

Help support our mission of coldwater conservation in Wisconsin

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

Wisconsin State Council of Trout Unlimited Fund

Contact Ben Strand at the Natural Resources Foundation at Ben.Strand@WisConservation.org or 608-409-3133

TU's Great Lakes Team Update

Crash Course Restoration Projects: Project partnerships and defining roles.

By Chris Collier, Great Lakes Program Manager

This is part two of a series looking into lessons learned by the TU Great Lakes Team developing and completing projects. My hope is that some of the lessons we've learned (and are still learning) can help our chapters and other partner organizations when completing restoration projects.

The Winter 2025 issue of *Wisconsin Trout* focused on project development and scoping and showed how our Great Lakes team seeks to develop projects.

In this, the second part of this series, I want to dive into how we take the project scoping process and use it to find project partners.

By finding project partners I mean determining what groups from our identified stakeholders should be and/or would like to be actively involved in getting a project implemented. Through this process we identify what groups or people should be invited to play a role in the partnership.

Next, we clearly define roles and expectations. Finally, we define who the lead partner is and how the groups will communicate. Project partnerships can be fluid and evolve over time from planning through construction, but taking the time early on to build a project team can help unlock funding resources and expertise that can move a project faster than relying on a single group.

How do we find partners?

First, how do we find the right partners? In most cases, the project scoping and development phase will lead directly to this. By developing a project idea with peer organizations, local governments, state and federal agency staff, and landowners, you should have a strong potential partners group in place.

Now is the time to cement those partnerships by asking the group who wants to be involved in getting the project completed, or by inviting specific partners because of a unique role they can fill, such as engineering and permitting support, for example.

During these discussions you'll likely find a few new organizations or individuals to invite to the project team. When deciding who to invite to the team, think about your project development discussions so you know what tasks need to be

completed and can think of partners that may be well suited to handle those tasks. Now that your project team is assembled, it's time to define roles.

Defining roles

Defining roles before major project work begins helps keep the project moving smoothly. It limits confusion regarding who is responsible for what tasks, and gets partners focused on priority work.

For the types of projects our Great Lakes Team works on, some common roles or tasks we see are surveying, engineering and design, funding, permitting, contracting and construction oversight, and monitoring.

There are cases where TU has filled all project roles, but we try to reserve that level of responsibility to the most unique circumstances. Having just one organization doing all that work limits their ability to work on multiple projects. For example, our team would probably be limited to three or fewer projects each year if this was our preferred project structure.

Simply having one partner to handle a larger task, such as funding, engineering, or construction oversight, increases our capacity to take on more projects. Then, by adding partners, we can see watershed-scale impacts in just a few years. This is the value of bringing partners together, and it leads to great short- and long-term outcomes, as long as the group stays focused.

Designating a lead partner

The lead partner responsibility should be thought of as another key project role, not just a designation of who will be listed as the project contact or what organization will pick up the slack if a task isn't completed. For a project to be successful, lead partners clearly communicate each group's responsibilities, have regular check-ins on individual tasks, and host recurring full-partnership update calls.

As partnerships develop over time, it's common for these check-ins to become more informal, but it's important to still have a group or individual tasked with tracking project progress and communicating updates to make sure nothing is missed.

When partnerships are organized in an effective way, we see



Florence County

RECONNECTING MORE THAN SEVEN MILES OF TROUT STREAM HABITAT

An aluminum box culvert installed by a Florence County contractor on Hendricks Creek reconnected more than seven miles of trout stream habitat.

large and complex projects completed in less time and with fewer headaches than when an organization goes it alone.

TU seeks watershed-scale restoration through our work, and I believe we shouldn't limit that goal to how many projects are completed. Instead, we should seek out those projects and try to get as many stakeholders as possible in those areas involved. This is how we tackle game-changing projects and maintain momentum over the long term.

Case Study: Florence County Land and Water Department partnership

Instead of highlighting a single project, I want to showcase our partnership with the Florence County Land and Water Department.

The Northern Wisconsin Great Lakes team has been partnering with Florence County since 2017 to replace fish passage barrier culverts with new road-stream crossings that reconnect trout habitat. These projects involve a variety of partners including the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Wisconsin DNR, Wisconsin DATCP, and Town governments. This rotating cast of partners has been tied together through a combination of individual projects and a broader partnership focused on improving trout streams in Florence County.

The projects we work on together are typically similar; identifying culverts that prevent fish from moving upstream and replacing them with fish-friendly structures. The close partnership between our team and the county allows us to pursue projects even when there isn't a concrete plan for what's next or funding support. We work to keep our other

partners aware of projects we are considering and when there's support from funders or interest from partners, we can quickly mobilize around a shared priority.

Along with being able to quickly bring together a project team, the time investment made in Florence County has created a consistent partnership structure. By completing multiple projects together, the organizations we work with are generally aware of what they will be asked to do.

For example, Florence County typically works on fundraising, design, contracting and construction oversight, and coordination with local governments. TU works on survey and design work, funding and assists with construction oversight. DATCP leads the design process, provides licensed engineering review to the county, and provides funding. The DNR works through permitting and can provide funding. Towns provide cost sharing and coordination with landowners.

These defined and consistent roles make it easy for us to come together and divide a project among the partners, rapidly moving projects to construction.

Florence County does not have the infrastructure budget of larger and more populous counties, but they are still a leader in fish passage work. This is because they identified a need in their community and spent the time bringing together partners that help them work on projects that would be difficult to handle on their own. By investing time in partnerships, they've built a sustained effort that brings resources to their communities and helps Trout Unlimited work to improve trout stream health.



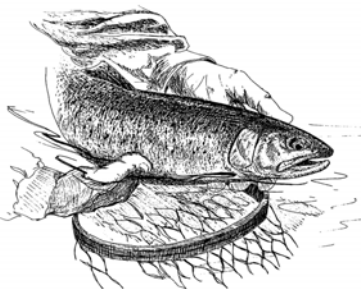
Trout Unlimited

USING THE PROJECT DEVELOPMENT PHASE TO IDENTIFY PROJECTS

Using the project development phase to identify projects opens the door to project partnerships that can enable your team to get more work done.

Consider Proper Release

It's working...so let's keep up the good work!

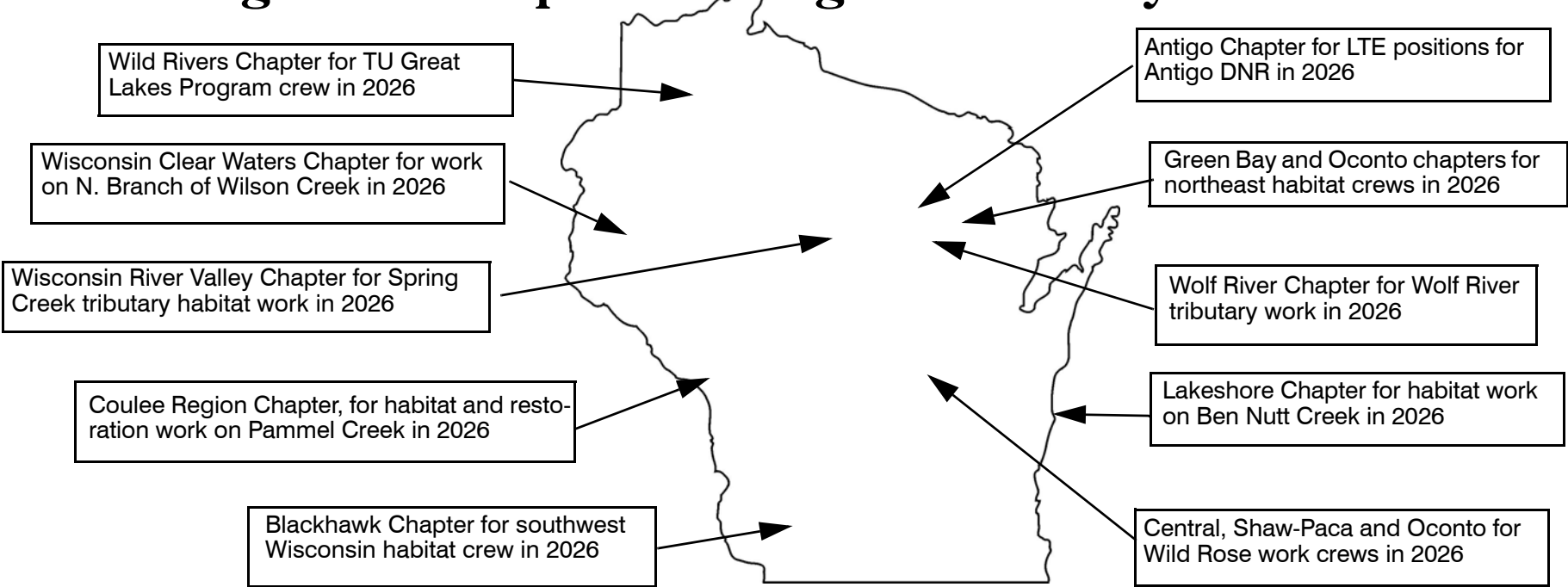


1. **Don't play fish to exhaustion.** Instead, use a landing net to bring fish under control before they're played out.
2. **Handle fish in the net.** Grasp them across the back and head for firm but gentle control. Use the net fabric as your "glove."
3. **Turn fish belly up while removing hooks.** This disorients fish momentarily for easier, quicker handling.
4. **Don't remove swallowed hooks.** Just cut the line...doing so saves two-thirds of deeply hooked trout.
5. **Don't keep fish out of the water more than 10-15 seconds.** Fragile gills are damaged after that...especially in cold weather.

Become a Friend. Support habitat work.

The 2026 Friends of Wisconsin TU grant season is underway, chapters are submitting their applications for the new grant year and grants will be awarded in February. Grants are made possible by the generous donations from TU members and friends. Please consider becoming a Friend of Wisconsin TU and supporting habitat work throughout the state.

Providing habitat improvement grants for 35 years.



Our Friends of Wisconsin TU

Dennis Anderson	St. Paul, MN	Ralph Klassy	North Fond du Lac, WI	Donald Smail	Wausau, WI
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Rick Christopherson	Norwalk, WI	Pete Meronek	Stevens Point, WI	Dave Vogt	Presque Isle, WI
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Arlene Colburn	Oregon, WI	David & Deb Muresan	Viroqua, WI	David Wahl	Lakewood Ranch, FL
M. Scott Connor	Oconomowoc, WI	John Murphy	East Troy, WI	Duke Welter	Spooner, WI
Dana Corbett	Verona, WI	In Memory of John Nebel	Menasha, WI	In Memory of Bill Pearson	
Terry Cummings	Rhineland, WI	Greg Oberland	Whitefish Bay, WI	Donald Williams	Fort Atkinson, WI
Dale Dahlke	Knapp, WI	Cheryl & Winston Ostrow	Viola, WI	Paul Williams	Madison, WI
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Patrick Eagan	Middleton, WI	Randy Rake	Helena, MT	Norbert Wozniak	Stevens Point, WI
Eden Women's Firemen's Auxiliary		Bob Retko	Viroqua, WI	Marguerite Zaspel-Van Ark	Suamico, WI
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Doug Erdmann	Wisconsin Rapids, WI	Michael Routhieaux	Janesville, WI		
John & Kathleen Ewen	Neenah, WI	Frank Roznik	Maribel, WI		
William Flader	Madison, WI	Tom Ryan	Whitefish Bay, WI		
Jerome Fox	Two Rivers, WI	Jack Saltes	Mount Horeb, WI		
David Frasch	Chippewa Falls, WI	Charles Sanders	Middleton, WI		
Kevin Freson	Reeseville, WI	Mike San Dretto	Neenah, WI		
Eric Forsgren	Fremont, WI	Jeff & Mary Schmoeger	Lake Mills, WI		
Richard Gallig	Hartland, WI	James School	Kaukauna, WI		
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Daniel & Sheree Kehoe	Madison, WI				
James Kellner	Saukville, WI				
Steven Kennedy	Eau Claire, WI				

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

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

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

Name _____

Address _____

City, State Zip _____ Phone # _____

New fly shop and guide service opens in Chippewa Valley



Peter Jonas

SMALL SHOP WITH BIG PLANS

The Red Cedar Fly Shop may be small, but owner Jeff Frawley intends to have a big impact in the Chippewa Valley area.

By Peter Jonas,
Wisconsin Clear Waters Chapter
President

Jeff Frawley has fished three continents, but he chose to open a guiding business and fly shop in the town he grew up in: Menomonie, Wisconsin.

“Within 45 minutes of the shop, there are roughly 150 miles of water on the Red Cedar and Chippewa rivers. Plus, when you add in all the trout streams nearby, the diversity of things you can do with a fly rod is unmatched. A buddy is coming up here to fish with me and we are going to try and catch a musky, a brown trout and a steelhead in one trip. Where else in the world can you do that?”

Frawley opened Red Cedar Fly Fishing in fall 2025 with a clear vision of what he wants the business to be. “I would describe Red Cedar

as a small, boutique-type fly shop focused on supplying everything you need to fly fish in our area. A fly shop needs good stuff, but it isn’t about carrying the most expensive brands. It’s about creating an atmosphere where anglers want to hang out in and offering knowledgeable guidance about fishing the local water,” according to Frawley.

Located in a small building in downtown Menomonie, the shop carries a curated collection of flies, rods and equipment to cover trout and warm-water fishing. Everything is arranged and displayed with an eye to aesthetics and functionality. Geographically, there isn’t a fly shop between the Driftless Angler in Viroqua and Lunds in River Falls. Frawley reports that many anglers who have grown accustomed to ordering things online are excited to come into the shop and support a local business.

While Frawley loves to fish for trout, and the shop has a great selection of trout flies and gear, his guiding focus is on pursuing bass, muskies, northern and walleye from his drift boat. “I love rowing as much as fishing, so I love guiding in my boat. I can refer anglers to local guides who specialize in trout fishing, but my focus will be guiding in the drift boat.”

As soon as his business opened, Frawley made it a point to support Trout Unlimited and other non-profit conservation and recreation groups. Red Cedar donated a guided trip to the Banff Film Festival in Eau Claire, which raises funds for the Wisconsin Clear Waters Chapter and other conservation organizations. And when Frawley took initiative to bring the F3t fly fishing film festival to Menomonie, he invited the Wisconsin Clear Waters Chapter and the local chapter of Rivers for Recovery to join him as partners and receive the proceeds of the raffles.

“Supporting local conservation organizations is great for the shop, and something I want to do personally. I plan on growing the shop organically, but I want it to stay small, and yet have a big presence,” Frawley said.

Frawley is an army veteran who served two deployments, one to Iraq and one to Afghanistan. So supporting Rivers of Recovery, which provides rehabilitation to physically and psychologically injured U.S. combat veterans through fly fishing and other outdoor activities, is especially meaningful for him.

“For the veteran community, fly fishing is great activity for mental health. When you are on the water, you shut everything else off and there is just the river, the casting and the fish,” Frawley said.

You can find more information about Red Cedar Fly Fishing at redcedarflyfishing.com. You can find more information about Rivers for Recovery at riversofrecovery.org.



Submitted photo

HIS FAVORITE PLACE: JEFF FRAWLEY IN THE DRIVER’S SEAT.

New tax law change regarding donations

The tax year 2026 will see a significant difference in how taxpayers will be allowed to deduct contributions to charitable organizations.

In recent years only those who itemized have been allowed to directly deduct their contributions from their total income. The problem has been that approximately 90 percent of tax filers no longer itemize because the standard deduction has been raised to the point where most tax payers are better off using the standard deduction instead of itemizing. That has meant that many donors have not seen a tax break for donating to charitable causes.

Now a change in the tax code will hopefully allow programs like the State Council’s Friends of Wisconsin TU and Watershed Access Fund to benefit from increased contributions.

Starting with the 2026 tax year, donors will now be able to deduct up to \$1,000 (\$2,000 if filing a joint return) from their taxable income for donations to any qualifying 501(c)(3) nonprofit. That deduction is available to taxpayers who use the standard deduction and do not itemize. The deduction is only available for donations made with cash, checks or credit cards. Donations of clothing or other material goods are not allowed.

If you use the new deduction, be sure to retain proof of your donations in case of an audit. Acknowledgement letters from the charities should also be saved. In the case of donations to our Friends and Watershed programs, all donors who send contributions are provided with a follow up “Thank You” letter, which serves this purpose.

Donors who have been giving part or all of their IRA required minimum distributions to charity are allowed to continue those donations just as they have been doing for the last few years.

As always, be sure to check with your financial advisor to make sure your donations are appropriate and allowable for your individual situation.

What legacy would you like to leave?

The Wisconsin Council of TU now has a permanent endowment fund entitled 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 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 Ben Strand at Ben.Strand@WisConservation.org.

RECOLLECTIONS

Killer Ray and the Melon Man

Master trout storyteller Rick Larkin shares another crazy story from the old days.

Columbia County in the late 1970's was not known for its trout water. It still isn't, but that never stopped my buddy, Killer Ray. He could never overlook a tip about good trout water if it was within an hour's drive of Milwaukee. That's where he ran a small liquor store with his brother, Denny.

Killer Ray was especially rabid about brook trout. Although Denny was also a trout fisherman and was similarly enthusiastic about brookies, but he was not rabid, like Ray. They took turns, with one running the store while the other fished, which allowed them to fish on weekdays when the fishing pressure was low.

In those days I worked for a small business and business was slow, allowing for weekday invitations from Ray. If he wanted a fishing buddy, I was happy to oblige. One September he invited me along to check out some spots he had not fished in a while.

Always an adventure

A trout trip with Killer was always an adventure. Killer Ray was a rugby nickname. Ray was an old veteran player, about 15 years older than me, and played for the same local rugby as I did. He anchored the fullback position on our fourth side. The D side. On the rugby pitch, the fullback is the last line of defense.

It was a large and successful city men's rugby club with our A side comprised of the best 15. The B side was nearly as good with younger players on the rise or guys just coming off the more competitive A side. Our C side was more social but still played good rugby. Most of those guys just did not like to practice twice a week or had wives or jobs which prevented a greater commitment to the sport.

Our lowest side, the D side, was referred to as our "beloved fifteen drunks and cripples." They were the party squad. We gave them nicknames like: "The Rock," "Man-boy," "The King," "Toothless John," "Dribbles," "Nutsy," and so on. This was thought to instill fear or at least discomfort on the opposing side, hence Ray's teammates bestowed upon him the "Killer Ray" moniker.

At least 40 years old, skinny, not particularly fast, and partially blind in one eye, owing to a motorcycle accident, Ray patrolled the deepest part of the pitch from his fullback position, looking for the odd stray kick and anyone making a break-away. From the sidelines the rest of us would silently pray when a loose ball or, God forbid, a streaking ball carrier got anywhere near Killer Ray. His tackling was terrible.

Still, in the tradition of rugby, Killer and the rest of the D-siders were part of the team. They wore the same club uniforms, albeit repaired older versions of what we wore. They played a (mercifully) shortened Saturday game, and always attended, often with greater gusto than the rest of us, the post-match party.

Killer was divorced and a ladies' man. More accurately, he was divorced because he was a ladies' man and, at the post-match party, it became evident that, after a few beers, the girls who liked rugby players couldn't tell the difference between

the A side boys and the D side boys. Killer used this confusion to his advantage.

Catching brookies, not rugby, was his real passion

But rugby was only a weekend passion for Ray. His real passion was trout fishing, especially brook trout. It was all he talked about. The back room of his little liquor store on the northwest side was his de facto trout fishing clubhouse where he often hosted evening bull sessions attended by a motley group of neighborhood trout fishermen (aka good customers) and a few rugby guys (also good customers) who also loved to trout fished.

Drawn by the lure of free beer, albeit slightly flat remains of unfinished returned party kegs, we would engage in trout talk late into the night. It was here that secret information regarding the best trout spots was discussed in hushed tones. Various streams, flies, bait, where to catch big trout, and how to avoid certain testy landowners were the typical range of topics. There was also talk about secret hand-tied flies, along with the exchange of hand-drawn maps and phone numbers. All manner of trout fishermen attended these sessions.

While Ray was adept at swinging wet flies on an old bamboo rod, he would probably resort to dynamite or electrofishing if things got slow. The back room was a rare example of neutral ground, and purists were not welcome. I was the youngster in this group, soaking up trout knowledge and drinking beer until it was time to go home.

Garden rakes?

That September morning, Killer Ray's old Volkswagen camper van, covered with the dents of countless deer collisions, rolled into my yard. It was still dark. The van was his rolling trout warehouse, full of fly rods, waders, fly boxes, coolers, etc. This time, I noticed a couple of metal garden rakes, some spinning rods, and a tackle box I had not seen before. A dirty Styrofoam cooler marked "worms" was also in the back. Killer, as I indicated, was no purist. I loaded my gear and jumped in.

While I knew Ray, I did not know him well but knew enough to not ask him too many questions about the morning's trout expedition. He was more than just a little vague about disclosing his secret spots, or having permission, and was good at dispensing incomplete or heavily edited information regarding places to trout fish. I once witnessed him sprinting away from an angry farmer and clearing a barbed wire fence with a rolling high jump, displaying an athleticism I never witnessed on a rugby pitch. Later, he said there was a "misunderstanding" regarding permission in that particular pasture.

We rolled out of my driveway and headed west towards Madison. The van slowly reached its top speed of around fifty miles an hour. We poured two coffees and settled in.

After a while, I couldn't take it anymore and asked, "Hey Ray, where the hell are we going?"

"Can't tell you. Privileged information." He said. "Secret" he con-

tinued.

"Bullcrap," I scoffed.

OK, Columbia County." He paused. "Near Rio."

"Thanks," I mumbled. This was no help.

I dug out my copy of Clarkson's Wisconsin Trout Maps from my rucksack. It was the best compilation of trout information available at that time. About the size of a road atlas, it contained 48 pages of county trout maps, listings of streams, species of trout present, the miles of the trout water present, the classifications of the trout streams listed, and other useful information. I opened the page for Columbia County. There were five trout streams in the whole county. Only three indicated native brookies. I was confused. Columbia County didn't seem to be any sort of trout hotspot.

I pressed Ray. "Prentice Creek?"

"No," said Ray.

"Hinkson or Rowan?" They were close to each other.

"No."

"Rocky Run?" It had brookies.

"No."

"Jennings?" It also had brookies"

"Only if we have time." Ray enjoyed torturing me.

"That's the last one! Come on Ray!" I growled irritably. I had seventy pounds on him, was way faster, and could actually tackle him if I felt like it.

Who's the Melon Man?

"We're going to visit the Melon Man." He smirked, knowing he was driving me nuts.

"Who?"

Ray ignored me.

"But we gotta make a stop first, near Rio."

"OK." I was resigned to being in the dark, again. I checked my map book. Jennings was the closest trout stream to Rio. Native brookies were indicated and, per the map book, only brook trout were present. Maybe the Melon Man was a landowner Ray had charmed into giving him permission on a private stretch of Jennings Creek. We rolled through the sleepy little village of Rio and kept going in the direction of Jennings Creek.

Columbia County is a mix of mostly level agricultural land, interspersed with large tracts of marsh and a good amount of forest, mostly hardwoods. The Wisconsin River with its sloughs and tributaries cut through the northwest corner of the county. The few trout streams present were slow flowing, low gradient examples which relied on cold spring water to support the trout.

Owing to the low-lying and level character of the land, and the presence of very fertile black silty soil, large tracts were drained for muck farming for growing vegetables like celery, carrots and onions. Mint was also grown here, and the typical practice for farming mint was to ditch and drain small rectangular forty-acre parcels for its cultivation. Drain tiles gushed cold spring water into these ditches which were filled with watercress, and, not surprisingly, trout. Fishing these ditches was an occasional topic back at the liquor store/clubhouse, and it was always discussed in hushed tones.

We pulled up to a lush dark

green farm field on a gravel road next to a ditch filled with watercress. The sun had just come up and the air was heavy with mint. Ray parked and we got out.

"Is this a trout stream?" I asked, completely dumbfounded.

Grab a rake!

"Grab a rake." Ray barked.

"Huh?"

"To rake holes in the watercress, dummy!"

"Are you sure we can do this" I asked.

"It's a public road, dummy." Said Ray, a little miffed at me

I was still confused but grabbed a rake and began to help Ray rip holes in the watercress floating on top of the water. Starting at one end of the ditch, we ripped holes in the thick green mats of the watercress, revealing gin-clear water and white sand below. We did this for almost half an hour, making holes through a sizeable stretch of the ditch.

Back at the van, I started to put my fly rod together.

"Put that thing away, Pilgrim. This is spinning-rod work," he asserted.

Ray was always a catch-and-eat guy above all else, and while he was an incredibly good fly fisherman, fresh brookies for supper were always a priority. Technique was not always important. We grabbed spinning rods, walked upstream to the holes we had created first, and started dropping in nightcrawler baited hooks weighted with a little lead. Ray knew the trout we had scattered with our raking would return by the time we got to the first hole we raked. It became pretty clear that he'd done this before.

Eager brook trout would almost always grab the crawler before it hit the bottom of the hole. They were nice, healthy and fat, with most pushing 12 inches. Ray grinned and noted how well they would fit in his big cast-iron fry pan. "Perfect eaters," he said.

While I thought this technique would probably not put us on the cover of any trout magazine, it was highly effective and damn clever to boot. It was not like any trout fishing I had ever done before and, soon we had our limit.

Close call

As we turned around to walk back to the van, I noticed Ray looking around nervously. It was now mid-morning.

"Time to go." He said quietly, scanning the countryside.

"I thought you said we had permission?"

"I never exactly said that." Ray added a little defensively.

Our pace back to the van quickened.

Once back at the van, Ray put the fish on ice, jumped in, started the van, and we took off down the road. A speeding white pickup appeared in the distance. He quickly lost the truck by scooting down a lane in a woodlot. By all appearances, he had done this before.

"Was that as close as I thought it was?" I asked.

"Closer than you will ever know." Said Killer.

"Time to see the Melon man." He continued, and I was confused

all over again.

As we drove, I suspected that this ditch fishing was a surprise attack he had planned, banking on nobody being around midweek on that lonely gravel road. We drove, taking a series of turns down the gravel roads designed, I think, to either throw off any pursuing landowner, or maybe to completely confuse me so I could never find this secret place on my own.

It worked either way, and I looked in vain at the map in the trout book, trying to figure out just where the hell I was. It was hopeless and I was just plain lost. I gave up. "Just go with the flow," I told myself.

Then I asked, "Ray, ain't it a little late in the season for melons?"

"Not the point, Pilgrim." He had probably seen the movie "Jeremiah Johnson" a few too many times and called everyone "Pilgrim."

As the van rolled down another gravel road, Ray returned to the swaggering undersized D-side full-back and party animal known as Killer Ray.

Finally...the Melon Man

We stopped at a rundown little house with a faded painted plywood sign announcing "Fresh Melons." Ray hopped out and pounded on the front door for what seemed like a long time. Eventually a frail old man appeared at the door, carrying a portable oxygen bottle. He recognized Ray.

"Hello friend! Have any of those delicious melons left?" asked Ray, loudly.

"What a suckup." I thought.

"Got a couple left," said the old man disappearing into the house.

Soon, the garage door began to open, revealing sheets of plywood on sawhorses with some small, wrinkled melons on them. Ray picked two of the least wrinkled ones and gave the Melon Man two dollars and thanked him. He also gave him two brookies in a plastic bag. The garage door closed behind us.

"Supper for the old boy," he said.

"What the hell was that all about?" I asked. "Those melons look kinda spoiled."

"I had to make sure the Melon Man was still alive so we could fish his pond."

"Clever," I thought.

I just shook my head and got into the van. Ray backed the van out of the driveway and turned down a grass two-track, just down the road from Melon Man's house. Ray filled me in a little further.

"Met him years ago. He has a great spring pond where ditches draining the melon fields empty. He told me he used to be a big-time melon farmer. Now he has just a little melon patch." Ray slowed the van to a crawl. I could see the pond up ahead.

"So, Pilgrim, wanna know what that pond is loaded with?" Ray grinned.

"Carp?" I asked.

"Smartass" said the Killer. "It's loaded with big brookies, you dope. That's why I gave him a couple of fish. If we catch a couple of bigger ones, we won't be over our limit."

Surprisingly, Ray usually played by the rules as to the legal bag limit. While he never talked about getting any tickets for over-bagging, my gut told me he probably got a few back in the old days. He was just being a little more careful as he got older.

A gin-clear spring pond

At about an acre, the Melon Man's spring pond was gin clear water and thick with aquatic weed growth and hidden in a grove of willows. As we got closer, we could see the surface dotted with the occasional ring of a rising brook trout.

We got out of the van. It was now approaching mid-day and time for lunch and maybe a quick siesta. A lunch in the field with Ray was also an experience, as the food selection often involved hard-boiled eggs and hard sausage fished out from under the front seat of the van, dark rye bread, an onion, nasty mustard or horse radish, and a big bottle of dark, often warm, German beer.

All of this would be laid out on an old metal TV tray. It was better than it sounds. We ate, laid down in the grass, and drifted off. We awakened sometime later and noticed the pond was experiencing some sort of hatch which triggered vigorous rising activity from its resident brook trout. Rise rings seemed to be everywhere.

"String your fly rod, Pilgrim," he said, as even more rings started to appear on the surface.

He strung his old bamboo and tied on something large and fuzzy. I strung my fiberglass WonderRod and did the same.

There, on the little pond, I experienced the best dry-fly brook-trout fishing until that point in my young life. And honestly, I have not come close to it since. The trout were eager, strong, fat and hard fighting. Their color was stunning. Time disappeared, and as the light grew dimmer, the trout became even less discerning, eating anything buggy looking that would float by. I lost count of how many I caught. Ray

lost count, too, but later insisted he caught more. And, of course, his were larger.

All this made me smile. It was the same bravado you would expect from a skinny little guy who would attempt to tackle a two hundred pounder running down the pitch carrying a rugby ball. That's probably why they called him Killer Ray.

The pond became quiet as the light faded and we knew our fishing day was over. Besides, we were tired from catching so many fish. We broke down our rods and cracked open two beers. We laughed, realizing we had forgotten about keeping the two more trout we needed to fill our limit.

As I drank that beer, I reviewed the events of the day. Trout fishing in a ditch with a garden rake with sketchy permission? Check. A daring escape from what might have been an angry landowner, or just a guy in a white pickup who was in a hurry. Check. Using a two-dollar melon purchase to get access to a hidden pond full of eager brook trout. Check. It was just too much for my exhausted brain.

You'll never find this place

Killer Ray just smiled. "Don't worry, Pilgrim, you'll never find this place, even if you have a million years."

I knew he was right and just drank it all in.

The beers were now empty, and Ray broke out a wrinkled little melon. He sliced it open with a pocket-knife and gave me some. It was the most delicious melon I have ever eaten, and I know I will never get another one quite like that ever again.

Congress could repeal safeguards protecting the Boundary Waters

Every year, 150,000 visitors travel to the remote Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness for its unparalleled recreational opportunities amongst abundant lakes, rivers, and streams. But Congress could repeal safeguards protecting this water wonderland.

On Jan 21, the U.S. House of Representatives narrowly passed a resolution that would permanently overturn a 20-year mineral withdrawal issued by the U.S. Forest Service in 2023.

The U.S. Senate is poised to vote on H.J. Res. 140, which would open the door for sulfide-ore copper mining on the doorstep of the Boundary Waters, putting clean water, pristine wilderness and native lake trout habitat at risk.

At nearly 1.1 million acres, the Boundary Waters spreads across the northeastern tip of Minnesota, containing over 1,100 lakes, 2,000 designated campsites, hundreds of miles of rivers and streams, and one of the largest self-sustaining populations of native lake trout in the lower 48. The three-million-acre Superior National Forest, which encompasses the Boundary Waters, contains 20 percent of all the fresh water in the entire National Forest System.

America needs critical min-

erals, but we don't need to endanger America's most visited wilderness area to secure their supply chains. Impacts from accidents or failures could cause irreversible harm to this water-

shed, threatening lake trout populations, water quality, wildlife habitat, and thousands of outdoor recreation jobs. It's a risk we can't afford to take.

Tell your senators to oppose

H.J. Res. 140 and protect the Boundary Waters.

—*Jamie Vaughn, TU Great Lakes Engagement Coordinator*



Working to return the West Fork to its glory

There is great hope that, with help, the West Fork Kickapoo will cool down and return to the trout stream it was before the 2018 flood.



SHRINKING THE POOL HELPED LOWER THE TEMPS
Senior Fisheries Biologist Kirk Olson said the in-flowing stream above the spring was 67 degrees and after the spring entered and mixed with the upstream water, the outflow was 63 degrees.

By Jason Freund
Photos by Kirk Olson, DNR

The West Fork of the Kickapoo has always had a special place in my heart. It is where I learned to fly fish. Growing up watching and being part of some of the stream restoration work helped form my career plans. In recent years, the West Fork has not been what it once was, but there is optimism for the future. There is great hope that the West Fork will cool down and return to the trout stream it was before the 2018 flood.

On a once-common old map of Wisconsin trout streams and ponds, the West Fork was a dotted line, classified as marginal trout water. But after years of amazing effort by the West Fork Sports Club, Blackhawk Chapter and other TU chapters, Vernon County and the DNR, the West Fork became a wild, self-sustaining brown trout fishery. During my youth, it had a great sulphur mayfly hatch, and the stream was known for its larger-than-average trout. Sure, it got a little warm in the summer, but that helped it grow larger fish.

The stream habitat work narrowed the stream, which cools it largely through reducing stagnated water. For decades, the West Fork was a great fishery, one of the United States' top 100 trout streams, at least according to a book published by TU. Everything changed in the 2018 floods when the Jersey Valley Dam failed. Under the best of circumstances, the dam did few favors for the West Fork. Yes, it was a "bottom draw" but with a maximum depth of 18 feet, nobody should mistake it for a tailwater fishery. What's left of the dam continues to isolate a population of brook trout above it, which I am grateful for.

Volunteers from the Coulee Region Chapter have been recording temperatures on the stream for several years. This year the stream hit 84 degrees on June 22, the warmest reading I had ever seen. That morn-

ing, I journeyed along the West Fork and Coon Creek watersheds checking on water temperatures. By about 9 a.m., the water held back by what is left of the Jersey Valley Dam was nearly 80 degrees. I have no idea how much warmer it got on that hot, sunny day but I know that the weather station and stream gage at the West Fork Sports Club, a few miles downstream, recorded that 84-degree water temperature.

Maybe that was the tipping point. Vernon County and the DNR came up with a plan to reduce the pool behind the dam. The La Crosse fish habitat crew brought out their heavy equipment and reduced the size of the pool. In doing so, it not only reduced the amount of shallow, sun-baked water, but it also exposed a large spring complex within the impounded area that nearly doubles the flow of the stream.

Senior Fisheries Biologist Kirk Olson said the in-flowing stream above the spring was 67 degrees and after the spring entered and mixed with the upstream water, the outflow was 63 degrees. Now that the cold water from the spring does not spread out over a shallow flat in the impoundment and warm in the sun, the spring will continue to help cool the stream.

As we saw later that summer, the West Fork still got a little too warm from time to time, but nothing like we had experienced in the nearly seven years since the 2018 dam failure.

This has huge implications for the future of the West Fork as a stream that is no longer coming out of the dam at temperatures above those in which trout thrive will have impacts the length of the stream.

While the plans for rebuilding the Jersey Valley Dam downstream seem to be on hold, in the short term the West Fork will see the benefits of less water behind the dam. With Vernon County receiving a \$300,000 Pre-Disaster Flood Resilience Grant, there will be funds to complete hydraulic and hydrology studies necessary for stream work to



LARGE SPRING COMPLEX UNDER THE POND DOUBLES FLOW
With water temps reaching the 80s below what's left of the dam, the LaCrosse Habitat Crew brought out some heavy equipment and reduced the size of the pool.

be completed.

A long-awaited project near Bloomington could happen much sooner, further reducing water temperatures. Also, recent work on West Fork Sports Club property has created a meandering stream where a long flat once existed.

All of these developments will lead to a healthier West Fork, a stream whose fish assemblage had been looking much more like a warmwater stream than a trout stream in recent years. As streams warm, they gain fish species as few fishes other than trout and sculpin can persist in colder streams. In recent years, western blacknose dace, white suckers and creek chubs comprised a large percentage of the fish in the stream.

Brown trout are able to grow much larger with abundant forage

fishes, so I expect to see an increase in average size these next few years as water temperatures become more hospitable for trout. And trout are resilient with few of them living more than three years in our streams which means that their populations can rebound quite quickly.

Expect to see the West Fork look something more like it did before the 2018 floods, which would be very welcome news.

Many thanks to DNR La Crosse Fisheries and dam safety engineers, along with Vernon County Conservationist David Hettenbach, for making this happen. I'm excited to see that a West Fork Watershed Council has been formed and will be working with landowners in the watershed to improve the landscape, which will also improve the stream.



YES, EXCAVATORS CAN AND DO GET STUCK SOMETIMES

Wisconsin Council of Trout Unlimited

Flash Sale: Now thru April 24

<https://troutunlimitedapparel2026springwebstore.itemorder.com/>

In honor of the work TU is doing in Wisconsin, we're making WI TU embroidered apparel available for a limited time.

For every item sold, \$5 will be donated back to the Wisconsin Council of Trout Unlimited!

Online orders only.

Sale ends April 24.

Orders ship approx. 4 weeks after (expect June delivery)

<https://troutunlimitedapparel2026springwebstore.itemorder.com/>

The Wisconsin Council of Trout Unlimited is working to ensure future generations access to cold, clean, fishable water.

Central Sands Celebration

Restore, enjoy, and celebrate the Mekan River



FRI, MAY 15 - SAT, MAY 16
COLOMA, WI

FREE AND OPEN TO PUBLIC
HOSTED BY TUCARES

plant trees | restore trout habitat
explore stream insects
learn fly casting and tying | games | music
free lodging and meals provided

TROUT UNLIMITED Every River Needs A Champion

CONTACT JAMIE AT [JVAUGHAN@TU.ORG](mailto:jvaughan@tu.org)
TO LEARN MORE AND SIGN UP

TUCARES: A community effort

With the completion of our Mekan River Watershed Comprehensive Plan, the workgroup committee for TUCARES is ready to start implementing the plan.

We also have an inventory of all the Mekan River Watershed Steam Crossings, thanks to Chris Collier and TU's Great Lakes Restoration team.

We have most of the information needed to implement the plan to improve and protect the watershed. The committee will now evaluate the findings, and prioritize the needs and begin to line up funding.

Last year's Central Sands Celebration was such a success that we decided to bring it back. We are putting the finishing touches on this year's celebration. This event is about bringing the local landowners, the community and TU together to protect coldwater resources in the Central Sands region.

This year's celebration is May 15-16 on the Mekan River in Richford. There will be stream-side events on Friday with an

entomology station, and we will also have a station for fly casting.

On Saturday morning we'll join the Central Wisconsin Chapter for their workday just off the 9th Avenue parking lot on the Mekan River.

The Central Wisconsin and Fox Valley chapters will provide lunch.

For those who would like to stay on site, we will have some free rooms at the Mekan River Inn, thanks to a grant from Bell's Brewing. Please watch for the event sign up emails or tu.org to check out the event site and sign up.

To finish off the weekend, on Sunday, May 17 is a fishing contest for the TUCARES chapters. We are asking for the Shaw-Paca, Frank Hornberg, Central Wisconsin and Fox Valley chapters to put together four-person teams to compete for bragging rights. Please come out and join in the fun.

—Linn Beck,
TUCARES coordinator

Kiap-TU-Wish excited about May STREAM Girls event



GIRLS ENCOURAGED TO REGISTER FOR KIP-TU-WISH STREAM GIRLS

Girls ages 11-15 are welcome to register. For more information email Michelle Bevis at michelebevis@kiaptuwish.org.

By Michele Bevis,
Kiap-TU-Wish Chapter

The trout, beavers, geese and birds can expect a gaggle of young girls to gather near their Rush River home on Saturday, May 16 at the Ellsworth Rod And Gun Club outside of Ellsworth, Wisconsin. The girls and volunteers will be there from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., rain or shine.

Our chapter will be ready with volunteers, snacks and lunch. And thanks to recent grants and support from our chapter, we will again provide every girl with waders, boots, fly rod and flies for an introduction to fly fishing and coldwater ecology. There are no costs to participants.

Last year we expanded our outreach to include the Pierce County 4-H club, The Pierce County Journal Newspaper, Wisconsin Outdoor News, several nearby TU chapters and teachers from the Ellsworth

and River Falls area. We also communicated with several Girl Scout leaders from nearby towns.

Through those contacts, last year we caught the enthusiasm of 15 spirited girls. Typically in grades six through eight, most girls came from the River Falls area, plus a few from the St. Paul area. We even had three gregarious and animated fifth-grade girls. All showed up right at 8:30 a.m. ready to go. Volunteer guides from the Kiap Chapter and Fly Fishing Women of Minnesota assisted the girls to catch and cast for their first trout on the fly.

National TU provided us with their colorful one-page flyer that promotes the STREAM Girls program. Linda created a specific flyer with an electronic link that participants can use to register. This year, our flyers will have a QR code that parents and guardians can use to register. We're also working on handling our photo and liability waivers

at the same time during the electronic sign up. Every year we add something new that makes our event planning a little easier - and a little less stressful.

Last year, one girl was dropped off and picked up by her grandfather. After seeing how dedicated all the volunteers were and how much fun the girls were having, he was impressed enough to make a modest donation to our chapter. This speaks to the devotion and enthusiasm we see year after year from our chapter members and related angler groups and supporters.

There's plenty to prepare, but each year gets a little easier in some ways. Nonetheless, there's always a certain amount of stress. What if no girls sign up? What if it rains or storms? Can we have as much fun inside the lodge? What if we don't have the right size boots or waders to fit one or more of the girls? What

if a lead volunteer can't show up at the last minute?

Any stress is worth it when we see the smiles and confidence the girls have earned by the end of the day. What's really fun is a hearing girl yell out when she catches her first trout, then finding out later she said it was "the best day of my life!"

We have a few volunteer instructors who are close in age to the STREAM Girls, but we welcome additional young girl anglers to volunteer. If you are a young girl angler or know someone who is, and want to volunteer this year, please contact Michele at michelebevis@kiaptuwish.org for more information.

All girls in grades 6-8 are welcome to register. We'll follow up with an email and more information. We can't wait to hear from you. If you can't find one of our flyers with the QR code, please contact me at the email above.

We will once again provide every girl with waders, boots, fly rod and flies for an introduction to fly fishing and coldwater ecology. There are no costs to participants.



KIAP-TU-WISH CHAPTER'S 2025 STREAM GIRLS

Meet our 2025 State Council Award winners

Our Awards Banquet in Oshkosh honored these amazing volunteers and professionals.



LINN BECK RECEIVES A NATIONAL AWARD AT A TU MEETING IN MAINE
Resource Award of Merit

Linn Beck

Linn Beck’s passion for trout fishing began on the Tomorrow River, when at 15 years old he caught his first trout on opening day. That first trout obviously hooked him for life.

As with most of us, our late teens and 20s are a traverse of highs and lows, compounded with moves, job changes and romance, but even then he maintained a Trout Unlimited membership...usually. He admits to a few gaps during those younger years. By 1999, however, he went all in. He decided to become a life member.

“I was always active monetarily from the get-go,” Linn recalls. “I donated to the Embrace-A-Stream program every year. I attended chapter banquets and I supported local donation requests.”

Eventually, he settled into his life as a working man and had 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. In 2012 Wisconsin Council Chair Henry Koltz asked Linn to succeed him, which he proudly agreed to do.

As a Council Chair Linn served two exemplary terms, followed by two terms as the Wisconsin Council’s representative to the TU National Leadership Council (NLC).

Most volunteers would be happy to rest on a bed of laurels the size Linn has produced, but Linn is not yet ready for rest. Last year he 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. He’s also an instigator and a doer. In 2013 Bob Haase and Linn hatched the grand idea of forming a youth camp. They put together a curriculum, age limits and chose a location. Then they 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 more. It’s been 12 years since that first camp, and thanks to Linn’s efforts, the chapters and council have introduced fishing to more than 200 boys and girls.

For Linn’s devotion to youth education, he was honored by TU National with their 2022. At the state level Linn has received numerous awards, including the Youth Education Award and the Gold Trout Award.

For his many years of extraordinary service and his recent ascent to the TU Board of Trustees, we are honoring Linn with our Resource Award of Merit, of which only the most luminous dignitaries receive. He barely made it to the banquet in time to receive his award, as his newest and most significant Trout Unlimited role to date had required him to be in attendance at his first meeting of the TU Trustees in Washington, D.C.

Hunt-Vetrano Resource Professional Award



CHAD DEWYRE

Chad DeWyre

Chad DeWyre is a Civil Engineering Technician (CET) for the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) in Northwestern WI. He graduated from UW-River Falls in 2000 with a bachelor of science degree, majoring in Land Use and Planning.

As a CET with a passion for environmental integration, Chad focuses on the intersection of technical design and natural resource management. Chad has 25 years of conservation-related work experience, of which 14 has been with NRCS and 11 years previously with a county land conservation

department.

Chad has been a great partner in the stream-restoration community since he began trout stream work in 2008. Since then, he has worked to restore 10.4 miles of local streams. When NRCS stream design standards changed a couple of years ago, Chad committed himself to understanding and implementing the new standards and continued to move stream projects forward.

In 2025 Chad completed designs and supervised construction on two different restoration projects to meet the challenges of ditched streams—a two-stage ditch that allows Danuser Creek to regain some sinuosity, and a complete re-meandering of the North Branch of Wilson Creek, where 4,600 feet of a ditched stream was returned to much of its original channel along with an adjacent wetland restoration. The Wilson Creek project required precise engineering which analyzed stream stability with the purpose to improve water quality and aquatic habitat. Planned in 2026 is an additional 5,000-foot section of stream on Gilbert Creek in Dunn County.

Chad implements projects through a team approach, as a respectful and cooperative partner with many other stakeholders. He strives to understand landowner needs and concerns and collaborates with DNR professionals and TUDARE in an exemplary way.

With a background in AutoCad Civil 3D, Chad excels at translating complex site data into actionable designs. His professional interest in hydrology and earthwork is mirrored in his personal life, where he spends his time focused on active land management and habitat improvement at the family farm.

The Wisconsin Council was honored to present Chad DeWyre with the Hunt-Vetrano Resource Professional Award. Congratulations, Chad.



THE GREEN BAY CHAPTER IS TRULY HITTING ON ALL CYLINDERS
Silver Trout Award for Chapter Merit

Green Bay Chapter

Like many chapters, the Green Bay Chapter provides plenty of opportunities for volunteers to roll up their sleeves and get dirty. Their habitat improvement days last summer took them to Spring Creek, Doty Creek, Long Creek and Beaver Creek.

Beyond work days, however, the Green Bay Chapter is currently firing on all cylinders and covering all the bases. Just consider some of these examples

The chapter has overseen TIC programs at Seymour High School and Bay View Middle School and is now adding Ashwaubenon High School to its TIC outreach efforts.

The chapter always contributes a significant amount for habitat work at the Council’s annual Northeast Region meetings.

The chapter’s Trout “Tails” Educational Trail continues to serve as an example for chapters across the country.

The chapter often hosts fascinating guest speakers at its meetings, with presentations on fish habitats, trout streams and more. These meetings feature free food, door prizes, and typically average 20 to 25 attendees each.

They partnered with other conservation organizations to teach kids fishing and convey the value of our coldwater resources. This includes the Outagamie County Conservation Club’s Take-a-Kid Fishing Day, the Green Bay PALs Program, Exchange Club and Brown County Izaak Walton League Kids Fishing Day (for 30 years) and an Izaak Walton League convention.

The chapter offers one of the most active TU Veterans Service Programs (VSP) in the country, accumulating more volunteer hours at their events and activities than most, if not all, TU chapters in the entire country.

As for fundraising, in just a few weeks will be the Green Bay Chapter’s 50th Annual Conservation Banquet. That is a significant accomplishment for any conservation organization. Not only that, attendance is astounding each and every year. Last February’s chapter banquet generated nearly \$34,000.

When it comes to communications, they’re leading the pack. In October the chapter launched a new website, which TU National quickly took notice of. Now TU promotes the Green Bay Chapter website as an example for other chapters to learn from. And, as is necessary these days, but not always practiced by many chapters, is a thorough use of social media. The chapter utilizes Facebook, Instagram, X, Constant Contact, television networks and other channels to communicate its message, activities and mission.

Looking to the future, chapter leaders have developed an excellent leadership crew, welcoming a new secretary, treasurer and vice president. The chapter is using a unique approach, offering leadership and board positions with lower levels of responsibility to younger or less experienced members, while offering roles with more responsibility to veteran members. With a solid and ever-growing group of leaders and a succession plan in hand, the Green Bay Chapter’s future shines bright. Congratulations!



WHEN SOMETHING NEEDS DOING, JASON ALWAYS STEPS UP FIRST

Distinguished Service Award for Leadership

Jason Freund

Jason Freund has a “lead-by-example” style that works well in a grassroots organization like Trout Unlimited. His background in academia, and time spent working with students at both Carroll University in southeastern Wisconsin, and now at UW-La Crosse, serves him well as a TU volunteer and leader. Jason has the ability to get a classroom of students with a diverse range of backgrounds and interests to engage in and thoroughly explore topics related to ecology and biology. He’s equally adept at pulling a group of volunteers together to work for the betterment of our coldwater resources.

He is the type of person who just does what needs to be done, no matter what the job is. He’s a role model for other TU volunteers and upcoming leaders. He is driven by curiosity and always looking for ways to streamline tasks and make the organization more effective.

During his time with the Southeastern Wisconsin Chapter, Jason was an active board member and helped organize volunteer workdays. If the chapter held a successful event, it’s likely Jason was in the background helping make sure things went smoothly. He played a crucial role in connecting his chapter and his Carroll University students in conservation work on Genesee Creek, a coldwater stream with adjacent lands that served as field stations for student research projects.

After taking a teaching job at UW–La Crosse, Jason joined the Coulee Region Chapter. He’s been an active member for more than a decade now, and is currently serving as chapter president. He is a staunch advocate for Wisconsin’s native brook trout and has led his chapter’s involvement in pushing for stronger protection of brook trout populations on proposed dam-removal projects in Vernon County.

Jason’s strongest asset may be his ability to connect youth with conservation initiatives. He routinely leads ecology activities as part of the chapter’s annual STREAM Girls program. Many of his students’ research projects are focused on trout and the local spring creeks they inhabit. These students are frequent presenters at local chapter meetings and regional events like the Driftless Symposium. It is this connection with youth and our local watersheds that will allow us to pass the torch to the next generation of conservationists. Thank you, Jason, for helping show us the way.

Distinguished Service Award in Youth Education

Terry Cummings

Terry was one of the first TU members to volunteer for the Council’s very first youth fishing camp 12 years ago. He also was the first adult mentor to join our Youth Camp committee. Every year a lucky camper gets Terry as a mentor. He always seems to get paired with the youngest campers, but he always manages to get his camper comfortable and confident in their ability to fish successfully in the Central Sands, which is not an easy task.

To better serve our campers Terry volunteered to help Dan Harmon III with our fly-casting portion of the program. It turned out that he was a great fit. He actually helped Dan make the program better.



TERRY’S BEEN CRUCIAL TO THE SUCCESS OF THE COUNCIL YOUTH CAMP

Unfortunately, we lost Dan Harmon III in 2023. With only two months until camp, Terry agreed to take over that portion of the curriculum, and he made the transition seamless. He’s also applied some of his own personal touches to the program. The fly-casting program seems to get better each year and is in great hands as we go forward.

For his work with all the campers over the years, his efforts on improving the camp while serving on the Youth Camp committee and his hard work on continuing and improving the fly-casting portion of our program, we were excited to present Terry Cummings with this year’s Distinguished Service Award for Youth Education.

Distinguished Service Award for our Service Partnership programs

Joe Harper

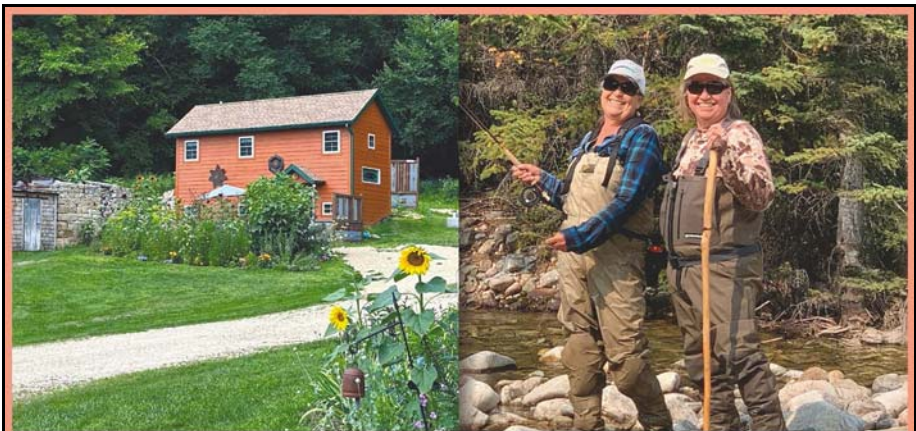
U.S. Army Infantry Veteran Joe Harper came to TU as an absolute beginner fly angler at a Veterans On The Fly (VOTF) fishing outing several years ago. He was seeking out the solitude that we as trout anglers know and appreciate. From that day forward he was eager to learn more, and he picked up fly casting quickly, thanks to the help of our volunteers. He learned how to read the water. Figuring out where the fish were seemed to come naturally to him. Meanwhile, his enthusiasm was a boost to the other veteran participants in the program. When winter set in, the group turned its attention to fly tying, an activity that Joe has become quite fond of.

In the years since his service time in the 1990’s, Joe has dealt with mental health issues and the effects of a traumatic brain injury (TBI). Through contacts within our veterans program, Joe found a TBI facility in Denver that has truly changed his life for the better. Joe is an outspoken advocate for veterans’ mental health and courageously shares his personal story with others.

A few years ago, Joe made a seamless transition from participant to volunteer leader within our veterans programs. He carries a calm demeanor, which puts veterans at ease when learning the intricacies of fly casting, fishing and tying flies. He has volunteered with TU veterans programs in the



JOE’S EVOLVED FROM A BEGINNING ANGLER TO SEASONED LEADER



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Madison and Milwaukee areas and recently spearheaded a new Veterans On The Fly program near his hometown in the Blackhawk TU Chapter area.

Joe is constantly advocating for the healing powers of water to fellow veterans. He openly shares his story of healing and brings many with him on the journey. We are honored to count Joe among our many amazing volunteers working help veterans in our communities. And we were honored to present Joe with this year's Distinguished Service Award for Service Partnerships.

Reel Partner Award

Brandon Scholz

For more than a decade the Wisconsin Council of TU has had an active presence and a solid voice working inside our state capitol in Madison. That voice belongs to Brandon Scholz of The Capitol Group, a contract lobbyist.

The Council has typically hired Brandon to represent our interests during the budget portion of state legislative sessions. As an avid trout angler and TU member, he has worked the rest of the sessions for us pro-bono.

In 2012, Brandon and TU volunteers started educating lawmakers about TU's mission and the importance of our efforts in the state. A steady revenue stream was sought to support this work. In 2014 Brandon and TU leaders helped get our TU State License Plate Bill signed into law. This program has since generated more than \$100,000 to support council and chapter cold-water conservation activities throughout the state.

Brandon's knowledge of the legislature and the relationships that he has developed over the years have helped us win legislative victories for the Dam Safety Program, wetlands legislation and a new Flood Resiliency Grant Program.

He's been a mentor to our volunteer leaders who step up to advocate for coldwater resources at the state level

Recent lobbying efforts have focused on the reauthorization of the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program, Wisconsin's iconic public lands initiative.

Brandon helped the Wisconsin Council play an active role in the program's reauthorizations in past legislative sessions, and he was heavily involved in our efforts to reauthorize the program in 2026.

Brandon has spent a significant amount of time and energy helping us advocate for a \$6 inflation adjustment to Wisconsin's Inland Trout Stamp. These dollars are the DNR's primary funding source for trout-habitat projects across Wisconsin. Thanks to Brandon's efforts, we're closer than ever to seeing this become a reality.



Brandon has now formally closed The Capitol Group and is slowly settling into semi-retirement. We value the guidance, wisdom and insights into the legislative process that he continues to share with our members and leaders within our chapters and council.

The Council thanks Brandon for his years of service and honored him with this year's Reel Partner Award.

Thank you, Brandon, and congratulations.

Wisconsin Women's Fly-Fishing Clinics

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

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ON THE WATER SKILLS CLINIC - INTERMEDIATE June 10-12, 2026

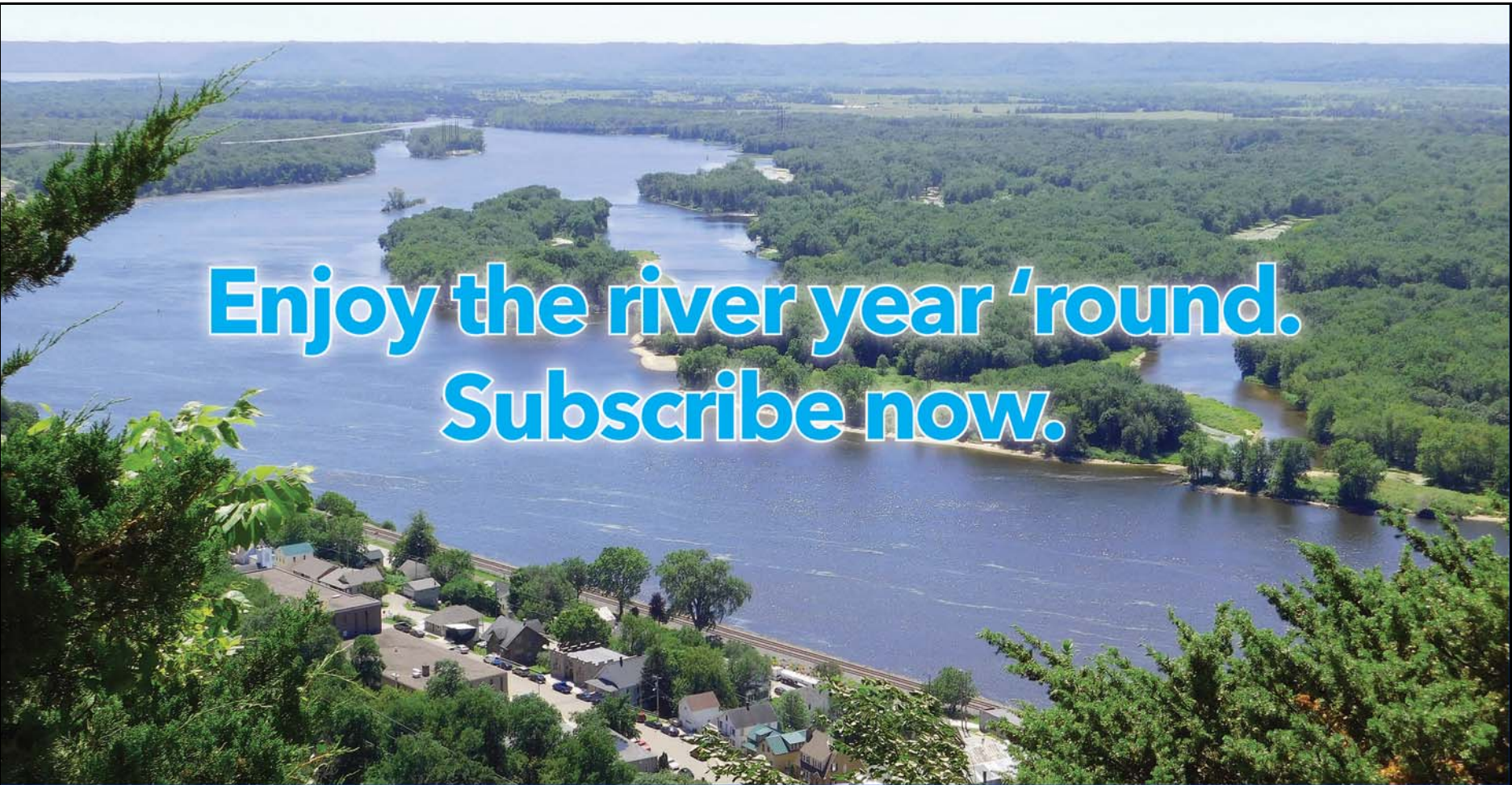
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Among the Mangroves

Not far from the masses, some Florida lagoons can still provide action and thrills for those willing to put in the effort.

By Tom Meyer,
Central Wisconsin Chapter

Canaveral National Seashore is a national park which has a northern entrance just south of New Smyrna Beach, Florida. It is about 15 miles south of Daytona Beach on the Atlantic Ocean side. It also provides access to the intracoastal waterway, which separates the ocean from the inland waters. In some places you could throw a stone from the ocean beach to this intracoastal waterway, but in other areas there's a mile of land separating the two waters.

It is sometimes called the Indian River or the Mosquito Lagoon. It is still considered salt water because there is access from the ocean into the bay further south from this northern entrance. For this article I will refer to the intracoastal waters as the lagoon.

I fished in the lagoon several times in recent years and never caught a fish. One year my cousin Will and I hired a local guide and despite the all-day intense search for reds, we never landed a fish. We did spot a couple and were able to cast to them, but never had a take.

I was told by a guide at one of the tackle shops in New Smyrna Beach (NSB) that fly fishing is very difficult in January but that he'd take me about 40 miles out if I paid him \$800. He also said he would take me to a few places in fresh water to catch carp and snook, but I wasn't interested in catching rough fish at the time. Nor was I interested in paying \$800 for a day of fishing in the ocean. My wife and I had been renting a condo in NSB for a few years, always in January. She doesn't fish so I was resigned to wade fishing on my own in the hopes that I might be one of those blind squirrels that eventually find a nut.

Over the course of three years I hadn't caught a fish. Then, one day in 2024, while taking off my waders at a picnic table in the parking lot, a couple of guys in kayaks pulled into the boat landing near my table. I noticed they had fly rods, so I approached them and asked how they were doing. They said they caught trout and drum and pointed out an area on the map where they were fishing. It required a long paddle in the kayak across a large body of water. They told me weather was always a concern and to always be



INITIALLY SPOTTED AT A DISTANCE, THIS BIG FINNY CREATURE THEN POPPED UP JUST FEET FROM THE AUTHOR.

aware of any storms in the forecast. I didn't think crossing that large bay on a rented kayak by myself was a smart thing to do. So I continued walk-and-wade casting along the shore of the lagoon, with negative results.

Fast forward to January of 2026, when I learned about an event held by the NSB chapter of Fly Fisher International. I was not a member of the Mid Coast Fly Fishers, but my friend Dan Harmon was a long-time active member and told me about this group. He had spent winters there in his later years. Dan, who passed away recently, was also an iconic, well respected member of the Central Wisconsin Chapter.

I met some of the chapter members at this event, and once I told them I was a friend of Dan's they were very friendly and informative. Club Treasurer Guy Faherty said Dan was the voice of reason for the club and highly thought of. Guy and other members gave me several options on where to wade fish on my own. They also turned me on to a fly-fishing guide who was a member of their chapter.

The jungle

One of the places they suggested required a walk of about a mile on a path through what I would describe as a tropical jungle. I carried my waders, wading shoes and fly rod and headed into the jungle, mostly concerned about alligators and snakes, but also watched for lizards falling from the trees.

During the mile walk I heard a lot of rustling in the brush but the only animals I saw were a couple of armadillos and some very small lizards. I would describe the area as dark, swampy and filled with Mangrove trees and Saw Palmetto.



READY TO HEAD INTO THE JUNGLE

Upon reaching the water I waded up and started fishing north-bound. Almost immediately I started to catch spotted sea trout. They were only about 12 to 15 inches, but I was thrilled to feel a tug and to finally catch some fish. I was using a white weighted zonker streamer pattern like they told me.

Big dorsal fin

I was standing in thigh-deep water about 50 yards from shore when I noticed a dorsal fin about 200 yards out into the lagoon. I didn't know if it was a shark or a dolphin but it was big, so I backed up to about 25 yards from shore and was now in only calf-deep water. There seemed to be a pod of fish right out in front of me and I was catching or getting a strike on almost every cast when all of a sudden the large creature surfaced only 10 feet from me, as it was also enjoying the pod of sea trout.

Startled, I backed up further until I was standing on the shore. I took out my camera and started taking a video of the creature. Aside from the thrill of the encounter with a fish that probably weighed 300 pounds, I actually caught fish, and a lot of them.

I took off my waders and headed back through the jungle. A few days later I booked a half day of fishing with the guide, Capt. Frank Brownell. It seems like if you own a boat in Florida you are automatically a captain. I have owned several boats in Wisconsin and nobody ever called me captain.

His clients must stay in the boat, as he says the lagoon has bull sharks and alligators, as well as resident dolphins and porpoises. He said even a large dolphin or porpoise could break your legs if it swam into you while standing in the water.

We were fishing mostly in relatively shallow water. Mangrove trees also line the shorelines and the

islands. They thrive in salt water and are a protected species. Captain Frank told me you can tell the difference between a shark and a dolphin by the shape of the dorsal fin. Sharks and porpoises have a fin that looks like a sail, whereas a dolphin fin is inset on the back side.

I showed him the photos of the fish I encountered and he leaned toward it being a porpoise. Frank told me that this time of the year the black drum tend to school up near the oyster beds and that he will be poling the boat in those areas searching for schools of them. Black drum are close cousins to red drum, which are commonly referred to as redfish.

He said the sharks, dolphins and porpoises are also searching for the schools. He said if you get into fish those large predator animals can hear the sounds of the fish splashing in the water from a long way away and will move towards those sounds. He said the hot fly in recent days was a black/purple baitfish pattern streamer with barbell eyes. I immediately started catching spotted sea trout, but these were bigger, perhaps 15-20 inches.

We spotted only one school of black drum and on my second cast to the school I hooked into a huge fish that took me to my backing on my 6-weight rod. Captain Frank started up the boat to follow the fish, which was the strongest most powerful fish I'd ever had on a fly rod, including steelhead and lake run brown trout from Lake Michigan tributaries. This rod was adequate for the trout but undersized for the big black drum. Eventually the fish wrapped itself around an old crab trap and broke me off.

It was a disappointing-yet-exciting experience none-the-less. What's not to like about fishing on a sunny Florida day when it's below zero in Wisconsin? And this year I think I may have finally cracked the code, if even just a little crack. Just wait until next year.



A TYPE OF DRUM, SPECKLED SEA TROUT ARE FAIRLY COMMON



Chapter News

Aldo Leopold Chapter

Just like a river fluctuates during the season, the members of the Aldo Leopold Chapter have experienced highs and lows over the winter. We managed to stay warm this winter at Barflies - tying flies in the bars of Sauk, Columbia and Dodge Counties. Our chapter president ties the “FAFO Fly” and teaches the rookie a thing or two in the latest edition of the Alder Fork Journal. To read it, please scan the QR code or visit simplebooklet.com/alderforkjournalwinter2026.
Nonetheless, we also mourn the loss of our longtime ALCTU Treasurer, Mike Stupich. Mike’s presence and contributions will be missed, and his good friend, Jim Hamala, wrote a beautiful memorial in the latest edition of AFJ.
Be sure to catch the Q&A with Wisconsin’s beloved musician and occasional fly fishing guide, Adam Greuel, in the same edition.
We’re gearing up for a spring work day on Saturday, April 11, at a location yet to be determined. Also,

we are seeking donations for our annual summer picnic at Habermann Park June 3 at 5pm. Please reach out to Dan Endres for donations at dtendres9@gmail.com.
If you’d like to submit your visual or literary work to be published in our chapter’s Alder Fork Journal, please reach out to Matthew Duffy at alderforkjournal@gmail.com.
—Matthew Duffy



Antigo Chapter

It’s hard to believe spring is already here. We recently held our 43rd annual banquet at Northstar banquet center with some new items and raffles. Now we jump into spring as our members will be installing the fishing dock that we constructed last fall. We’ll be placing it at Gartzke Flowage.
We’re also planning our annual Kid’s Fishing day on Saturday, June 6 at the City of Antigo Park. This

event is always a great time for everyone.
At our last meeting, the Antigo Chapter agreed to donate \$1,000 scholarships for Lauren and Blake Genske to attend a National TU program out west this summer.
Have a great summer. Yours in conservation.
—Scott Henricks

Central Wisconsin Chapter

CWTU: A brief synopsis

CWTU was formed on March 25, 1971 at the Hope Lutheran Church in Wautoma. About 200 people attended that meeting, and 72 of them paid dues and joined. Green Bay Packer Doug Hart was the featured speaker. “The Way of the Trout” film was shown. Former State Supreme Court Justice Jon Wilcox was the emcee. CWTU was supported by 140 members that first year. It was the largest TU organization in the state. It was comprised of 10 counties initially. Work days were started shortly after this. It has

grown to greater than 300 members.
Some of the chapter’s more legendary members included Bob Hunt, who spent 33 years as a stream biologist working on stream habitat improvement. He was nationally recognized as an expert in fisheries research and received numerous awards for his work. He was often referred to as Mr. Trout.
Another was Elward Engle, who worked for the DNR for 38 years doing fish habitat improvement. He mapped and wrote management plans for several rivers and watersheds in Waushara, Waupaca and



HAPPY FACES FROM THE CENTRAL WISCONSIN CHAPTER
CWTU board members Tanja Zins and Mike Northam enjoyed themselves at the chapter’s recent Night of the Caddis meeting.



TROUTFEST PROVIDED PLENTY OF LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES
Shawn Sullivan, DNR coordinator and Tom Meyer CWTU Trout fest chairman talking with participants at Trout Fest 2026.

Portage Counties. He is responsible for DNR purchasing of hundreds of acres of land and miles of easements along numerous trout streams and watersheds. In his retirement he was instrumental in the battles against Perrier.

Highlights

Trout Stamp approval: The inland trout stamp was approved in 1977 post third submission after the relentless work of Jon Wilcox, a member of CWTU and also a retired Wisconsin Supreme Court Justice.
The chapter founded the Dan Harmon III Annual Fly Fishing School in 1976. As of now, the annual program has graduated more than 700 students.
Youth fly tying. Many youngsters have been introduced to fishing due to Bob Haase’s fly tying programs.
The Fox Valley Technical College Beginner Fly Fishing class was initiated and taught by chapter member John Gremmer. This later transformed into the chapter’s fly-fishing and fly-tying programs.
Our master’s fly-tying program an educational program with well-known fly-tying educators.
Started by John Gremmer, our Riverkeepers program is now coordinated by Bob Joswowski and currently monitors water quality data in 31 streams/rivers by 105 volunteers. CWTU has been gathering data for more than 20 years.
TroutFest is our annual winter program of environmental and trout fishing education with socialization enjoyed by all started 2002 at the bowling alley in Berlin. 240 attend-

ees enjoyed the event on Feb 28, 2026 at the Mount Morris Convention Center.
CWTU’s workday program has grown to a monthly program from May through September. In the last year volunteers logged nearly 1,000 hours restoring streams. Mike Northam is the workday coordinator. The DNR/Trout Habitat team works with CWTU in improving trout habitat. Operations Team Manager Shawn Sullivan and his staff often assist with stream restoration and preservation. They volunteer to work with CWTU on workday Saturdays without pay.
Trout In the Classroom: TIC teach children about trout and the environment. We are proud to be a sponsor of this.
Environmental fundraising, Troutfest and recognition banquets since 1972. The monies received are used to support LTE for the DNR staff and for stream restoration projects in the Central Sands area.
Supporter of Annual Redd Survey and Training Seminars by the DNR started in 2023.
Central Sands Trout River Series created and coordinated by Tom Bishop started in 2025. This is a traveling educational series of specific streams, ecology and flies that may be suitable for trout fishing. Rivers featured are The Mekan, White, Pine and Waupaca/Tomorrow.
Project Healing Waters was organized by John Tucker for Veterans at the John H Bradley Clinic and UW Oshkosh.
External Partners Award recipient from the DNR 2018.



JUST A FEW MORE WRAPS
CWTU board member Mark Hoffman helps Gabriel Catteruccia with her fly tying during The Trout River Series at the Knuth Brewing Company in Ripon.

Chapter News

TU CARES Central Area Restoration Effort for Sustainability, formed with our chapter, the Fox Valley Chapter, the Frank Hornberg Chapter and the Shaw-Paca Chapter, will host a TU Cares Celebration event at our May CWTU work day on May 16, 2026.

Partnership with the Elliot Donnelley Chapter of TU. The Elliot Donnelley Chapter is financially and physically supportive of CWTU's work to restore streams and maintain river quality.

Founders and Legends of CWTU; a history book of the chapter written by Tom Meyer, a true historian of CWTU.

Educational Programs are provided monthly following CWTU board meetings. Trout fishing and environmental topics are presented by awesome lecturers. The Night of the Caddis was enjoyed at the February 11, 2026 Educational Meeting.

Communication

CWTU communicates with its members and the public in a number of ways. The Brookie is a quarterly publication sent to members. Other correspondence is through social media and via the website.

Grants

CWTU has obtained numerous grants to help fund stream restoration including The Trout and Salmon Foundation, Embrace a Stream, State TU and others.

Advocacy

CWTU participated in advocacy to prevent Perrier to build wells, prevention of high capacity wells and monitoring of recent building of solar farms to prevent damage to the water. John Tucker is CWTU's Watch dog for locating and evaluating potential problems that could damage the cold water fisheries.

—Laura Tucker

Coulee Region Chapter

Nearly everyone I talk to last month had a bad case of cabin fever. The good news is that we're getting more daylight every day and hopefully that means more conducive fishing weather. As they say, hope springs eternal.

Our Member Event in January was again "on the road" but this time in Sparta. The American Legion Hall was our location, and our speakers were Vernon County Conservationist David Hettenbach and Monroe County LCD Director Robert Micheel. We had a nice group out on an iffy-weather night to learn about conservation efforts in these counties. Bob Micheel has addressed CRTU in the past, and it was good to meet and speak with David Hettenbach for our first time together.

February is banquet season for CRTU, beginning with the Wisconsin Council Banquet in Oshkosh. This year our own Chapter Presi-

dent Jason Freund was honored with the Distinguished Service – Leadership Award. Jason has long been a leader in our chapter, and it was great to see his leadership recognized by the Council. Congratulations, Jason.

The CRTU Banquet and Fundraiser in February featured a revamped format with a conservation theme. The event featured speaker Josh Hein of ORA Trails. We expanded the auction to include both a silent and live auction with Dan Boggs of The Flying Musky in Stevens Point as emcee/auctioneer. Dan has quite a reputation as a lively auctioneer, and we had fun with the live auction.

We also introduced an event we called the Fish-Off as a different type of fundraiser. We showcased our chapter activities – Habitat/Stream Work; Youth Education; Special Projects; and our 2026 Friends of Wisconsin TU grant re-

ipient, Outdoor Recreation Alliance (ORA Trails) using narrative and pictures on posters.

We posted a "storyteller" at each station to explain how we use chapter funds to support these efforts. The attendees purchased "brookie trout ballots" and placed their ballots in creels for the projects they wanted their donation to support. The voting results will guide the chapter's investment of time and resources.

We provided raffles for two unique rods including a newly built 4-piece MHX 8-foot, 4-weight graphite rod and a rare 5-piece Sage SP489-5 graphite rod in an 8'9" 4 wt. with two tips. Both rods raised significant funds. Congratulations to the new owners. We deemed this banquet a success.

In March, we were back to our Member Event schedule with Ben Lubchansky, who along with his

wife, Kate, owns 608 Community Supported Kitchen in the Madison area. Using his many years of cooking experience and creating dishes, Ben showed how to prepare trout.

On April 15 we welcome Bob Trevis, author of Troutchaser's Guide to the Driftless. Bob will be talking to us about fishing opportunities in the Driftless Area, beyond Viroqua.

And to round out our Member Event season, our annual chapter picnic is May 20. Look for more information on this soon.

We hope to see everyone at the Coon Creek Confluence on May 2. TroutFest is tentatively the third Saturday in June, the Youth Outdoor Fest is July 11, and Stream-GIRLS is on August 8 at the West Fork Sports Club in Avalanche.

—Deb Muresan

Fox Valley Chapter

The Fox Valley Trout Unlimited chapter may not have trout water within our boundaries, but that doesn't stop us from supporting coldwater conservation. As dedicated TU members, we promote, fundraise, and volunteer, for trout streams across the region. Here's a snapshot of what we've been doing, and what's coming up this year.

Stone Fly Socials

Each winter, our chapter hosts the popular Stone Fly Socials from January through March at the Stone Yard off Highway JJ, northeast of Appleton. This year we were joined by members from neighboring TU chapters to tie flies, swap stories and share plans for the upcoming trout-fishing season.

Cabin Fever Day success

Thank you to everyone who attended our Annual Cabin Fever Day event. Attendance nearly doubled from previous years, and we significantly increased the funds raised for conservation efforts. The event involved members from across our chapter, and we stayed so busy that we forgot to take photos.

A special thank-you goes to Ben Hlaban and Doug Nelson for organizing the entire event and engaging so many volunteers.

Supporting trout research and monitoring

Last November, two Fox Valley TU teams conducted weekly redd surveys on streams in central Wisconsin. The data collected helps the DNR plan future stream habitat projects.

We're also looking forward to assisting with creel surveys on opening day of trout season, gathering important information about fishing activity and trout populations.

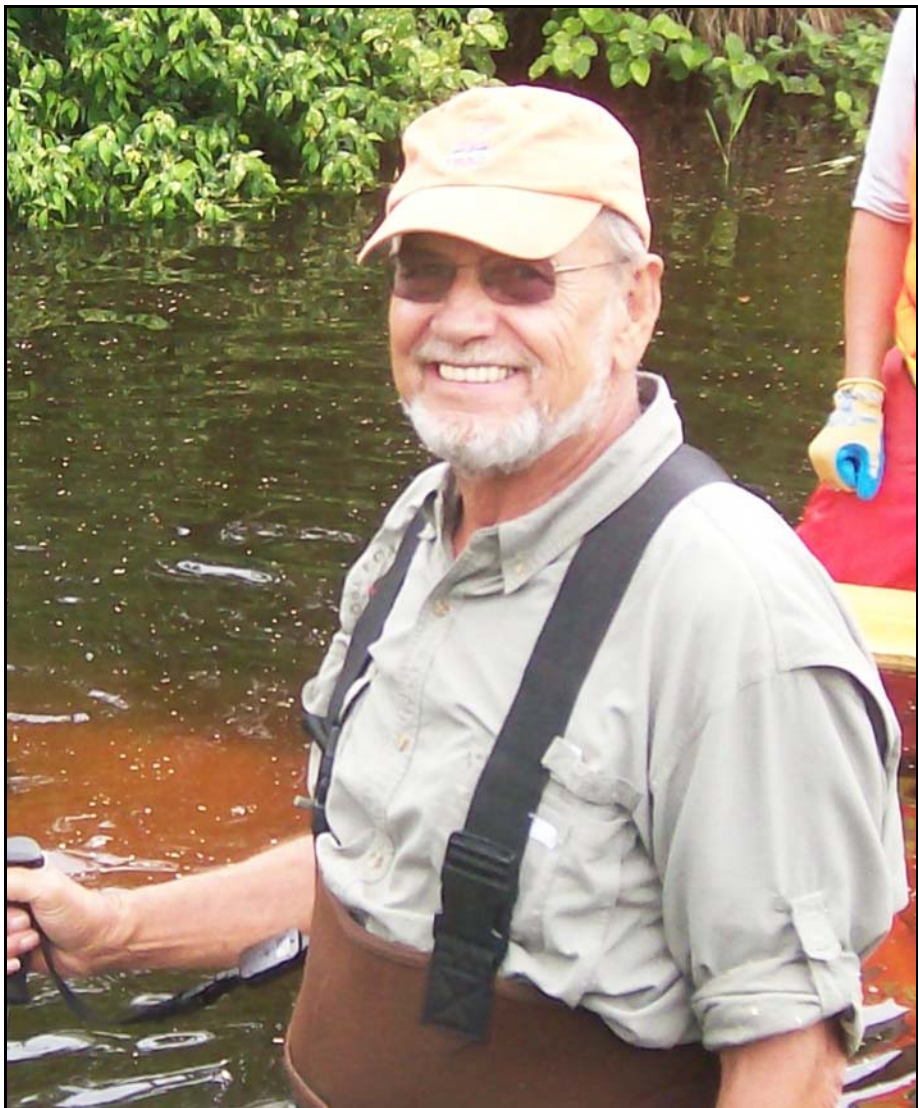
Several of our members also con-



COULEE REGION BANQUET FEATURED A CONSERVATION THEME
They also expanded the auction to include both a silent and live auction with Dan Boggs of The Flying Musky in Stevens Point as emcee/auctioneer.



PAMMEL CREEK PROJECT RECEIVES FRIENDS GRANT FUNDING



JOE BACH TOUCHED MANY LIVES IN AND OUT OF TU



Chapter News



John Barkmeier

FVTU GOING BACK TO THE FAIR

On June 25 FVTU will be back at the Outagamie County Fair with their educational booth. Visitors can try fly casting and spin casting, learn about the aquatic insects, watch or try fly tying, and learn about some fishing basics.



John Barkmeier

NO STRESS HERE

FVTU recently took part in a wellness event with the Appleton Area School District, where staff had the opportunity to learn fly casting and discover how fishing can help relieve stress.

tribute to the WAV (Water Action Volunteers) stream monitoring program, where we systematically collect data on streams located in central Wisconsin.

April Angling Adventure

Our annual April Angling Adventure returns, and we're looking forward to welcoming all of our members for a great weekend in the Driftless Area. The fun begins on Thursday, April 16, with a chapter meeting at the West Fork Sports Club. It's a great chance to reconnect, share plans for the weekend, and kick off a few days of fishing and camaraderie.

We'll gather on Saturday evening for a relaxed potluck at the pavilion in Esofea County Park, just outside Viroqua. It's the perfect setting to swap stories from the water, talk about the day's catches, or the ones that got away, and enjoy good food and company.

If you happen to be in the Driftless Area that weekend, we welcome you to stop by and join us. For full details and updates, visit our website at foxvalleytu.org.

Fishing Day for People with Disabilities

On May 9, Fox Valley TU will proudly host our 46th Annual Fishing Day for People with Disabilities

at Camp Shioc, a YMCA camp near Shiocton.

We stock the pond with rainbow trout and help participants in catching fish. All fish caught are cleaned and packed on ice so families can take them home. After a morning of fishing, we provide lunch for everyone involved.

This event has become a cherished tradition for families in the Appleton area, and we're honored to continue providing this special day each year.

Habitat and conservation partnerships

Again this year we'll join the Central Wisconsin Chapter for habitat workdays. In May, together with TU CARES, we'll participate in the Central Wisconsin Celebration at the Mekan River.

This event brings together chapters, partners and volunteers to improve trout habitat through hands-on stream-restoration projects. We're especially pleased to welcome friends from the Elliot Donnelly Chapter in the Chicago area. If you'd like to learn more about conservation work and get your hands dirty helping, please join us.

Outreach and education

Fox Valley TU also works to spread the word about coldwater

conservation and the value of TU's work.

On June 25, we'll be back at the Outagamie County Fair with our educational booth, and we're offering plenty of hands-on fun. Visitors can try fly casting and spin casting, learn about aquatic insects, watch or try fly tying, and learn about some fishing basics.

The booth was a big hit last year, drawing lots of curious fair visitors who were eager to learn and give casting a try. Thanks to that enthusiastic response, fair organizers asked us back this year. If you're attending the fair, be sure to stop by, test your casting skills, and learn a bit more about the world of fishing.

We recently took part in a wellness event with the Appleton Area School District, where staff had the opportunity to learn fly casting and discover how fishing can help relieve stress. After all, few things restore the spirit like time spent on the beautiful trout streams we work so hard to protect.

Working together for trout

While Fox Valley TU doesn't have trout streams in its area, we believe that trout conservation is everyone's responsibility. By supporting coldwater conservation throughout Wisconsin, we help anglers everywhere, as well as the natural habitats we value.

Remembering Joe Bach, a legend and leader

Our chapter also lost a dear friend and dedicated member this past year. Joe Bach spent more than 20 years with Fox Valley TU and was a leader, mentor, steward, conservationist and trusted friend.

Joe served the chapter in many roles, including president, secretary, habitat work coordinator, and board member. He also championed a Trout In the Classroom program at Chilton Area Schools.

Beyond the chapter, Joe volunteered for more than 15 years as a Water Action Volunteer, conducting stream monitoring and collecting important environmental data. He loved working with youth and was happiest helping students discover aquatic insects during Chilton School field trips.

Joe's dedication to Stony Brook led to the creation of the Friends of Stony Brook and earned him the 2021 Wisconsin State TU Distinguished Service Award for Leadership.

Above all, Joe valued his family and his church. He will be deeply missed by his family, students, teachers, Fox Valley TU members, and all who knew him as a true gentleman.

—Tony Pudlo



Adrian Meseberg

GBTU EARNED THE COUNCIL'S 2026 SILVER TROUT AWARD

Green Bay Chapter

Recent speakers at our meetings have included St. Norbert College Geology Professor Nelson Ham presenting "From Glaciers to Brookies: The Geology of Trout Streams in Northeastern Wisconsin and Why It Matters." He highlighting the geological history that shaped our region's trout fisheries.

In February DNR Fisheries Biologist Chip Long discussed his work on northeast Wisconsin trout streams and pointed out opportunities for us to improve our coldwater resources, including the potential adoption of the North Branch of Beaver Creek via the DNR's Adopt-a-Fishery or Adopt-a-Wildlife Area partnership.

Our March meeting featured DNR Fisheries Scientist Matt Mitro presenting "Effects of Beaver Dams on Coldwater Stream Habitat and Trout Populations in Wisconsin." He shared his research-based insights on the importance of thoughtful beaver management. We sincerely thank all three speakers for their excellent presentations.

The Green Bay Chapter participated in two significant banquets in February. On February 7, several chapter members attended the Wisconsin Council Banquet in Oshkosh, as we were honored with the Silver Trout Award for Outstanding Chapter for the first time in years.

Despite the absence of Class I

trout streams within our chapter area, this recognition reflects our chapter's meaningful impact on northeast Wisconsin trout streams and the broader community.

It was truly an honor to have the Council recognize our efforts and it was a privilege to accept this recognition among our peers in TU chapters throughout the state. You guys are all so amazing. Together, we are all making a difference.

In February we hosted our 50th Annual Conservation Fundraising Banquet at the Stadium View Bar and Grille. Approximately 300 supporters attended the event, which was a major milestone for the chapter. Early estimates indicate the banquet generated significant revenue to support our conservation mission. We extend our sincere appreciation to all who contributed to the event's success. We couldn't do our great work without your support.

In late February we partnered with the Brown County Chapter of the Izaak Walton League to host a youth fly-tying event. Ten youth and five adults participated alongside five TU volunteers at the Izaak Walton League's property on Osprey Point. By the end of the morning, all participants successfully tied multiple flies. We offer a big thank you to the volunteers who dedicated their time and expertise.

Chapter News



Kiap-TU-Wish Chapter

STREAM Girls event

Our STREAM Girls event is Saturday, May 16 at the Ellsworth Rod and Gun Club, from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. It is open to girls ages 11 to 15. Linda Radimecky and Michele Bevis are once again prepping for the annual event on the Rush River.

We are eager for 15-18 girls to join fly-fishing anglers who will share their knowledge of fly casting, fly tying, macro-invertebrate identification and river-velocity calculations. After all that, they'll be guided to fish on the Rush River.

Each girl will leave the event with a STREAM Girls patch, a Woolly Bugger fly that she tied herself, and a fishy/artistic key chain that she made herself. They may even leave with a photo of a trout that they caught on that fly.

Thanks to past investments and grants, the chapter provides all gear including waders, boots, and fly rods. We also provide snacks and lunch. There's no cost to participants.

Last year we caught the enthusiasm of 15 spirited girls from the region, most from the River Falls area,

with a few from St. Paul. Volunteer guides from the Kiap Chapter and Fly Fishing Women of MN assisted the girls to catch and cast for their first trout on the fly.

We welcome volunteers of all ages. We have a few volunteer instructors who are close in age to the STREAM Girls, but we welcome young girl anglers to volunteer. If you are a young girl angler or know someone who is, and want to volunteer this year, please contact Michele at michelebevis@kaiptuwish.org for more information.

If you or someone you know wants to be a STREAM Girl this year, please contact Michele.

Other Kiap News

At our annual chapter member celebration in December, we honored two members of the chapter with the Gold and Silver Trout Awards.

We presented our Gold Trout Award to Kent Johnson for his invaluable service and outstanding dedication to science-based monitoring of our coldwater streams. His stewardship and commitment to



Adrian Meseberg

GBTU HOSTS IZAAK WALTON LEAGUE FLY-TYING EVENT

GBTU's Dave Ostanek leads a Saturday-morning youth fly-tying event with the Brown County Izaak Walton League.



Adrian Meseberg

GBTU CELEBRATED THEIR 50TH ANNUAL CONSERVATION BANQUET

Banquet Committee member Wally Heil (center) is joined by FFA volunteers and some hopeful bucket raffle participants.



Adrian Meseberg

ABOUT 300 GUESTS CELEBRATED AT GBTU'S BANQUET

The GBTU Veterans Service Partnership (VSP) continues to meet at the First Presbyterian Church in De Pere on the first and third Mondays of each month through April, from 4:30–5:30 p.m.

Beginning in May, the program transitions to monthly fishing outings throughout the summer. Veterans and volunteers of all experience levels are welcome. For more information please contact Veterans Pro-

gram Coordinators Jim Hauer at jehauer1@icloud.com or 920-639-3718, or Paul Kruse at kruser2@new.rr.com or 920-639-2361.

For updates and additional information, visit greenbay.tu.org and follow the Green Bay Chapter on social media.

—Adrian Meseberg

Harry and Laura Nohr Chapter

The Fennimore Trout-In-the-Classroom has many fingerling browns with a good survival.

The current stream restoration project on the Blue River at the Snowbottom Wildlife Area will be restarting soon and completed this spring. We have completed more than 23 miles of stream restoration.

This year's Lie-and-Tie event at the Dodger Bowl in Dodgeville featured a presentation by Lance Eagan via TEAM. We had about 15 in attendance.

In February we participated in the Outdoor Skills Day at South West Technical College in Fennimore, organized by the Grant County Sports Alliance. We offered fly-casting and fly-tying instruction.

We have had a video presentation about our stream restoration work with the Lee Wulff Chapter and have one coming up with the Elliot Donnelly Chapter.

Preparations for our spring banquet in May are underway.

Plans for a learn-to-fly-fish program on May 16 are being coordinated with SWTU, Chuck Horn and the DNR.

We also have two workdays coming up alongside the Southern Wisconsin Chapter. On Saturday, May 16 we'll team up to plant trees near Smith Conley Creek and on Saturday, May 30 we'll be clearing willows and other invasive wood at Big Spring Creek.

—Brian Larson



KENT JOHNSON EARNS KIAP'S GOLD TROUT AWARD

This was for his invaluable service and outstanding dedication to science-based stream monitoring. His stewardship and commitment to these vital ecosystems provide lasting contribution to their protection and health.



KIAP PRESENTS RAINBOW BARRY WITH SILVER TROUT AWARD

She has been instrumental with many of their youth programs including "Trout/Bugs in the Classroom."



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KIAP WORK CREWS KEEP AFTER IT

these vital ecosystems provide lasting contribution to their protection and health.

We presented our Silver Trout Award to Rainbow Barry for her commitment to community and her contributions to coldwater conservation. She has been instrumental with many of our youth programs including "Trout/Bugs in the Classroom" as she helps in developing future conservationists and leaders.

We welcomed John Stipl and his colleagues at the NRCS at our January meeting. They presented an overview of the work being done on the North Branch of Wilson Creek. The DNR, NRCS our chapter are proposing a stream realignment project on the North Branch of Wilson Creek in Dunn County. The property is owned by Josh Edlund, and the state purchased a public fishing easement on the property.

This proposed project will restore 2,136 feet of Wilson Creek from a 1,612 ditched section by re-meandering the existing channel through its historic floodplain and establishing riffle-pool sequences with aquatic habitat features that will support macroinvertebrate and fish populations.

Objectives are to restore wetland and stream habitat within this reach within an ecologically degraded landscape to improve wetland functions, reduce peak flood flows, restore surface and groundwater interactions, improve water quality, increase base flow, increase flood resilience and aquatic habitat.

Successful auction

Our Winter On-line Auction was a great success. The auction is our biggest fundraiser of the year with a goal of raising \$12,000. With both online bidding and the 3/100 chance board we raised \$15,445.

The money will be used to fund our stream restoration efforts and education programs, such as Trout In the Classroom, STREAM Girls, internship program, Reel Recovery and Casting for Recovery.

The chapter thanks everyone who donated to the banquet, from lodging getaways, guided river trips, non-fishing excursions, flies, gear, art, jewelry, honey, maple syrup and other items. Your ongoing donations and support make this event possible.

Also, a special thanks to everyone who participated and made bids and hopefully won the item of choice. Kudos to Greg Olson who chaired this event and the auction committee of Ben Toppel, Michele Bevis, Ken Hanson, Matt Janquart, Tom Schnadt, Sarah Hartung and Suzanne Constantini.

The Kiap-TU-Wish Chapter's Dry Fly Dick Frantes Memorial Fly-Tying Event will feature five fly tyers

from one of the most well-established fly-tying clubs in the United States -- the St. Paul Fly Tiers & Fishermen's Club. This year the club was represented by Joe Schreifels, Greg Meyer, Andy Fiskness, Tony Stifter and Michael "Stew" Stewart. The two organizations have a long history together with a substantial number of folks who are members of both. For example, Tony Stifter was once Kiap-TU-Wish chapter president and Greg Meyer served on the chapter's board.

One of the interesting features of the club is that its members tend to fish for and tie flies to catch every kind of fish that swims without a strong bias for any single species. This guarantees an interesting variety of styles of tying, all demonstrated with skill and adeptness.

Dry Fly Dick had a long and interesting history with the club, both as a friend and a "frenemy." Dick was no shrinking violet and not shy about speaking his mind on any matter, often without invitation or any sense of brevity.

TIC programs

Kiap-TU-Wish has five Trout In the Classroom programs going strong in River Falls, Ellsworth and Prescott. We expect to host the popular Bugs In the Classroom experience with Dean Hansen again in April.

The TIC program's brown trout will be released in mid to late May. Participants look forward to river exploration, macroinvertebrate collection and fly-casting instruction with TU volunteers on their trout-release days.

We have held 11 workdays since the beginning of December at the Steeple Drive site on the Kinni and have cleared all of the buckthorn and box elder trees on the west bank from the bridge downstream to the confluence with Parker Creek.

The DNR crew will be completing a restoration project at this site beginning in late summer.

We now switch efforts to brush and tree removal at sites on the Trimble River, cutting and burning the slash piles unless the fire danger is high.

One of the Trimble sites will involve working with FFA students from Ellsworth High School who for the third year in a row will help us with burning the slash piles.

I will be sending out an email later this week asking volunteers to assist with closing up the 200 or more blue bird nest boxes which are situated on multiple sites in our chapter area and were opened up last fall to keep mice from moving in over the winter months.

—Gary Horvath

Lakeshore Chapter

Hello everyone. Lakeshore began the year with our first of three monthly fly-tying socials at Laack's Tavern. We had 10 people attend this casual event. Everyone brought their own stuff, had a few drinks, ate some venison sausage, talked smart, tied a few flies and had a great time.

A few days later our January meeting featured Craig Cook of Fall Line Outfitters as the guest speaker. More than 20 folks attended the gathering to listen to Craig talk fishing in the Central Sands and tell us his story. Craig has a great shop, guide service and an even better story about his new career owning a fly shop after retiring from his 20+ years in the US Army.

If you don't know Craig or Fall Line Outfitters in Stevens Point, do yourself a favor and get into his shop or find Fall Line on the web at <https://www.falllineoutfitters.com/>. Craig and his crew do things right. Many thanks to Craig for his service to our country and his support of Lakeshore TU.

We kicked off February with our first workday of the year, with 14

volunteers working to open trails along Ben Nutt Creek. This stretch has been heavily impacted by Emerald Ash Borer during the past five years, and there's about a mile of stream that is nearly inaccessible. Just getting to the stream is extremely difficult. Worse, the fallen trees are causing damming in spots with resulting sediment buildup and channel relocation affecting the quality of the habitat. This was just the first of many workdays at this site. Everyone's invited to come along and help.

Our February meeting featured DNR Fisheries staff Alec Meyer and Drew Wallace. They went over the results of the redd surveys that they did on the Onion River and tributaries Mill Creek and Ben Nutt Creek. The results were excellent, showing that the river is very healthy and reproduction activities are strong. More than 30 members attended the gathering. Many thanks to Alec and Drew for their excellent work and interesting presentation.

We closed February with a very successful IF4 Film Festival and



LAKESHORE CHAPTER WORKDAY CREW



LAKESHORE MEMBERS WORK ON THE JUNGLE AT BEN NUTT CREEK

This stretch has been heavily impacted by emerald ash borer during the past five years, and there's about a mile of stream that is nearly inaccessible. Just getting to the stream was extremely difficult.



LAKESHORE CHAPTER BEGAN IT FLY-TYING SOCIALS

Lakeshore began the year with our first of three monthly fly-tying socials at Laack's Tavern. Everyone brought their own stuff, had a few drinks, ate some venison sausage, talked smart, tied a few flies and had a great time.

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mini-banquet event at Laack's Tavern and Ballroom in Johnsonville. About 100 people attended and by all accounts had a great time. The evening began with a social hour featuring live music, a whiskey tasting, raffles, silent auctions and plenty of time to connect with friends. That was followed by a light meal and then the films. The event was a success by every measure. We are so grateful for the generosity of our sponsors, hosts, donors and espe-

cially to all of those that attended. Thank you, all.

March included our final fly-tying social of the winter, a workday and our monthly gathering. Now many of us will begin hitting the tributaries for browns and steelhead and others will wet a line for those early season inland trout. Spring rains are here and warm weather is sure to follow. See you on the water.
—Al Wortz

to hack brush, plant trees, partner with the DNR, and collaborate with nearby chapters and more. There's even a day with Stihl's professional crew.

There is something for everyone and everyone can help in some way

at every event. We encourage you to view the schedule on swtu.org and we hope you can join us streamside.

As always, there is much and more going on. Visit swtu.org to learn more.

—Drew Kasel

Southeast Wisconsin Chapter

The SEWTU Holiday Party featured a non-perishable food drive, a gift exchange, a raffle, the recognition of one of our hardest working volunteers, and member fishing travelogues chronicling their latest fishing adventures. In other words, it was a busy night.

The food drive brought in a record food donation and the gift exchange was a hit. The raffle saw a mentored steelhead trip, two fly-rod/reel combos, and multiple stocked fly boxes for prizes. Our hard-working volunteer is Steve Krakow. If you have seen Steve in action, you know what I mean, he is an unsung hero for our chapter. We appreciate all that he does.

But the best part of the evening was the member fishing travelogues featuring a mix of adventure, misadventure, and some fun with the Meta AI analysis of a chapter event which was posted on Facebook. The travelogues started with some Montana small water fishing which included fishing in the snow on the first day of summer. Others featured a Brule River steelhead and big brown trout adventure, a Door County grandad and grandson trip, and our own Leo Tramm and company catching a stunning array of fish both very big and very small.

The evening ended with Joe Schroeder's tongue-in-cheek presentation of a Meta AI analysis of some photos from our chapter's mentored weekend at the West Fork Sports Club last August, which was posted on Facebook. Meta AI was particularly interested in a photo of yours truly making egg tacos on a camp stove for hungry fishers. AI speculated on the ingredients of my tacos, what I charged, and where my taco truck was located (No, I do not own a taco truck, but I am thinking about getting one). I guess Artificial Intelligence is not so intelligent when it comes to tacos but at least everybody had a good laugh.

Our January meeting featured Andrew Struck, the Director of the Planning and Parks Department for Ozaukee County. Andrew has an extensive background in ecological planning, protection, restoration,

implementation and management, Great Lakes fish and wildlife habitat, and natural resource planning. Andrew's remarkably interesting program got us up to speed on Ozaukee County's watershed work in the upper Milwaukee and Menomonee River watersheds. Much of the information was applicable to the migratory Lake Michigan trout and salmon along with smallmouth bass and pike which make up this ever-improving fishery. In addition, Andrew and his department have been working on a newly identified coldwater tributary named Mole Creek. As a result of this presentation, SEWTU will be part of the restoration in the future.

Our February Chapter meeting was our Steelhead Spectacular with our own Fishing Pharmacist and Past Chapter President Andy Avgoulas. Andy provided us with a great presentation with detailed information on our local steelhead rivers. He also included a detailed look at how to interpret flow data, casting tips and tactics, optimal temperatures, the right flies, gear, and finally, where to fish. We also raffled off two steelhead flyrod and reel combos, boxes of steelhead flies, and a guided trip donated by Andy. Kudos to Andy for making this happen.

In March, Cheryl Nenn of Milwaukee Riverkeeper will bring us up to speed on what is happening on our three home rivers which now provide almost year-round fishing opportunities for Lake Michigan migratory trout and salmon along with smallmouth bass, northern pike, and believe it or not, brook trout.

In April, I will be handing the Chapter Presidency over to Brian Mullins, who I know will do an outstanding job. Barring him up at Vice President will be long time board member Chuck Staley. We will be in great hands. It has been a busy three years, and I plan to continue doing everything I can to help this dedicated group of coldwater conservationists.

—Rick Larkin

Wild Rivers Chapter

We were excited to partner with the Great Lakes TU team in hosting a Tie-One-On social fly tying event in March at the Sawmill Saloon in Seeley. This is always a fun fly-tying event for our chapter after the long cold winter. We have had a lot of cold and snow this past winter.

Our first ever Wild Rivers TU Coldwater Conservation Symposium at Lakewoods Resort in Cable is April 18. The Conservation Symposium is free and open to the public. We have three great speakers: Mike Miller from the DNR on the effects of neonic insecticides on our coldwater ecosystems. Paul Cunningham will talk about our native brook trout and the brook trout reserves program in northwest Wis-

consin. Emily Stone, a local naturalist and author, will talk about our local loons.

We are also planning our stream workdays for 2026. Since winter in northwest Wisconsin is unpredictable, it can be challenging to schedule them until spring finally arrives. We have scheduled a May 1 tree-planting work day along the Maren-go River in the Lincoln Community Forest, and another tree planting along the South Fork of the White River on May 8. Our workdays in the Clam River State Fishery Area and North Fish Creek will be announced in April, and the details will be posted on our website wrtu.org.

Again this winter chapter mem-



MARINETTE COUNTY CHAPTER HOLDS TROUT-FISHING CLASSES

The Marinette County Chapter held its trout-fishing classes recently, covering everything from fly tying to casting and everything in between.

Marinette Chapter

This February and March the Marinette County Chapter unlimited held its trout-fishing classes, with the first class covering the habitat and reading streams and where trout are most likely to be. We also showed how to identify the different trout and insects they like. The second class covered fly-fishing gear and how to rig up a rod and reel and what all those strange numbers and letters mean. The third week covered fly tying, and is where students get to tie a woolly bugger and a cad-

dis fly. The last week covered fly casting, and the class was able to practice casting on the turf field.

Our chapter put on casting demonstrations during the outdoors sports show in March at the Marinette Community Rec. Center. April 20 will be our 42nd annual fundraising banquet at Little River Country Club in Marinette. For more information contact Dale Lange at 715-582-1135.

—Dale Lange

Southern Wisconsin Chapter

Our legendary Meicher Madness Auction event returned to its rightful place at our March gathering. As our only fundraiser planned for this year, it looks to be a solid financial success – though we don't have numbers as it happened just as this publication went to press.

As measured in other ways, we can already call the auction massively successful. There was plenty of member engagement, including plenty of new folks, in the crowded and enthusiastic room full of curious buyers. By the time it was over, plenty of fishing equipment found its way into the hands of excited anglers who are excited for the new season. And there were flies -- set after set of masterfully tied local

patterns that will be drifting a spring creek at the very next opportunity. We thank all who attended for their generous donations, bids and spirit. And we extend a special thanks to our tireless, energetic auctioneer, Topf Wells.

One auction item was a box of beautiful fly patterns from the students in our annual free fly-tying class. Throughout the eight-week beginning and intermediate fly-tying classes, students and instructors stayed warm inside while busily improving their skills and whipping out flies.

With spring in the air, we turn our attention to spring workdays. Conservation Chair Jim Hess has lined up a stellar slate of work days



Henry Nellis-Lowe

SWTU'S FLY-TYING CLASSES ALWAYS BRING SMILES



Chapter News



HIGH SCHOOLERS LEARNING NEW SKILLS THANKS TO WILD RIVERS

Wild Rivers Chapter members Dick Berge, Bob Traczyk and John Simonson taught fly tying to 18 Ashland High School students, twice a week for several months. Plans are to teach them casting and attend a stream day, as well.

bers taught fly tying to 18 Ashland High School students, twice a week for several months. Thank go out to Dick Berge, Bob Traczyk and John Simonson for teaching these wonderful students. We also will be do-

ing fly casting and have a stream day planned to let the students see the aquatic macroinvertebrates in the stream.

—John Simonson

Wisconsin Clear Waters Chapter

Cold weather and ample snow has sustained our winter stream-clearing projects. On January 3 a team consisting of Phil Porter, Frank Lowry, Peter Jonas, Keith Krajewski, Steven Voller, Dean Rosemeyer and Matt Wysocki descended on Hay Creek in Chippewa County. A number of large box elder trees hanging over the stream,

which would eventually cause bank damage when they eventually “let go,” were removed.

Our second project day was January 17 when we returned to an area on McCann Creek in Chippewa County to begin clearing the west bank. This follows the clearing and replanting on the east bank of this stream section in 2025. On a brisk



IT'S A GO!

Jamf employee Josh Beekman shows confidence in his construction of the bonfire at a recent workday on McCann Creek.



SOME HARDY SOULS BRAVED THE COLD FEBRUARY WATERS

Jamf employee Joe Rupslauskas donned waders and braved the brisk water to retrieve brush cuttings at a recent McCann Creek work day with the Wisconsin Clear Waters Chapter.

and snowy Saturday, Don Baumann, Chuck Bomar, Keith Gilland, Bill Heth, Bob Mitchell, Jennifer Parson, Phil Porter, Dean Rosenmeyer and Matt Wysocki cut and burned a dense stand of tag adler in the area.

The brush cutting in this area on McCann Creek was finished in February by a volunteer group from Jamf in Eau Claire. This business encourages employees to volunteer in the community by providing paid time for volunteer work. From Jamf; Josh Beekman, Travis Boettcher, Alex Danielson, Chad Drier, Sam Johnson, Matt Linn, Lig Lor, Caleb Oster, David Poynter, and Joe Rupslauskas with minimal oversight by Dean Rosenberger and this writer completed the remaining brush removal to bring the total area cleared to 2,200 feet of stream frontage. This spring the plan is to plant more swamp oaks in April.

Clear Waters Chapter President Peter Jonas was a guest on the radio program “It’s Time to Get Outdoors” at WHTL 103.3 FM and hosted by Brian Bethke. The interview covered a wide range of topics important to trout enthusiasts. A video of the interview is available on the Wisconsin Clear Waters Trout Unlimited Facebook Page.

The winter season continues with an active schedule of monthly Wisconsin Clear Water Chapter member meetings. In January at the Brewing Projekt in Eau Claire, DNR Senior Fish Biologist for Dunn, Pierce, and St. Croix Counties Kasey Yallaly and DNR Senior Fish Biologist Nate Anderson shared summaries of their research, and habitat work. We were a little proud to learn that one of our local streams has been the source of wild

strain brook trout eggs for hatchery use that has resulted in improved natural reproduction in other streams statewide.

In February at the Brewing Projekt the meeting featured Ethan West from the UW-Stout Fly Fishing Club who reported on the many activities of this campus club. In addition to meeting weekly for fishing outings or fly-tying events, they volunteer to support the STREAM Girls badge events.

In March DNR Fisheries Biologist Joseph Gerbyshak who discussed trout management in Chippewa, Eau Claire, Pepin and eastern Dunn Counties.

On April 3rd, in partnership with Red Cedar Fly Fishing, we are bringing the 2026 F3T Fly Fishing Film Tour to the Mabel Tainter Theater in Menomonie. The event will include raffles and prizes and is a sure way to shake off the winter grey.

On what used to be opening weekend our Chapter will support the STREAM Girls event at Beaver Creek Nature Reserve in Chippewa County. Activities include fly tying, instruction on fishing, and fishing in a local pond. It will be interesting to see what the northwestern Wisconsin weather will bring to us with the new April Fool’s Opening Day.

Two of our chapter members have been active in statewide events, Bill Heth presented at the recent Driftless Symposium in La-Crosse and Tom Sather represented Reel Recovery in Oshkosh and Sheboygan. A big thank you to you both for your time and dedication.

—Peter Jonas

Wisconsin River Valley Chapter

In an effort to connect with our new members in the north, 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.

Our January meeting featured “An Evening with the DNR.” Thank you for those of you that came to hear about current coldwater fisheries projects and the state of our trout waters. The information was presented by Taylor Curran and other DNR staff. It was a great way to learn about new areas to explore.

Our IF4 film festival event in February was dedicated to Bob Pils, who passed away in December after a short battle with lung cancer. He served a long time as a board member, active volunteer and an amazing storyteller. He became a board member when the chapter was formed more than 40 years ago.

He often volunteered at youth events to try to pass on some fly-tying knowledge and love of the outdoors to next generations. He enjoyed showing them his preserved collection of aquatic insects, how a black-nosed dace is tied and how to add deer hair to a hook for a mouse pattern that would drive a brown trout crazy.

He was a graduate of the Art Institute of Chicago, worked as an illustrator for Wausau Insurance and illustrated Gary Borger’s earliest

books. He met his wife Bonnie at Wausau Insurance. They married in 1966 and had 59 wonderful years together, a perfect husband and father to their two boys, Greg and Andy, hunting, fishing, camping, and sporting events.

After retiring he and Bonnie traveled a lot. In 2010 they moved to their house on the shore of the Eau Claire River and spent hours watching wildlife out the back window. He was good natured, kind, sincere and had a line for every occasion and it always brought a smile or chuckle. His was a life well lived and he will be missed.

With that I would also like to thank the sponsors of the IF4 event: Wisconsin Public Service Foundation, Edward Jones (Ben at the West Campus Drive office), ETCO Supply Co., Griesbach Auto Service, Fall Line Outfitters, Fly or Die Outdoors, Dan Hansen’s Prairie River Cabin, Chase Outdoors, Studio E Salon, Kathy’s Styles and Associates, Mel’s Trading Post, Point Brewery, Sawmill Brewing Company, Dan Renzoni, Springbrook Outfitters, Timekeeper Distillery, Zastrow The Beer Man, Rhineland-er Brewing, Mixed Media Artist-Jeanne Bernath, Lil Old Winemaker Shop, Pat Esselman for his Kinetic Sculpture, Al Hauber for the Lotto raffle.

Thanks to significant donors LeRoy Miller and John Zatopa.

Thanks to individual sponsors Bryce Bender, Terry Cummings, Jason Fremming, Gene Koshak, Linda Lehman, Tim Logemann, John Meachen, Perry Nikolai, Bob Paine,

Chapter News



BOB PILS ENJOYED TEACHING YOUTH

He often volunteered at youth events to try to pass on some fly-tying knowledge and love of the outdoors to next generations.

Eric Pease, Deb and Steve Scheickhardt, Todd Soukup, Kirk Stark, Glenn Tiffany, and Jeff Vanden Huevel.

And, finally, thank you to everyone who purchased tickets to the IF4 film event.

Your support gives our chapter the ability to buy trees for habitat projects, purchase equipment for Trout In the Classroom educational programs and sponsor campers at the State Council Youth Fishing Camp.

We are also able to provide some funding for culvert inventory so that culverts with poor fish passage can be addressed so that fish can move freely in the stream to find cooler water in the heat of the summer.

March's presentation was "Culverts, Fish, and Water Action Volunteers" by Tom Boisvert - Conservation Program Manager Lincoln County Land Services Department.

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

May 6-7 is the Midwest Outdoor Heritage Education Expo at the MacKenzie Center in Poynette. If you are a fly tyer and can help at this event, please contact Bob Haase. All you need to bring is your vise and tying tools. Materials are available at the event.

May 12 at the Sawmill Brewery Merrill will feature Bob Paine dis-

cussing "Fly Design for Both Tyers and Non-Tyers Alike."

May 15 is the Taylor County Youth Expo at the Taylor County Fair Grounds in Medford. This event is modeled after the Midwest Outdoor Heritage Education Expo but on a smaller scale. We will be casting and tying flies with the kids from the local schools.

May 16 is Kiwanis Kids Day at the Wisconsin Rapids Kiwanis Club. It includes activities stations, shooting range and more. Lunch included. For more information go to wrkiwanis.org.

June 20 is a workday as Tayler Curran and his crew will be doing brush bundling on the Evergreen River in Langlade County, near White Lake. This will be a joint effort with several Trout Unlimited chapters from the northeast region. Please watch your email for more information.

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 scene with a river running through it. You can post it on our Instagram account at [wisrivervalleytroutunlimited](https://www.instagram.com/wisrivervalleytroutunlimited).

Stay up to date on our activities by checking our Riffle newsletters and our "Wisconsin River Valley Trout Unlimited" Facebook page. Hope to see you out on a stream somewhere.

—Linda Lehman

Sports Club, and we hope to do the same for to honor Don Studt. He was one of our founding members, long-time treasurer, fly-tying instructor and chapter cheerleader. These benches from PG&M in Monroe are a great way to memorialize members who have done so

much for chapters and TU.

As I'm writing this it is 25 mph winds, freezing rain with lots of snow on the way, but hope springs eternal for some fishing weather.

—Dave Brethauer

Wolf River Chapter

It's spring again, or at least it feels like it, and the Wolf River Chapter is busy planning for the upcoming field season. Last summer for the Wolf River Chapter it went in a concentration of activities on Nine Mile Cr., a joint workday with other Chapters and accumulated in helping the 2025 Wolfman Triathlon be another great day on/in the Wolf River.

Along with the equipment purchased earlier in the season, we also acquired a Stihl chainsaw with a 20-inch bar to help with the larger wood that needed/needs to be removed from both trails and waterways. The Stihl GTA 26 mini electric chainsaws worked wonderfully and are very easy to both operate and maintain. Thanks to our many contributors for these wonderful tools.

The wet weather continued from spring and there were several days of oppressive heat. However the beaver did not rest nor did the chapter. Beaver dams were the main focus of attention.

Between Saturdays and weekdays, we removed more than 50 beaver dams. All were barriers to flow and many were also barriers to fish passage.

Some were exposed from out of the sand and sediment due to flushing and some were collecting the same materials.

After our work, in many locations we soon saw gravel, rock and even boulders that had not been exposed for decades. This will change in some locations as materials from upstream flow down, but they will uncover again.

The last location to date that had beaver activity was located by the DNR shocking crew in a lower stretch of Nine Mile Creek. Their report is worth a look as it shows the positive effects of what our chapter has accomplished in the last few years.

With DNR's cooperation and that of the private landowner these beaver were removed along with 4 new dams, free flow was restored in time for fall spawning to begin.

Of course the main focus of all this labor the TROUT were more numerous than I have seen since I was a boy fishing Nine Mile Creek more than 50 years ago. Brown trout were caught further upstream than I had ever caught them before. However there is a very disturbing situation that also occurred. Along with the trout came the otter. Throughout my career with Wild Life Services I have seen firsthand the decimation the otter can cause. No place have I witnessed more devastation than what I saw this summer. They came and never left.

As the weather cooled, the fall run of beaver started and so did trapping activity. Another large 3 legged female was removed along with 2 kits and a medium male and 5 dams. A large male otter was also removed.

During the last few months the Chapter has been busy planning for the upcoming field season both within the Wolf River Watershed and Forest County.

Several locations have been identified in Forest County and a meeting was held with DNR to discuss several projects. We will be meeting with the U.S. Forest Service to discuss these and other sites for future workday projects.

We have purchased additional thermistors to place this spring to begin gathering pre-project conditions. The chapter is eager to get started with our new responsibilities in Forest Co. The chapter looks forward to the vital information pre-project data will provide when compared to after project start and completion, further confirming how the chapter's efforts can have a dramatic improvement with minimal cost.

Please feel free to attend our workdays to experience firsthand these methods for yourself.

Planned workdays are every Saturday from June 15 to September 15, except holiday weekends. We also do work during the week when members are available.

—John Carbonari

Blackhawk Chapter

Trying hard to keep cabin fever at bay, the Blackhawk Chapter has continued its Wednesday-morning fly tying. We've recruited a few new members and participants and have tied enough flies to donate as raffle prizes at various TU fundraisers. And we still have some fly boxes left for our upcoming banquet on April 19 at Boundaries Bar and Grill between Janesville and Beloit.

Anita Vaughn attended the Council's youth camp again this year and had a great time. She says the experience is just amazing and Linn Beck and the other organizers do an awesome job. The chapter provided money for a couple of youth and plan to do the same this coming year. We have dedicated the money we get from our monthly meeting raffle to supporting kids for the

youth camp.

The Council's Friends of Wisconsin TU program granted us \$2,500, and we matched with another \$2,500 to help fund the DNR brushing crew working out of the Dodgeville office. They have done a great job opening up areas that were virtually unfishable. Lloyd Meng, who oversees the crew, made a presentation at our February meeting, explaining where much of the work has been done and the extent of work they have accomplished. It helped get our members excited about what we can do to help in the future. At the very least the chapter plans to provide funds each year and hopefully utilize available matching-grant money.

Last year we placed a streamside memorial bench at the West Fork



WOLF RIVER CHAPTER KEEPS NINE MILE CREEK RUNNING COLD

Beyond the fishing itself

There are many reasons why we fish, and most of them have nothing to do with fish.

Words and photos By Kyle Siebers

There are plenty of reasons to fish. You might fish because you enjoy the challenge. You might fish for food. You might fish because a loved one fishes, and it's a way for the two of you spend time together. Maybe you fish because you like to admire the beauty of your catch. Maybe you fish because you enjoy the moment of mystery after the hookset but before you see your quarry, when you could be hooked to a stick, a sunfish or shark. Most of the obvious reasons to fish revolve around the fish themselves, or at least the act of fishing. I started thinking the other day about all the reasons I fish that have nothing to do with the fish themselves, and there are plenty.

Health

It has been talked about and written about before, so I won't dwell on this point, but trout fishing is great exercise. Balance, coordination, strength and cardio all benefit from the act of trout fishing. Walking even a short distance through and around a trout stream is much more taxing than double or triple that distance on a treadmill or the sidewalk.

Still under the health umbrella but often slipping through the cracks are the impacts that trout fishing can have on mental, emotional and spiritual health. Fishing has given me the ability to think deeply about certain topics that needed my mental attention. Conversely, it has also allowed me to not think at all when that is the necessary treatment. Fishing has helped to heal when I needed to grieve a loss, and helps calm me down when my emotions are running too high.

Spiritually, trout fishing can strengthen our connection to our chosen belief system. Sunrises, sun-

sets, autumn hillsides awash in color, or a booming thunderhead rolling in as darkness approaches can all be powerfully moving sights. God, Allah, Krishna, Greek Pan and Artemis, Roman Faunus, Silvanus and Diana, Norse Jord, or just Mother Nature herself; whichever you choose to believe in, trout fishing is a way to know and interact with your chosen deity.

Fishing as reconnaissance

Sometimes I fish to identify future fishing spots. Although I might be heading to a favorite spot, I'll use it as excuse to drive by a couple of spots that I might want to fish in the future. Or maybe I meet a fellow angler on the stream and get to talking. I might learn of new fishing spots just by having a friendly conversation.

Some people use fishing as an excuse to search for edible mushrooms. I am fond of berries, and at least once have gone fishing as an excuse to check on a berry patch I know of. Maybe wild asparagus is your thing. Trout fishing is a great reason to get you onto the back roads where your chances of finding your prize are greatly increased.

Finding future hunting spots is another reason to fish. I have found more good hunting spots than I'll ever be able to effectively hunt. Deer sign can be obvious when you find it. Stream crossings, bedding areas, terrain features, wind patterns and food sources are worth taking note of if you're like me and hunt some of the same public lands that you fish. I have also stumbled into concentrations of game birds while out fishing. I'll take note of these locations as well, especially if I'm running low on whatever fly-tying material those birds might provide.



IF THIS WASN'T REASON ENOUGH TO GO FISHING....

Sunrises, sunsets, autumn hillsides awash in color, or a booming thunderhead rolling in as darkness approaches can all be powerfully moving sights.

Flora and fauna

Unique plant and animal encounters are some of the things I remember most about certain fishing trips. Sure, you can see some neat plants at the arboretum, and some exotic animals at the zoo, but the plants at the arboretum are manicured and pampered, and the zoo animals are often sad facsimiles of their wild relatives. A hike at a nature center or a state park offer a wilder experience, and most of what you'll see there are native species, but the sheer volume of traffic in these places often dilutes the experience.

Trout streams are not as heavily traveled as hiking trails, and trout streams are the interface between multiple worlds. The aquatic world meets the swamps, marshes and lowland forests of the floodplain. The floodplain meets the upland forest. The forest gives way to prairie. Sometimes all of these transitions can take place within the span of a hundred yards, as trout streams and their adjacent habitats can be incredibly biodiverse places. I'll share some examples of when I have gone fishing and come home with a great memory, a new friend or a memorable photo.

My turtle girlfriend

This love affair started in the year 2020. It was early June and I was pulling into a DNR parking lot to fish for the evening. I had to stop halfway down the driveway to avoid hitting a turtle. It was no big surprise. There are plenty of turtles in the area and it was turtle nesting season. I got out of my truck to usher her across the driveway to safety, but as I approached her I noticed something odd. She was missing a chunk of her shell where her front left leg came out, and that leg was missing its foot. She was a unique turtle to say the least.

Fast forward to 2021. It was early June, and I was pulling down the same driveway to fish the same stream as the year before. There was another turtle in the driveway. Again, I got out of my truck to shoo her off the driveway. I was still quite a distance away when I recognized her. Missing the piece of her shell

and trucking along with her stumpy leg, she was the same turtle as last year.

Neat, I encountered the same turtle two years in a row. At this point I thought it was just a lucky coincidence, but I was wrong. I saw her again in 2022, and 2023, and 2024, and 2025. So now I have seen this beautiful girl six years in a row. I usually see her in June when she is on the upland looking to lay her eggs. One spring I used my binoculars to spy her sunning on a log in late March which wasn't as intimate as usual, but it was still her.

I don't remember a single detail about any of those fishing trips, but I'll never forget my turtle girlfriend.

Snake food

Some years back, my friend Steve and I were out fishing a stream that had been mechanically brushed during the winter deep freeze to remove invasive species and increase angler access. It was mid-May and we were walking the bank looking for rises or sunbathers, and just generally getting a feel for the place. The brushing machine unit had laid waste to the buckthorn and honeysuckle and left a carpet of wood chips along the bank.

Steve stopped to eyeball a good looking bend pool and I cut the corner to take a peek at the next likely spot. On my way I spotted a garter snake with its head buried under wood chips. My curiosity, and my inner child, just had to investigate. I gently picked up wood chips piece by piece to see what this snake was doing down there. After removing a handful of chips the snake reversed course and pulled its head up and into view. It had its mouth around the head of a toad. I called Steve over to come see for himself.

We both sat down on the ground in awe to watch the carnivorous scene unfold. By the time we discovered the situation, the toad had already inflated itself with air, trying to make itself larger and harder to swallow. Its second defense was to lock its front legs in a sort of bicep curl position, giving the snake a formidable obstacle to overcome if it was determined to fill its belly. The toad put up a good fight, but fortunately or unfortunately depending

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Trout streams are not as heavily traveled as hiking trails, and trout streams are the interface between multiple worlds.



A DAMAGED SHELL AND MISSING FOOT NEVER STOPPED THIS GAL

The author helped the this female turtle across the dirt road to a fishing spot in 2020, and has encountered her every year since.



THE AUTHOR DOESN'T REMEMBER HOW THE FISHING WAS THIS DAY

Over the course of 20 or 30 minutes the snake slowly, methodically worked its lower jaws, first the left, then the right, walking the toad millimeter by millimeter further down its gullet.

on whether you're the snake or the toad, the amphibian lost the battle.

Over the course of 20 or 30 minutes the snake slowly, methodically worked its lower jaws, first the left, then the right, walking the toad millimeter by millimeter further down its gullet. The challenge of the front legs must have been difficult, because occasionally the snake would pause to, I don't know, catch its breath? Rest its muscles? Once the front legs were folded back and no longer an obstacle the rest of the body and hind legs seemed to be a walk in the park.

When most of the toad was beyond the head of the snake, and only the toad's little tippy toes were still visible, things kicked into high gear. After nearly a half hour of "chewing" on the toad, the snake sent it from its throat to its stomach near the midsection in a matter of seconds.

The only evidence of what had unfolded was a rather obvious bulge in the middle of the snake.

I have no recollection of whether we caught any fish that day. Honestly, I haven't fished that spot since. I don't know why I haven't returned. From what I remember the water looked plenty good. Maybe my subconscious keeps steering me elsewhere, because if I go back and don't see a snake, I'll feel somehow cheated.

Feeding damselfs

I believe it was 2017 and I was fishing a northern Wisconsin stream on National Forest property. I had worked my way down through a stretch that was dominated by cedars and boulders. As I transitioned out of the cedar swamp and entered a tag alder meadow, I took a moment to admire the scenery.

I was standing in the stream taking note of the way the alders dominated the foreground, but eventually gave way to mixed conifers in the distance as the land began to rise and dry out. I noticed a small gathering of damselfs flitting about and rearranging themselves after my sudden presence had disturbed them.

I was watching one damselfly as it landed on several different leaves and twigs

searching for just the right one. Eventually we found ourselves face-to-face at a distance of four or five feet. It was about this time that I noticed a mosquito flying straight for my face.

I locked eyes with the mosquito and gave it a full quarter-second to change its mind, but it pressed on. I swung my arm and connected a solid backhand slap. The mosquito was sent tumbling through the air, and by pure chance it was headed for the damselfly.

The damselfly lifted from its perch and grabbed the mosquito out of the air with perfect precision. It

returned to its twig immediately and I took another step closer for a better look. I was able to watch the damself devour the mosquito in only a handful of bites.

I can't help but wonder if the damselfly deliberately used me as bait or if it was just random luck that we crossed paths in the way that we did. What I do know, is that for a brief moment in time we were a team, unlikely partners in our respective pursuits of our quarry.

Avian encounters

There is a strong chance that every trout angler has a bird story or two. Sometimes it's the sighting of a rare species, and sometimes it's more than that.

I was fishing in southwest Wisconsin with my wife's grandfather. He took me to one of his favorite spots and we hopped the gate before walking down the access path to the stream. While walking under some trees a bird half fell, half flew out of the tree above us and landed right at my feet. I stood there surprised, wondering what just happened.

It was May and it was fully feathered so it likely wasn't a fledgling out on a test flight. The bird seemed like a healthy, alert and otherwise fine adult specimen. Not sure what

else to do, I crouched down and picked it up. It sat on my hand for a while, seemingly tolerating my amateur photography.

When I was finished snapping a few photos I gave my new feathered friend a gentle toss skyward and it flew away.

During a different month, on different water, in a different county, I was standing on the bank in the evening looking for bugs or rising fish. Just before dusk a family of geese came gliding in to roost for the night.

What they didn't know was that a pair of swans had taken up residency and were in the process of raising their brood.

As soon as the geese landed, a swan, I assume the male, came charging out of the vegetation. The geese took flight, and the swan thereafter. The swan chased the geese through the air, getting close enough to nip at the geese, but the geese were more agile and always avoided the bite at the last second. Around and around the birds flew, painting the picture of a World War II dogfight overhead.

At one point the swan passed overhead at no more than 20 feet. At that range I was reminded of the fact that swans are very large birds indeed. I was glad I wasn't a goose that evening.

Fast forward to August -- hopper season. I was on small stream slapping my hopper around trying to excite some trout.

At one point I overshot my cast and landed my fly in a small bank-side shrub. I began the gentle art of wiggling at the fly trying to retrieve it without blowing up the spot or losing my fly. Almost immediately a mother Red-Winged Blackbird emerged from the bush attempting to eat my fly, or defend her nest, or both. Thankfully, I was able to free my fly before she got to it.

Mammals

Mammalian interaction usually involves a spooked deer and a shot of adrenaline. I've had plenty of those. One deer encounter that I recall is of a different flavor. I was fishing with Steve and I had looped upstream far away from the bank. I wanted to get into the shade of some oak trees and watch as Steve fished up a long run and into the bend pool at the oaks. While I was enjoying the shade, and getting hit with the occasional falling acorn, I noticed a flash of movement. Across the stream, on the peninsula and less than 10 feet from where Steve stood in the water, was a small buck. Instead of blasting out of his bed and potentially causing Steve to soil his waders, he was sneaking away. I watched him for what was probably only a few seconds, but he moved so smoothly and silently in his escape. The stealth of that little buck was impressive.

Another time, Steve and I stood on the bank and watched as two beaver kits drifted past. They were cooing and chirping and playing and seemed not to notice us standing there. When they had rounded the next bend and were out of sight, we resumed fishing.

I once had a skunk sneak up on me at dusk, only I didn't know it was a skunk until it swam across the river in front of me. It was headed right for the parking area, and I was thankful we didn't meet again later that night.

Plants

We can't forget the plants. My experiences with plants are far less exciting, but no less memorable. I remember the morning fog hanging just feet above the Joe Pye

weed. I remember the walls of jewelweed bordering a northern Wisconsin brook trout stream, adding a fresh flash of orange to the otherwise green, green, and greener alder thicket surrounding me. I remember one goofy pine that grew in a full loop. It was young when I found it, maybe 10 years old given its size. I hope it survives long enough to build on the character it developed in its youth. That reminds me. I haven't visited that tree in a while.

It's not about the fish

The act of fishing is often viewed as having a narrow focus. Angler versus angled. I'm still capable of getting stuck in that laser focus from time to time. But the more I fish, and the older I get, I realize there is so much more to fishing than just the capture of your prey.

I've grown to dislike the anglers that feel the need to report the exact number and size of fish brought to hand, like it's some kind of contest. I'm drawn more to the anglers that report about the singing frogs in the backwaters, the kettle of agile nighthawks on the evening feed, or the secluded berry patch on the way back to the truck.

I'm not going to pretend to be anywhere near as talented a writer as John Gierach so I'll paraphrase something he once said. When we go fishing, catching a fish is the goal, but it's not always the point.



CLOSE ENCOUNTERS ARE COMMON, AND USUALLY PLEASANT

Upon discovering a disoriented warbler, the author provided a safe, temporary perch before sending it off.



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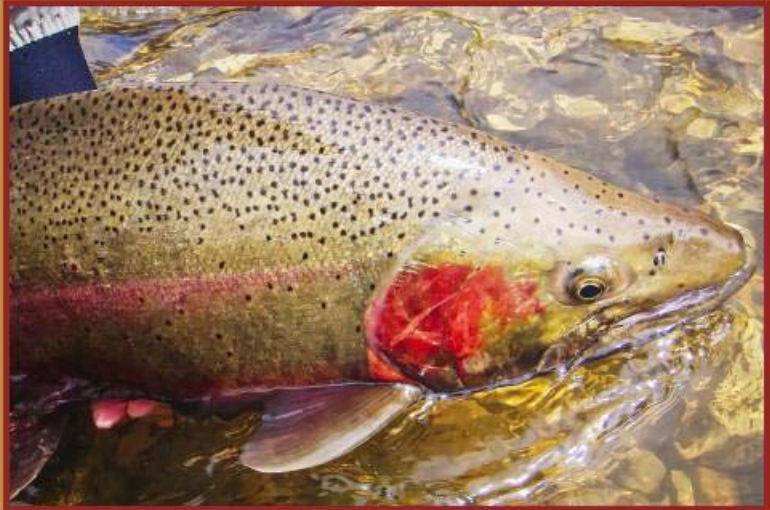
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