A MESSAGE FROM MIKE

There are many excellent reasons to be a part of Trout Unlimited. The TU chapters of North Carolina can provide opportunities for learning more about how and where to fish. Being part of TU is a great way to socialize with fellow anglers in what is otherwise largely a solo pursuit. If you want to learn to tie flies or build rods, many TU chapters offer instruction for this. The volunteer opportunities within TU are widely varied as well; if you want to teach others how to fish or tie, work with kids on raising trout in their classroom, take a veteran fishing, or pick up discarded beer cans along your favorite riverside roadway, you can do all of that as a part of Trout Unlimited.

With all these valuable and engaging opportunities, I think sometimes it is easy to lose sight of what Trout Unlimited is really about: the trout. These other activities are important and they further our mission through recruiting and retaining members, by engaging with our local communities, and in educating youth in good stewardship. Ultimately though, I believe that we as TU chapters, members, and leaders should be directly involved in on-the-ground habitat work in some way.

This direct involvement in conservation work can take many forms. It can be going through the painful process of writing grant requests, assisting our partner agencies with their conservation programs, or putting on a pair of waders to do something like live-staking an eroding streambank. One of our goals for NCTU has been to increase those opportunities for direct involvement in conservation work for our members and chapters.

In this issue of The Drift, you will find articles highlighting how chapters and members have become involved in conservation work, and how you can become involved in that work. You will learn about our Community Science programs, in which you work directly with TU staff gathering critical data needed to prioritize our conservation work. You can read about TU volunteers planting rain gardens and doing brook trout survey work in GSMNP. You will also find information on our first annual NCTU Conservation Workshop, an event that anyone passionate about trout conservation in North Carolina should attend.

And not to neglect all the other wonderful aspects of being part of Trout Unlimited, you will find articles about the wisdom of birds, a couple of highly controversial fly patterns, conservation and chaos theory, and why you should try fly fishing for tuna. Yes, tuna.

A few years ago I made a trip to the Au Sable in Michigan, the birthplace of Trout Unlimited. The memorial there to one of our founding fathers, Art Neumann, serves as a great reminder to all of us of why TU exists: “Take care of the fish, and the fishing will take care of itself.”

Thank you for being a part of North Carolina Trout Unlimited!

Mike Mihalas
Pisgah Forest

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Join conservation professionals from state and federal agencies, TU staff and members across the state to learn more about identifying, selecting and funding conservation projects — and seeing them through from beginning to end.

The formal, structured component of the workshop takes place Saturday starting at 9 AM and runs through dinner. Arrive Friday night for informal social sharing and networking with other conservation leaders, and stay through Sunday for our council’s annual meeting, which will begin around 9 AM.

Our host facility, the Lake Logan Conference Center, features private river access and sits right below a stretch of trout water stocked by the Wildlife Resources Commission. This is a unique opportunity to gather information to make your own dreams for coldwater conservation projects a reality are on the agenda.

- Welcome: Hear more from the folks who are getting it done.
- Opportunities: Coldwater conservation issues in North Carolina.
- Expanding Your Capacity: Working with agencies and partners.
- Funding: Where’s the dough to do this gonna come from?
- Projects: Large, small and everything in between.
- Getting It Done: A roadmap for taking it from idea to reality.

If you’re passionate about coldwater conservation but don’t know where to start — if your chapter wants to do more but can’t seem to get it going or match up to an opportunity, this is a great place to begin. If you want to do more, this is a great place to learn how. Spend time with others who have your same concerns and interests, learn from them and share what you know — we hope you’ll join us at Lake Logan in November.

To register, visit https://northcarolinatu.org/conservation-workshop.

Workshop Registration Options

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cost</th>
<th>Dates</th>
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<tr>
<td>$245</td>
<td>The Whole Weekend</td>
<td>Arrive late Friday afternoon and visit with other conservation leaders in an informal social time before the conference. Includes workshop registration, dinner Friday night, all meals Saturday, breakfast and lunch on Sunday and private accommodations Friday and Saturday night, plus private water fishing privileges all weekend.</td>
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<tr>
<td>$195</td>
<td>Saturday &amp; Sunday</td>
<td>Arrive Saturday after breakfast. Includes workshop registration, lunch and dinner Saturday, breakfast and lunch on Sunday and private accommodations Saturday night, plus private water fishing privileges Saturday and Sunday.</td>
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<tr>
<td>$95</td>
<td>Workshop Only</td>
<td>Arrive Saturday after breakfast. Includes workshop registration, lunch and dinner Saturday.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Free</td>
<td>Annual Council Meeting</td>
<td>Unable to attend the workshop? Join us Sunday morning for our annual meeting. As a thanks for your service, the council will buy your lunch. Stick around and fish the stocked water above the center in the afternoon.</td>
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Conference: Friday, November 15 – Saturday, November 16
Annual Meeting: Sunday, November 17
Lake Logan Conference Center: Canton, North Carolina

Other accommodations and requests can be handled on a case-by-case basis — additional meals, family members, special needs, you name it. Fill out the registration form and let us know how we can help.
A couple of years ago, Mike Mihalas, then-president of Pisgah TU, and Mark Steirwalt from the US Forest Service were talking about potential coldwater conservation projects in Pisgah National Forest. “What's your top concern right now?” Mihalas asked. Steirwalt didn't have to give it much thought. “Cantrell Creek” was his reply.

And the Cantrell Creek Project was born.

Cantrell Creek is a major tributary to the South Mills River in Transylvania County and there are both northern and southern strain brook trout present. It’s located in the Pisgah Ranger District between Wolf Ford and the Turkey Pen parking area in Transylvania County.

The waters of the South Mills are of excellent quality for drinking, recreational use, and are home to a wide variety of aquatic organisms and species including the Eastern Hellbender — on the North Carolina “Endangered” and “Forest Species of Concern” lists — and Appalachian Elktoe Mussel, designated as a “Threatened Species” by the federal government and protected under the Endangered Species Act.

The Cantrell Creek Trail is very old. While the lower section of trail was upgraded about 20 years ago, portions
of the trail in the upper reaches of Cantrell Creek followed an old railroad grade constructed in the early 1900’s for timber harvest. The purpose of this project was to upgrade and/or relocate those 2.4 miles of the Cantrell Creek Trail and eliminate the disturbance to the streambed caused by recreational use, thereby improving and preserving the overall health of Cantrell Creek and Mills River by reducing the downstream sediment load.

In many places, Cantrell Creek Trail had merged with the stream channel, eroding soil material into the stream. The absence of riparian vegetation along the streambed also contributed to the problem. Most coldwater species need clean, cold, well-oxygenated water free of excessive sedimentation. Field observations had noted elevated sedimentation in Cantrell Creek and the South Mills River. Sediment is one of the leading causes of impaired water quality in North Carolina. It impacts the aquatic community by filling interstitial spaces in the streambed or even burying the natural streambed. This interferes with fish spawning and negatively impacts benthic macroinvertebrates, which are important food sources for trout and other aquatic species.

The new trail is built to sustainable standards, ensuring that the natural ecosystem will not suffer from the many who come to enjoy the area’s natural beauty, so visitors can enjoy the area without having to walk and bike directly in the streambed.

The Cantrell Creek Project was included in the “Pisgah Ranger District Recreation Project 2018.” It was described in more detail at https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=53329. (The trail re-route portion of the project was later re-mapped.)

Funding

After identifying the need for the project, the next step was to identify potential funding resources and project partners. The first partner to come to mind was Asheville’s Land O’ Sky Chapter of Trout Unlimited, whose members fish the rivers in Pisgah and have a stake and interest in their health and well-being. The chapters agreed to tackle the challenges of the project together.

Working through Trout Unlimited’s “Embrace-A-Stream” program, leaders from the two chapters put together a proposal for a $10,000 grant, matched by $5,000 each given by the chapters, $1,500 from the North Carolina Council of Trout Unlimited and additional funds from several project partners (USFS, Mills River Partnership, among others) to cover estimated project expenses of $153,000.

The grant request included nearly 500 hours of “in-kind” time as well for management, permitting, monitoring, mapping and other on-the-ground labor provided by TU volunteers, agency partners and employees, and others. The value of this time was estimated at more than $20,000.

In addition to the grant award, the chapters participated in the “Embrace A Stream” Challenge sponsored by Orvis Corporation. Donors nationwide were asked to designate their gifts to one of 46 grantee projects, and prizes were awarded in three categories. The Cantrell Creek project swept the awards and claimed wins in every category, adding $10,600 in award money to the $4,155 in donations received during the challenge, bringing the week’s total to $14,755.

In total, friends and members of Trout Unlimited, supported by a generous gift from the ORVIS Corporation, have raised more than $40,000 of the project’s cost.

The Pisgah Conservancy Signs On

“I was talking to someone at the Forest Service about different projects we could get involved in and they mentioned the Cantrell Creek Project,” said John Cottingham, Executive Director of The Pisgah Conservancy.
The project turned out to be a perfect fit for the organization, allowing it to use its resources to recruit additional funding partners, coordinate efforts between several organizations, and work closely with the USFS to fulfill the necessary federal requirements before the project could begin.

“In essence, we became the project managers, said Cottingham. “And while ours is an important role, none of this would be possible without the participation of the United States Forest Service and the passion of the many organizations who’ve come to recognize the importance of this endeavor."

One of those is Transylvania County Tourism (TCT), which recently announced a $20,000 contribution to the effort.

“While tourism promotion is our primary goal, we are keenly aware that tourism has an impact, and we have an obligation as an organization to support projects that sustain and preserve our natural assets,” said Grant Bullard, chair of TCT.

TCT funded the Cantrell Creek Project based on “Transylvania Always”, a program created to support local sustainability efforts and other initiatives aimed at caring for the county’s natural resources and improving visitor experiences. This pledge marks TCT’s largest contribution to a single sustainability project.

Outdoor retailer REI Co-op has also contributed $20,000 to the effort. The contribution to the Pisgah Conservancy is part of the co-op’s effort to invest in nonprofits and community organizations that share the REI mission to protect public lands and ensure access to the outdoors for all. As a member-owned co-op, REI gives back nearly 70 percent of its annual profits to the outdoor community. “The addition of $20,000 grants from both the TCT and REI to the funds already raised by Trout Unlimited and others provided a huge boost to the project,” said Cottingham.

**NEPA and Permitting**

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) was enacted by Congress in 1969 to ensure that federal agencies consider the potential environmental impacts of their proposed actions and alternatives to be considered before deciding on a course of action. For some projects, NEPA requires the preparation of an Environmental Assessment or an EIS. EIS are required when federally listed species are involved in a project. This project was categorically excluded from EIS or an EA because it involved: construction and reconstruction of trails; modification or maintenance of stream or lake habitat improvement structures; and restoring streams and riparian areas; however, a biological evaluation was a component of the NEPA decision.

The purpose of the NEPA process is to ensure that accurate environmental analyses are performed; that the public is involved; and that public officials make decisions based on an understanding of environmental consequences.

**Work Gets Underway**

Once the NEPA process is completed and contractors are selected, the work is generally ready to get underway. However, in the case of the South Mills and our coldwater streams, another scheduling challenge presented itself. Moratoriums of various durations and timings are applied to in-stream work to protect trout and other aquatic species during their spawning periods. This moratorium protects the spawning bed (redd) which is home to the eggs, and the spawning trout, which are at their most vulnerable.

The South Mills River is home to three major species of wild trout: rainbows, browns, and of course, brookies. Because of the existence of these three species and the differences in their spawning seasons, the work moratorium on the South Mills and its tributaries lasts six months – from October through March of each year. No instream work or proximate work which will significantly affect the stream may be performed during the moratorium.

The moratorium, while necessary, desirable and beneficial, presents a scheduling problem for on-water projects and compresses the work timeline significantly. So while the NEPA process had been completed, work was put on hold until the moratorium passed.

While closing a trail, restoring a creek, and building a new ½-mile trail might appear to be a minor project, the reality is that this type of work in remote areas, is costly and requires substantial coordination and a wide array of resources. In the case of Cantrell Creek, the work was complicated by the remote location of the trail.

“Whether the work is done by hand or machine, remote work is much costlier than doing the same work right on the side of the road,” said Dave Casey, district ranger for the Pisgah Ranger District. “It’s also not just about getting from point A to point B – how you get there also matters. That’s a big part of what we value about our trails, the character of them and how they move you through the forest.”

The thumbnail plan for the project was to install structure to stabilize the banks, fell dead hemlocks to provide habitat and support the formation of pools, and to relocate the trail so it
Fall 2019

Due to the complexities involved and the project requirements, a professional trail building company was selected to relocate the trail, utilizing trail and stream restoration techniques, managing storm water, installing check dams and transplanting native plants. The contractor was selected and on-site work commenced in early August, 2019. It was substantially completed by September 15, 2019, with a few remaining details to finish up before a ribbon cutting-ceremony, scheduled for mid-October, announcing the re-opening and recommissioning of the trail and recognizing the contributions of the many partners involved.

**Lessons Learned: Flexibility**

Due to more rigorous permitting and environmental regulations, much of the work done on government lands must now be handled by authorized professional contractors. The days of being able to walk to the river with a chain saw and knock down a few trees are long gone.

Still, a plan to include hours of volunteer service figured prominently in the initial planning stages of the project. “Boots on the ground” is a strength of Trout Unlimited, and many of our volunteers look forward to working on our conservation projects, getting their hands dirty and seeing the immediate difference made by their work.

We've mentioned the remote location several times in this article. It’s worth mentioning again. On foot, it’s about a 2-3 hour hike to the work area from either trailhead, and some of the terrain is challenging. As we took a harder look at the logistical specifics, the transport of materials, people, tools, and equipment proved even more challenging than initially thought. And three hours in plus three hours out doesn’t leave time or energy to get the work done during the day.

Fortunately, with the Embrace-A-Stream Challenge win and generous gifts from REI Outdoors and Transylvania County Tourism, we were able to afford many of the volunteer labor obligations to our on-site contractor. In the final analysis, it’s important that the work gets done, and done properly and on time. As long as the money held out, it made sense to get as much done as possible by the professionals while they and the equipment were onsite.

We believe this project flexibility honors not only the value of volunteers, who don’t have to spend day after day hiking in and out to do a few hours of work, but also the will of our generous supporters, who gave to fund this particular project.

Thanks to all of you for being willing to make that hike, and thanks to our generous supporters who made it so we didn’t have to.

**Lesson Learned: The Power of Partnership**

Now that the Cantrell Creek Project is finished, the improvements will benefit practically every user group in the forest: anglers, hikers, mountain bikers and horseback riders. Additionally, decreased sedimentation will increase the water quality of Cantrell Creek and the North Mills River watershed, and improve the habitat for insects, brook trout and the Eastern Hellbender.

As abundant as these benefits are, they might be just the beginning of something much larger.

“The Cantrell Creek Project has given us a real sense of what we can accomplish by coordinating our efforts,” said Cottingham. “There are several different user groups and organizations who care deeply about our public lands. The Pisgah Conservancy can help bring together these entities to tackle projects for the good of everyone.”

“One of the reasons we’re so excited about this project is its collaborative nature,” added TCT’s Bullard. “Sharing resources is a great way to achieve truly meaningful results. This project would not have been possible without the commitment of many groups. We look forward to being a partner in many more such worthy projects – and to help recruit other willing partners.”

Cottingham believes that individuals can play their part by contributing to organizations that support efforts like the Cantrell Creek Project. He also has some simple advice about our public lands.

“Cherish them. They are part of our heritage that has been passed down to us. How we take care of them is going to be our legacy to future generations.”

Dave Casey, with the Pisgah Ranger District, summed it up best: “It’s always great to have support from a wide range of user groups; but this is going beyond support – this is real buy-in.”

**PROJECT SPONSORS**

The United States Forest Service
The ORVIS Corporation
The Pisgah Conservancy
The Pisgah Chapter of Trout Unlimited
Mills River Partnership
The United States Forest Service
The Pisgah Conservancy
Transylvania County Tourism (TCT)
REI Outdoors

**PROJECT SPONSORS**
F or more than a decade, you’ve been able to show your support for Trout Unlimited and coldwater conservation in North Carolina with a special license plate featuring an illustration of a brook trout and a tag number ending in “TU.”

What you might not know is that a good chunk of the little extra you pay for that plate every year goes to support the the North Carolina Council of Trout Unlimited. The plate has been the council’s major source of revenue and generates in excess of $10,000 per year at present; over the course of its lifetime some $67,000 — all of which has been plowed back into coldwater conservation and education efforts throughout the state.

It’s not just a one-time thing. Each time you renew your TU tag, the state council receives another $10. Think of it as the gift that just keeps on giving.

At last year’s council meeting, then-treasurer Sam Stitcher commented that our plate revenues have seen a steady decline in recent years despite steady growth in our statewide membership. We were all concerned so we began to think about ways to reverse that trend.

Then, at this year’s TU Southeast Regional Meeting in Georgia, we heard from the state fisheries biologist and others about their new TU license plate, which in Georgia, we heard from the state fisheries biologist.

Then, at this year’s TU Southeast Regional Meeting in Georgia, we heard from the state fisheries biologist and others about their new TU license plate, which doesn’t generate $10,000 per year; it generates $10,000 per month. Our eyes all lit up.

Yeah, they’re anglers and probably can’t help stretching the truth a bit; and they get $20 per plate instead of the $10 we get. But imagine how much we could do with “just” $60,000 or $30,000 per year. Imagine how the Rivercourse foundation could grow, how many more coldwater conservation projects we could get behind. And so we got to work right away on refreshing our plate.

Before we tell you more about that, a little background is in order.

The current plate has done an amazing job for us, but is showing its age.

All state DMVs have different standards and requirements for their license plates. When our current plate was created, the designer was limited to a small space at the left and a white background. If you’re an artist, you know how challenging it can be to come up with something attractive and meaningful when you have to work in tight design parameters.

Michael Simon, the artist who took on that challenge more than a decade ago, did a masterful job of creating the art many of us sport on our vehicles today. He’s a supremely talented illustrator with a keen eye for trout, and you’ve probably seen his art in books and magazines, on greeting cards, and hanging on walls. The council paid a modest $800 to Michael for his design – an $800 investment that’s paid us over $100,000 in return.

When Michael learned about our new plate design this year, he wanted to donate $400 to our council, for no other reason than that he’s not only an outstanding artist — he’s a fine human being and an avid conservationist. We can’t thank him enough for the use of his art, and for his ongoing generosity. You can visit his website here to see more of his art, and for his ongoing generosity.

The artwork was donated by Royce Fitzgerald, an illustrator from Collinsville, Oklahoma. A long-time friend and colleague of Charles and Suzanne Crolley, who handle much of our council communications, Royce was the first person who came to mind for the project. The illustration was done completely freehand, without the use of technology.

We’re deeply appreciative of Royce and his generous donation to our council.

We’ll send out an announcement when the new plate becomes available from the DMV. If you like the current plate, you can keep it and the council will continue to benefit; but we hope you’ll check out the new design and slap one on the family cruiser. Our goal is to at least double our plate revenues in a year or so to $20,000, and hopefully much more as we move along.

In Tennessee, Trout Unlimited plates generate nearly $70,000 a year. Imagine what even half those numbers could do for coldwater conservation and education in North Carolina.

With your help, it’s easily within our reach. Keep your eyes peeled for that announcement; show your support for our streams and make your world — and your bumper — a more beautiful place. 🐟!
As any fly angler could tell you, there are few things as exciting as making a perfect cast or having an exact drift that leads to your fly or indicator disappearing. That does not always happen, but when it does, that excitement turns to anticipation quickly as you wonder what is on the other end of your line. Occasionally, you get that answer in short order as you see what appears to be 18-inch Brown Trout break off your tippet, but sometimes it takes reeling all the way up to your tippet and holding the fish in your hand before you realize that you have something different.

With that in mind, I wanted to take this column to share some information about a few non-trout you might encounter during your outings. To do this, I have enlisted the help of Luke Etchison, Western Region Aquatic Wildlife Diversity Coordinator for the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission. Like me, Luke is passionate about fish, but his professional efforts focus on those species that are not considered gamefish.

Let’s return to our scenario that we presented above. If you are standing a stream in western North Carolina holding a small fish that you did not expect to catch, there is a pretty good chance that it is one of these two species: Warpaint Shiner Luxilus coccogenis or Rosyside Dace Clinostomus funduloides. There are certainly other candidates (e.g., chub species), but the potential habitat and diet overlaps with trout make these two minnows the most likely fish you will encounter. Here is a little more information about each of them.

**Warpaint Shiners**

Often found in creeks and rivers that are clear and cool, Warpaint Shiners are a relatively large minnow that can reach sizes up to 5.5 inches. They also prefer streams that are well oxygenated, with a wide insect prey base. Similar to trout in those environments, Warpaint Shiners’ utilize available prey and respond to insect hatches. Whether they are eating a mayfly nymph or an adult caddisfly, their large mouth allows them to eat almost any insect (or fly) that hits the water. Warpaint Shiners can be easily identified at any size or sex by their yellow to red streak on their cheek and red “lipstick” (Photo 1).

**Rosyside Dace**

Rosyside Dace are a minnow species (up to 4.5 inches) that can be found in runs and pools of small to medium sized, cool water streams. At first glance, they may look somewhat similar to Warpaint Shiners, but they are a smaller minnow species and have finer scales. Like Warpaint Shiners, Rosyside Dace have a large mouth that allows for a wide prey base that overlaps with trout. Rosyside Dace are often seen schooling with juvenile trout in large mixed-species groups, which can likely decrease predation risk on early life stages of trout. They are most easily identified by the brown or golden yellow stripe, and breeding males are more obvious with a broad deep red streak (Photo 2).

Admittedly, it can be frustrating when that perfect presentation does not yield the trout we set out to catch. However, catching fascinating species like Warpaint Shiners and Rosyside Dace gives us a glimpse into the diversity of aquatic resources that are in our watersheds – something we may not always be aware of. Hopefully the small amount of information that we shared with you here will help with not only identification but also with awareness of the other fishes in our waters.

These two minnows are only a fraction of the native species that exist here in the state so needless to say their presence and persistence are important symbols of the health of our aquatic resources. We are so fortunate to have the waters that we do, and as those that are concerned about trout and coldwater conservation, it is important to remember that trout conservation flows downstream. In the end, the good work done to help trout and their habitats has impacts beyond our favorite fishing holes. Often those impacts are not seen directly, but as we just discussed, sometimes you do get to take a peek. 😊
Volunteers from across North Carolina have been putting boots on the ground to better trout streams and improve coldwater habitat. Over 50 people have come out to support TU Community Science projects in the Wilson Creek watershed and the Sky Island area (headwaters of the Davidson, Mills, Pigeon, and Tuckasegee Rivers).

Through their efforts, we are identifying road-stream crossing structures that are barriers to the movements of fish and other aquatic species in our local streams and sources of sedimentation that negatively impact our waterways. While our teams are doing great, the need is big, and we could use more volunteers to amp up the program.

We're hosting another round of training sessions for these important programs.

**Sedimentation Survey Program Training:**

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<td>Wilson Creek</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 16</td>
<td>Upper Tuckasegee</td>
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**Didymo Survey**

Scum. Rock snot. No matter what you call it, this slimy covering found on the stream bottom of some local waterways can quickly ruin a fishing day. Many anglers have found themselves wading full of water after slipping on a patch of this strange aquatic species.

Mats of the single-celled algae don’t just pose a threat to your balance, they may be negatively impacting stream-dwelling species that need clean gravel and cobble to live.

Justin Murdoch of Tennessee Tech University is working with NC Wildlife Resources to launch a project to determine and understand the presence of didymo in western North Carolina and they’ve asked us to lend a hand.

With the cool temperatures of Fall on their way, many of us will be hitting our favorite local streams. The ask couldn’t be simpler: you collect water samples as you fish and send them in for testing.

The kits are easy to use and come with detailed instructions. Those that sign up for collection will be mailed sampling materials and, after doing their collection, will mail them directly to Tennessee Tech.

Read more about didymo in Jake Rash’s column, featured in the Summer 2019 edition of "The Drift."

To register for one of the survey trainings or order a supply of didymo sampling kits, visit [https://northcarolinatu.org/community-science](https://northcarolinatu.org/community-science)

You can learn more about TU’s community science program — including how you can give to support and expand the program offerings — by contacting Jeff Wright, Southeast Volunteer Coordinator.

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**PROTECT YOUR WATERS**

**YOU CAN HELP PREVENT THE SPREAD OF AQUATIC NUISANCE SPECIES BY DOING THESE BASIC STEPS:**

- **CLEAN** equipment of all aquatic plants, animals and mud
- **DRAIN** water from boats, live wells and all equipment
- **DRY** all equipment thoroughly
- **NEVER MOVE** fish, plants, or other organisms from one body of water to another

**FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT NCWILDLIFE.ORG**
Funding Fundamentals

By Charles Crolley

The need for this article occurred to me during a recent conversation with a good friend and longtime TU member. He gives generously and regularly, and asked me how he could make sure more of the money is used to support projects right here at home.

If you’re like most TU members, you’re accustomed to the friendly reminders that begin about 4 months before your membership is due to expire. You probably get repeated “one-time-only” offers to upgrade to a life membership, and those generally include impressive swag like a fly rod and reel, or a set of commemorative plates with pictures of TU leaders through the decades smiling out at you as you eat your breakfast.

Or calendars, holiday cards, return address stickers, sweeps letters, “exclusive surveys” and the like, all compelling you to give more.

You love those new signs along the river, the rain gardens, the TIC program and want to support that work, so you renew your membership early. Once in a while you respond to the appeal mailings, because you’re a generous person and could really use that new hat.

But where does all that money go, and who determines how it’s used? That’s (literally) the multi-million-dollar question. In this article, we take a close look at how the money works out in TU. We believe that you should know where your money winds up so you can make the best, most informed choices in your giving.

Membership has its privileges

The “basic” TU membership is just $35/year. There are no chapter or other dues to pay. If you’re like most of us, you assume a lot of that comes back home to support the work your chapter is doing in your own backyard. Then a month or two later you get a letter from your chapter asking for financial support.

Geez, there are 400 of us in this chapter, and we’re all kicking in $35/month, and all we get are some meetings and maybe a cup of coffee and a cookie on special occasions? Now they want MORE? Where’s the $14,000 going, anyway? You check the parking lot for Bentleys, and your chapter officers’ wrists for expensive watches.

This is where math comes in; particularly subtraction and division. Here in North Carolina, our council receives $2.50 per membership per year from Trout Unlimited. It is our council practice to split that with our member chapters. As a result, each chapter meeting a simple requirement (filling in their annual financial report, or AFR) receives $1.25 per member per year from the national -> state organization of Trout Unlimited.

That’s $1.25 out of $35 coming back to your chapter’s coffers. So that $14,000 you thought they had to work with is now $500. $1.25 of that $35 goes to support the operations of the state council (newsletter, programs, training, resources coordination, conservation grants to chapters, education and outreach). The rest, about $32.50, goes to TU’s national programs, outreach, education and other expenses, like Trout magazine and legislative advocacy.

The “OneTU” concept represents the idea that Trout Unlimited is a multi-layer organization distributed through national, regional, state and local units. The intent of each of these is to hone the message and priorities to the unique character and expectations of membership — particularly at the regional, state and local levels.

Your TU chapter reflects local priorities. Your state council helps us all connect to support the waters where we live — if you’re in Raleigh, the state council connects you to the cold waters of western North Carolina where you spend time with your fly rod. The regional group provides more help to pull off big projects — whether that’s protecting a salmon fishery here or a brook trout fishery there. Some of these things get really expensive, and there’s no way a chapter — or even a state council uniting the chapters — could possibly pull them off.

It’s important to keep up your membership, and to respond to of TU’s fundraising appeals particularly when a project or issue at the national level lights your fire. In addition, the national level of TU deals with the bureaucracy in Washington DC. That’s a huge part of our mission in protecting and preserving our coldwater streams and wild places; the laws passed in our congress and actions taken by administrations directly affect our lands and waters, particularly our national forests.

Do not, by any means, think the money you give through TU national does not benefit you here in North Carolina. It does so in many ways.

But what can you do to make sure that, in addition to supporting the important work TU is doing across our nation, you’re taking care of things here at home? The answer is to give at several levels, according to your own interests and concerns. Instead of sending one gift of $100 to the national organization, consider sharing the love — $25 here, $25 there, $50 over there.

Here are a few options to consider — we call them “givin’ where you’re livin’.”

Give Where You Live: Your Home Chapter

Since you’ve read this far, you know that your local chapter doesn’t receive significant support from Trout Unlimited upstream.

Some chapters hold banquets, raffles, auctions and other fund raisers throughout the year to underwrite their budgets and power their programs. Each
Giving to your local chapter supports its programs — community outreach, Trout in the Classroom, chapter meetings, communications, coffee and doughnuts for volunteers, trash bags and gloves for highway cleanups, and — most importantly — coldwater conservation projects right in that back yard of yours.

Give Where You Live: TU Southeast Region Programs and Projects

Trout Unlimited has invested significant energy and resources in our area through folks like Andy Brown and Jeff Wright. They make up a huge part of our product. Andy brings the heat in conservation from enormous projects to local jobs like Rain Garden. Jeff steps up with meaningful ways for us to pitch in on community service and coordinating with Andy to make sure there are plenty of “boots on the ground” opportunities for us as volunteers.

You may think they’re driving TU corporate cars and drawing fat salaries and pensions. It would be a sweet gig — spending a lot of time in shorts and tee-shirts, hanging out and drinking beer with trout bums, working with the awesome folks at our state and federal agencies to come up with cool projects paid for out of a deep pocket you never have to pay for out of your own freight in finding funding for new projects and administration.”

Most of the money we continue to make have access to Andy, Jeff, and other TU staff and that we can continue to grow our influence here in North Carolina and throughout the Southeast come from chapters, councils, and individual volunteers who provide financial support for the programs TU puts on the ground right here at home. The TU staff is not going to hang out in a parking lot or show up at your door with a tin can. You support them by giving directly to their programs and projects.

Meet the Team

Andy Brown, TU’s Coldwater Conservation Manager for the Southern Appalachians, usually has several irons in the fire. Some of those projects, like the rain gardens you’ll read about in this issue, are smaller and involve more of our “boots on the ground” and volunteers from TU chapters in the area for labor support. Others — Aquatic Organism Passage (AOP) Projects, for instance — are of a much larger scale requiring engineering expertise, heavy equipment, surveys and site work. These all require professional services and can run into several hundreds of thousands of dollars. Tearing out old culverts and replacing them with new ones, removing disused or ill-placed dams, and stream channel improvements are great examples of AOP projects. Donors who want to give directly to Andy’s work in general can do so by contacting him directly (abrown@tu.org). Andy will share more information about various program areas and specific projects and provide you with a code to make sure your gift goes directly to that project. If he’s aware of your intention to give, he can follow up to make sure your gift is applied according to your wishes. Checks should be written to Trout Unlimited and sent to the national headquarters: 1777 N. Kent Street, #100, Arlington VA 22209.

Jeff Wright is the Southeast Volunteer Coordinator. Jeff’s job is to create opportunities for TU members to get boots on the ground or waders in the water in service to our coldwater streams. One exciting project Jeff has headed up/created is the “Community Science Program”, oriented at understanding the overall health of our streams and watersheds. It has three tracks — Temperature Monitoring, Sedimentation Surveys and, in coordination with Andy Brown, the AOP Barrier Survey.

Recently, Jeff worked with the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission to obtain and distribute didymo sampling kits. As you read in our last edition, didymo is an invasive plant species that coats riverbeds with a thick algae mat — and is so slick and slimy it’s been referred to as “track snot.” The didymo survey will determine what help inform agency decisions about how to control it. To learn more about these and other projects, and to support Jeff’s work directly, get in contact with him at (jeffwright@tu.org). Donors who want to give directly to Jeff’s work in general can do so by mailing a check to Trout Unlimited, PO Box 7300, Woolly Bugger, WV 25438 with a letter stating that they want this donation to go to the Southeast Volunteer Coordinator.

Direct Giving — Youth and Education

TU’s national “Headwaters Youth Program” is headquartered in Asheville and is managed by Franklin Tate with a big assist from Tara Granke. Their jobs are to create programs nationwide to recruit and engage young people (college-age and under) in TU and coldwater conservation. In support of the Headwaters Youth Program, the Guadalupe River Chapter of Trout Unlimited (Texas) established the “GETU Tomorrow Fund”, a challenge fund meant to inspire donations from chapters and councils. Starting this year, chapters can step and support the Tomorrow Fund via the 100 for 100 Challenge.

The concept is simple: 100 TU chapters pledge $100 as a direct match for Guadalupe River (Texas) Trout Unlimited’s annual $10K gift to our Headwaters Youth program. Of course, you can give any amount, big or small, to be matched up to $10K! Supporters will be featured in the Spring 2020 issue of Trout magazine.

Direct Giving — NC Rivercourse

In general, the state council doesn’t ask for money from our members and relies on the national membership rebate, which it shares 50/50 with our chapters, and revenue from the state license plate for its operations. One exception to that rule is the Rivercourse program, our summer fly fishing camp for young men and women, which takes place every summer.

We have big plans for Rivercourse, including it becoming a program with full parity of boys and girls; and long-term, one where all camper expenses are fully paid by interest generated from the Rivercourse foundation and students of all backgrounds are able to participate without concern for tuition costs. A direct gift to Rivercourse or to the Rivercourse foundation, keeps the program vital and moves it one step closer to making those plans a reality.

If you’d like to learn more about supporting Rivercourse, contact Rivercourse Administrative Director Reba Drinkman. You can also make a credit card gift online by visiting https://rivercourse.org/give.

Your gift of any size, and to any “branch” of Trout Unlimited goes to support coldwater conservation across the country, across the region, across the state and right there at home. However you choose to give, thank you for making a difference.
This month, members of Land O’ Sky TU and Pisgah TU partnered with the United States Forest Service (USFS) and TU’s Andy Brown to install the first two of six rain gardens in heavily-trafficked areas in Pisgah National Forest. One was installed at the Riding Stables parking lot along Avery Creek, a tributary to the Davidson River, and included a planted area and fencing. The other, at Pink Beds near the head of the North Mills River, was a planting-only installation.

Rain gardens are a simple but effective stormwater management tool useful at parking areas and roadways that keep pollutants out of streams and protect in-stream habitat from scouring high flow velocities that occur after rainfall events. They work by capturing the first flush of a storm and filtering the sediment, petroleum products, heavy metals and other toxins that get suspended in the stormflow. They can vary in shapes and sizes.

At their essence, rain gardens are shallow depressions excavated into the ground at the downslope side of the contributing area and planted densely with native trees, shrubs, herbs and grasses. In addition to saving our streams from pollution and damaging stormflow, they can be beautiful and enhance wildlife habitat.

Andy Brown and Brady Dodd, a USFS Hydrologist, worked together to identify the locations for the projects, which are primarily used to control and contain sedimentation that otherwise wind up in the streams. Both locations see a great deal of foot and vehicle traffic, and both are located along gradients; making them ideal candidates for a rain garden.

Initial site preparation was done by the USFS using heavy equipment (a trackhoe) to shape a suitable depression and footprint. After that, a blend of grass and native wildflower seed was distributed throughout the plot, and then a jute mat was installed to protect the seed and further stabilize the soil.

The final step in site preparation was the installation of three barriers, made up of large rock. Two are installed about 3 feet apart at the end near the anticipated source of the runoff, forming a “forebay”, which traps sediment and contaminants. Excess water then flows into the body of the structure where it’s absorbed by the soil and taken up by plants.

The third barrier is installed at the “outflow” end of the rock garden. The purpose of the final barrier is not only to keep water in the system, but more importantly to reduce the speed and flow of water out of the system in high water and intense rain events.

Volunteers were energized by the results and talked a great deal about the future for projects like these. A rain garden would be at home virtually anywhere runoff is a problem, in the city or in the wild, near fishing access parking lots or shopping centers and on coldwater or warmwater streams. They’re an ideal cooperative project with government agencies and private landowners, as well as other conservation and preservation groups for birds, butterflies, other pollinators and wildlife. We hope to see a lot more of these in the future.

At both locations, we had a chance to talk with curious visitors about the projects...
Avery Creek Riding Stables

Volunteers arrived Friday morning to begin the planting portion of the Avery Creek Project. Brady and Andy selected and delivered the plants and explained the process, and then volunteers unloaded and sorted the plants according to species while the two coordinators determined optimum plant location for water absorption, growth and visual impact. Once the plants were positioned, the volunteers dug the holes and did the planting.

What started out as a pleasant day turned quite warm, and in places compaction of the earth and parking lot materials made the perimeter holes something of a challenge, but overall it was easy, fun and rewarding duty. Andy provided lunch and the volunteers all enjoyed lively conversation and more than a few good laughs during the break to refuel before the last big push to finish up, then stood back to admire their handiwork. A cold beer may have put in an appearance.

The next day, a different crew arrived to install split-rail fencing. Tim Schubmehl from the Pisgah chapter is a bona-fide split rail fence installation expert, having done many of these projects along the Davidson. Under Tim and Andy’s guidance, the crew got a beautiful split-rail fence installed in record time. The fence is necessary due to the location of the rain garden in the parking lot – to protect the plants from pedestrians and motorists who might go in there, intentionally or otherwise.
Pink Beds

Thanks to LOSTU Chapter members John, Sherry, Kip, and of course NCTU’s own Andy Brown for some great conservation work in Pisgah National Forest. On Saturday September 21 we met at 09:00 sharp at the Pink Beds Parking area to help create a run-off controlling rain garden. Thanks to some pre-event site grading and french drain construction to direct future run off, a few dozen plants stood ready to go in the ground. It was all hands on deck to fight what turned out to be some very rocky ground at times, but this group could not be deterred.

Armed with shovels, pry-bars, rakes and root clippers it took about three hours to get everything into the ground. The time went by fast with lots of talk about favorite outdoor gear, fishing stories of course, and best of all lots of great conversation about each other and the difference we were making to the future of our cold water streams. Cold beverages and lunch finished off our day perfectly and gave us the chance to talk with several random folks who took interest in our work and stopped to ask questions.

The revitalizing feeling gained from this project lead us to dream of so many more opportunities we have in western North Carolina and beyond for cold water conservation. Get your gloves ready and stay tuned folks, we’re just getting started and our conservation program is getting ready to launch into a whole new era.
Several years ago, my middle son had just finished building a new home and I was there helping him move. He was also a landscape architect preparing a blueprint for his yard. I noticed the screen saver on his laptop, and it was a small mouth bass with a fly sticking out of its mouth. I said, “where did you catch the smallest?” He responded, “New River, but that’s not my favorite fish.” Now I’m expecting brown, rainbow or brook trout as his reply. No, I was way off. He flips the screen to a picture that I think is a bonita, and I say so. He says “no, false albacore” and then proceeds to tell me, “if you can only fly fish one more time in your life this is the trip you want.” I’m thinking of some exotic (read expensive) destination. “Where did you catch them?” I asked. He said, “I caught them off Harkers Island, NC.” Now my interest is way up. Maybe this is something I can do. He offered that he went with a guide. This is even better as I don’t have a saltwater boat. “Who’s the guide?” I asked. He answered “Brian Horsley is the best in the business. Well second best, his wife is the very best.”

The time is now May and false albacore season is late September through mid-December, so I think I have plenty of time to book him. I call the number for Brian Horsley, he answers and I tell him I would like to fish with him this fall. He responds, “I’m already fully booked but my wife Sarah has an open day.” I ask to speak with her, “I’m ok I’d like to fish with my wife”. She then tells us, “this is where 9 weights come to die.” On the way out to the ocean we stop for a few minutes and cast to a school of blue fish. Fun on the fly rod and Sarah didn’t fool us. She was giving us a casting skills test. We must have passed because she didn’t take us back to the dock.

The way to find false albacore is to watch for the birds. When they start diving it means the allies have pushed a school of bait fish to the surface and they have guttered into a ball (bait ball). The allies are on or near the surface and can be sight fished. Seeing the bait ball is a phenomenal experience — a room-sized ball of anchovies or silversides spinning round with allies charging through. They are often joined by other pelagic fish — blues, spanish mackerel and sharks. We pulled up on the first bait ball along with another boat. It was a large bait ball, maybe 50 feet across. You could feel and see the energy. The excitement was almost paralyzing. The surface of the water was rippling and exploding with anchovies bright red from fear. Sharks and allies were charging through with fins and sometimes whole bodies out of the water. It was overwhelming. I cast like it was the first time I had held a fly rod. Calm down, calm down, slow down, ok I got this, decent cast into the ball. Bam I’ve got a hook up. Wow I can’t move it. Let it run and run and run. Sarah is saying it’s not an albie, probably a shark. It surfaces and she’s right — a five-foot black tip. I fight it for a while and Sarah says, “break it off we’re not going to spend all day on this we have allies to catch, and besides who’s going to take the fly out of his mouth.” By this time there were several boats surrounding the bait ball and it was getting crowded. Sarah said, “let’s go, we’ll find our own damn fish”, which we did. A short time later we pulled up to our private bait ball–two-inch crimson fish spinning in a sphere. Arthur casts to an albie and gets an immediate hook up–screaming reel and all. I cast–same response–screaming reel. Let it run and run and run. My drag is on full and I’m running out of backing. Goodbye fly line. Arthur is now landing his first ever albie. Sarah grabs it by the tail and hoists it into the boat. A quick hero picture and she pile drives it headfirst back into the Atlantic. The fish takes off like a torpedo — no damage done. By now the bait ball is down so it’s back to watching for birds.

The casting style is nothing like that for trout. Get the fly out there and get it out there fast. This isn’t about gentleness of presentation. It’s about speed of casting and stripping back fast. When a hook up is made, fingers, thumbs and hands should be clear of the reel. Several false casts and the allies may be gone.

We see a few birds working in the distance. Full throttle to the birds, then full stop. Sarah says, “look at these” we’re looking at the Garmin fish finder and there are a few little hook shaped marks. “Big drum” she says. She practically throws us heavier rods (12 wt) and tells us to hurry and go deep. “Strip out, strip, strip.” Fast, jerky retrieve. Both rods are rigged with a fly named half and half. We both hook up at about the same time. Are you kidding? I think I have a Volkswagen on the other end. We both are in a long, long fight. Get some line, some line, get some line, lose some line. Then the fish does for the bottom. During a hard pull I feel my line go slack. Arthur finally lands his. OMG He holds it to his waist and its tail drags the deck—50 plus lbs. A few hero pictures and then it goes back into the ocean. We dash toward another bait ball and I’m on Sarah’s rod since mine has no line. We both sight cast to allies, hook up and the run takes off. These guys run 75 to 100 yards or more before they slow down. It’s give and take till you recover most of the line. There may be a few extra 50 yard runs as the fish is worked to the bolt. These fish run at literally 55 miles per hour. Repeat this a few times and you have our day.

“I can only fly fish one time!”

Where to go. What to do. There are several guides that work the false albacore run out of Harkers Island, NC. The two I mention above and the ones I still fish with are:

* Sarah Gardiner: captainsarah@charter.net  
* Brian Horsley: bdhorsley@charter.net

It is generally easiest to contact them by email since they are on the water most of the time. Harkers Island Fishing Center is where I stay. It is an old cinder block Motel. Rusty clean and a fun experience. They are best reached by phone (910) 258-3307. Harkers Island Fishing Center is where I stay. It is in the outer banks, NC. 1007 Island Rd., Harkers Island, NC 28531.

By Jimm Barber

**MY FIRST False Albacore Trip**
A few months ago, Jim Estes was inducted into the Hall of Fame at the Fly Fishing Museum of the Southern Appalachians in Bryson. You might not be familiar with Jim by name, but you’re probably familiar with one of his signature creations that took the world by storm: the mop fly.

Mop fly mania history began in the late 90’s in Western North Carolina. Jim Estes began using the mop material on fly patterns here when the material first came available at a Dollar Store in Bryson City, North Carolina. Jim and I have been friends since the mid-1980’s and one thing I can tell you about him is that he is one of the most experimental fly fishers that I know. Not just the mop material used in tying but we have played around with homemade fly lines, liquids and pastes for floating or sinking mono, and many other obscurities in the sport of fly fishing.

In the late 90’s the bright green “mop fly” was a very good representation of the larger sourwood worms that fell from the trees in June through August in this part of the country. Before the mop material came about we would use coffee grinders to get the perfect color green and a dubbing loop to represent these terrestrial worms.

Today you will see folks with variations of the pattern all over the world. Why? Because regardless of your thoughts about the pattern it is a highly...
productive fly at times with the added benefit that it is one of the fastest patterns to create. It has quickly become a favorite “guides” choice pattern because of the simplicity to produce.

Folks Either Steal Or Share Information

One of the best quotes I remember from my friend Lefty Kreh was “folks either steal or share information”. He had seen it all during his time in the fly fishing industry. Lefty used the story of Norman Duncan who invented the Duncan Loop in the Florida Keys in the early 1960’s. Norman showed it to a neighbor and a month later it was published as a new knot called the “Uni Knot”. A few months later it goes to Europe as a “Grinner Knot”. How convenient that Norman was never mentioned in any of these! He shared it with others for others to exploit.

One of the big keys to success for Western Carolina fly fishers is that many do share information. The successes in this region could have never taken place otherwise. From knots, patterns, casting techniques, line retrievals, solutions of paste, and many other facets for fly fishing. Hard to be a fan of those that take without due credit. This is more common today (entitlement crowds) than ever before.

In all honesty, I think it is quite laughable before. Today (entitlement crowds) than ever before.

Mop Fly Mania History

Jim Estes submitted his creation to Umpqua Feather Merchants in Colorado. Umpqua and Montana Fly Company are among the few big players for commercial patterns. It was declined because as he was informed “it was a regional pattern”. This was ironic in a way because it had already won multiple individual, as well as, Fly Fishing Team USA Youth Gold medals in Europe. It was already proven in Patagonia, New Zealand, Chile, and many other exotic trout fishing destinations. Now it is in their 2018 catalog called the Umpqua Mop.

Point is just a few short years ago all kinds of credit was given for articulation of a singular pattern. Articulation is nothing new! I remember nymphs and streamers articulated when I was a teenager.

Bryson City has had many renowned fly fishers from Europe visit during either competition or training for the Team USA Youth or North Carolina Team. October 2016 it was featured in the London Times and the Wall Street Journal. The mop is no doubt one of the most popular patterns in the past 50 years for the sport of fly fishing. Making use of new materials as they become available has always been part of the evolution of the sport of fly fishing and fly tying.

Changing a singular color in back of bead or adding a rubber leg is not an invention of a “new fly”. The concept of a material being used in the first place as a viable pattern is a progress. Many folks think the pattern should be in the “junk food” category along with squirmys worms and egg patterns. Even aquatic worms and eggs occur naturally in the water. So it is a bit confusing why they are considered junk food in the first place.

Evolution of Patterns

The mop fly actually represents many aquatic and terrestrial insects. The chartreuse mop represents the sourwood worms in this part of the country. The tan mop represents crane fly larvae well from the Nantahala River and many other watersheds in this region. It is also excellent with all of the crane fly larvae on the Beaverhead River in Montana. mop fly mania history

The gray, dark brown, and black mops represent the cased caddis. Especially the October caddis in this part of the country. Many times in the winter months these produce epic numbers of trout landed. I also think part of the key to their success is from the old saying of big fly, big fish!

The pink mops look like nothing in the water yet I remember many triple-digit days on guide trips. If you fish lakes often you will become a believer in the mop. It mops fish to the net in a hurry! It will give it a try and I assure you at some point you will have many wild brown trout over the years with strange things eaten including okra!

For the science geeks, trout feed by the law of conservation of energy just as everything else on the planet. mop fly mania history

The orange and yellow mop represent a fast impressionistic pattern for our larger daughters. A tip for these is to use a permanent marker to two-tone the mop and add some rubber legs. If you think about all of the steps involved to create realistic patterns for stoneflies why would you waste the time at the vice?
I was lamenting a few years ago to one of my fly fishing buddies that no one posts fish pictures on Facebook anymore. All I saw on Facebook were political rants and advertisements. He looked at me like a millennial looks at their parents and said, “Dude…you need to be on Instagram, that’s where the fish are!”

And he was right…my very limited social media time is primarily spent drooling on my phone as I swipe through all kinds of awesome fly fishing destination pictures and beautiful fish of all types. I guess that’s when I finally realized there was some merit to social media (insert smug emoticon here). So when Triangle Fly Fishers was looking for ways to get our members out fishing local waters, build more camaraderie, and support local conservation efforts, we turned to Instagram (and we included Facebook too).

This past summer, Triangle Fly Fishers hosted its first ever, social media fly fishing derby. The premise was simple, go out and fish, your fishing buddy, etc. to Instagram and beautiful fish of all types. I guess that’s when I finally realized there was some merit to social media (insert smug emoticon here). So when Triangle Fly Fishers was looking for ways to get our members out fishing local waters, build more camaraderie, and support local conservation efforts, we turned to Instagram (and we included Facebook too).

As a start, I felt that our social media fly fishing derby is much like the TV show Who’s Line is it Anyway, where everything is made up and the points don’t matter. The purpose of this derby was simply to get folks out to some local fly fishing spots, meet some new fly fishing friends and donate a little money to a local conservation group.

The results were great, and while I would have liked to have seen more of our members participate, there was some fun competition going on throughout the summer. Heck, some folks like myself don’t matter.” The purpose of this derby was simply to get folks out to some local fly fishing spots, meet some new fly fishing friends and donate a little money to a local conservation group.

The results were great, and while I would have liked to have seen more of our members participate, there was some fun competition going on throughout the summer. Heck, some folks like myself don’t have time to head to the mountains, there are some pretty good rivers right here in the Triangle. We had 36 members participate. The vast majority of the posts were on Instagram and future events will probably focus on that social media platform exclusively. The Triangle Fly Fishers sponsored events really helped to get folks out onto the water. These events were simple and did not require much planning. We merely selected a date, time and location to meet and went fishing.

As a start, I felt that our social media fly fishing derby was successful. However, we definitely want to expand the reach of the derby and get more participants. We also want to promote the trash cleanup portion more, and hopefully build additional relationships with other conservation organizations.

Heck, next summer we may go statewide with #TeamMountains, #TeamPiedmont, and #TeamCoast! Perhaps another way to go is #TeamColdwater, #TeamWarmwater, or #TeamSaltwater? Regardless, our intent is to get folks out fly fishing to support local conservation efforts.

By now, some of you may be interested in the results — here they are:

- The winning river was #TeamEno; Triangle Fly Fishers will be donating $500 to the Eno River Association.
- The first was caught out of the Eno River. Members will get to cast a vote at our annual fund-raising event in September, but perhaps readers across the state want to chime in on which fish was the biggest. Just email me at flyfishing-hackett@msn.com with #TeamEno or #TeamNeuse in the subject line to indicate which fish looks bigger to you!

- The winning "team" was determined by the TFF fly fishing derby committee based on the number of hashtags posted for each team. The team with the most posts/tags would “win” $500 to be donated by Triangle Fly Fishers to a local conservation group.
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The Land O’ Sky Chapter of Trout Unlimited (Asheville) and the National Park Service completed their third year of cooperative survey and conservation projects in the North Carolina section of Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Three distinct projects took place this summer, a couple involving backcountry excursions and overnight camping in the park. Not a bad way to spend a summer evening or two!

The first project, a one-day Large Stream IBI Sampling of Big Cataloochee Creek, included chapter members John Miko, John Griffith, Curt Silvers and Tom Tenbrunsel. This work is an annual activity to monitor the health of the largest stream in Cataloochee Valley. Big Cataloochee was found to be in good health, so your ‘fishing pressure’ hasn’t deterred the trout from their usual habits including eating, growing, making more trout and refusing your carefully-selected and perfectly-presented flies.

The second project was intended to be a four-day, Four Stream Characterization and Population Sampling study including overnight camping with GRSM Park Fishery personnel. Land O’ Sky members chapter members Jay Hawthorne and Jay Moynahan participated. The Rough Fork Creek study was completed on day one as planned. That night, a monsoon came in and almost flooded our entire campsite. No kidding, it rained like somebody left the faucet on in a tub above our heads. Those sleeping in ‘hammock tents’ woke up banging above small lakes! The creeks were completely blown out on the following morning, so work had to be rescheduled for later dates. Fortunately, chapter members John Miko and Eli Goode stepped up to support the fishery folks in completing the task as planned when it was rescheduled.

The third project was two days of monitoring brook trout populations on Flat and Bunches Creeks near the crest of Balsam Mountain (~5000 foot elevation). These are classic, small, somewhat densely congested creeks in a beautiful area with elk, turkeys, whitetails, and even a bear seen during our visit. Also, evidence of wild pigs was found next to the creek. (Would pig tails make good streamers?)

In addition to electrofishing, weighing, and measuring hundreds of brookies, some fly fishing enabled us to ‘gather more information’ on the native, Southern Appalachian Brook Trout that have inhabited these streams since the Ice Age. We are happy to report that both creeks have healthy and active populations of wild, native trout. Chapter support was provided by Kip Pritchard, Jacob Wiseman, Jay Moynahan, and Jay Hawthorne.

This was the first time our chapter has taken on three conservation projects in one summer. While it kept us busy, we were blessed to be out in the beautiful Smoky Mountains doing important work with Park Fishery leaders Matt Kulp, Caleb Abramson and their crew.

Each spring, the Land O’ Sky chapter receives an update from leaders from the park fisheries regarding ongoing projects and progress, and what’s on tap for the summer. Matt Kulp and Caleb Abramson, the fisheries biologists have given in-depth presentations on the health and distribution of trout throughout the park and shared those presentations with us to pass along to you.

They’re packed with so much detail that at times it’s a little like drinking from a firehose, but you can download them from these links and take them in at your own pace. They’re a fascinating, in-depth look at what’s happening with the only trout native to the eastern United States, which just happen to make their home in the National Park closest to ours.
This has been a very effective nymph pattern for me over the years and I have found it to be a great DH (delayed harvest) fly. It’s easy to tie and it gets down quickly. Not only have I used a tungsten bead for this example, I’ve also added lead free wire. It can also be a very effective fly for “Euro” style nymphing. It can be tied on any number of hook styles such as “scud” or “jig” and in this example I’m using a size 16 barbless “jig” hook. It can be tied with tungsten or brass beads, or even colored beads work well. It’s a fly that lends itself to modifications easily, so use your imagination.

So let’s get at it…

Tight lines,
Dave

### Materials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hook</th>
<th>Size 16, Barbless Jig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thread</td>
<td>Uni-Thread, 8/0, Red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bead/Weight</td>
<td>Slotted Tungsten, Silver w/ 5 wraps of .010 lead free wire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thorax</td>
<td>Hareline Rainbow Scud Dubbing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body</td>
<td>Red Thread Underbody w/ UTC Pearl Tinsel Overbody</td>
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</table>

1. Start by placing a tungsten bead on the hook and placing the hook in your vise.
2. With the hook securely placed in the vise, and this is optional, place a few wraps of lead free wire behind the bead and snug it against the bead.
3. Start your thread behind the wire wraps, or bead if you’re not using wire. If you’re using wire, wrap over the windings to secure in place. A drop of CA glue may also be a good idea here.
4. Clip a few, 4 or 5, pheasant tail fibers from a pheasant tail feather and secure them to the top of the hook shank with 3 or 4 loose thread wraps. Now’s the time to adjust the tail to the proper length. Once you are satisfied with the tail length, continue touching thread wraps rearward to just prior to the hook bend keeping the tail fiber on the top of the hook. If you are using a scud hook you’ll want to continue wraps slightly around the bend.
5. At this point I generally flatten the thread by spinning my bobbin counter clockwise until all twist has been removed. Now, form a nice slightly tapered underbody allowing the thread to hang behind the bead when finished. This will serve as the tie in point for the next component, pearl tinsel.
6. and 7. Secure a section of pearl tinsel on top of the body and behind the bead. Continue with thread wraps rearward securing the tinsel to the TOP of the body stopping at the base of the tail. Tie any excess thread that protrudes over the bead and bring the thread back to just behind the bead.
8. Starting at the tail tie in point, grasp the excess tinsel and using slightly overlapping wraps, wrap forward to just behind the bead. Secure the tinsel with a few wraps of thread and fold the tinsel back over the thorax area and overwrap with rearward thread wraps.
9. Loosely dub an appropriate amount of dubbing to the thread and form the shaggy thorax.
10. Pull the tinsel over the thorax and secure behind the bead with a few tight wraps of thread.
11. Trim all excess tinsel, whip finish forming a “red hot spot” and add a drop of head cement.
The work of conservation advocacy combines a number of challenges. Convincing those who don’t care to care, motivating those who do care to act, and shaping public policy such that people who do care and do act can make a difference. Constructive discourse is crucial to all these things but particularly to the last one.

Advocating policy within the American political system is a long and proud tradition protected by the first amendment. It is an art and a science that I spent a substantial portion of my professional life practicing. I have worked on Capitol Hill, in the Executive Branch and in private industry with both of those bodies. During that time I observed many attitudes and behaviors that were constructive, and some that were not. Coming from that experience, I have recently grown concerned with discussion occurring in a variety of TU internal communications. Increasingly, I see colleagues within TU adopting and espousing unconstructive perspectives and practices related to a variety of policy debates that affect our mission. Please note that I am not taking issue with their positions. I am simply saying that my experience leads me to believe that their assumptions, attitudes and perspectives are unconstructive. By unconstructive I mean that they diminish rather than increase the likelihood of achieving our policy goals.

There are a few principles and practices that I think we would do well to be more mindful of:

**RESPECT YOUR OPPONENT**

Resist the temptation to impugn the motives, intelligence or integrity of others simply because they have a different position on an issue. It does nothing to strengthen the validity or veracity of your own position. Public policy is complex. Reasonable people can disagree. Close your mouth, open your mind and seek to understand the reasoning behind someone else differing from your viewpoint. Only by seeking that understanding can you develop a proposal that meets both their concerns and yours. Bottom line, if you think somebody has their head up their rear end… there’s a 90% chance that you have your head up your rear end.

**EVERYONE IS A “SPECIAL INTEREST”**

Believe in what you do but avoid the temptation to be self-righteous. In the political world the term “special interest” is a slur that in reality usually just means “somebody whose interests are different than mine.” We see ourselves as righteous conservation advocates striving to preserve, protect and restore… etc. but to a rancher who needs water we’re just a bunch of well-heeled fly fishing snobs shamelessly waving the banner of conservation in an attempt to keep hard working Americans from doing something that might mess up our favorite playground. So who’s the special interest?

**TRUTH IS PERSONAL**

Truth is another word I see inappropriately “weaponized” a lot. We all want to be on the side of “truth.” Even Superman has it in his mission statement. In reality, truth is not an absolute. It is simply facts, viewed through the lens of our own perspective. Maybe I won the Powerball today and you got hit by a car. I’m going to say today was a good day. You’re going to say today was a bad day. You could send an email to all your friends saying that I was completely clueless, we could get into an argument about which was “true” or we could seek to understand the facts and perspectives that lead each other to view the day so differently. In the world of successful advocacy, there’s only one choice.

**POLITICS IS A COMPLETELY VALID REASON FOR POLITICIANS TO DO THINGS**

I frequently hear people dismissing an elected official’s motives for an action or inaction as “nothing but politics” or just “trying to get reelected.” Let’s think about that for a minute. The reason our policy makers are elected is so that they remain accountable to the people they represent. They are supposed to act in harmony with the majority sentiment of the people they represent. If a politician takes a position counter to what we’d like because most of his constituents support that position, then it is we who haven’t done our job, not the elected official.

**TODAY’S LOSS IS TOMORROW’S WIN, IF YOU LET IT BE**

Elected officials don’t like to disappoint constituents (see above). When they have to say no to you on a request, by nature they will be more inclined to say yes on a future request. Don’t waste that inclination by stomping away or going online to rally opposition to their reelection. Talk with them about why they can’t support you. Respect their answer. Make a note of it and seek future opportunities where they can help on something that doesn’t involve the same conflicting principle.

**THERAPISTS (NOT DISCUSSION THREADS) ARE FOR THERAPY**

If you care deeply about your cause, and I know you do, these ideas are easier in theory than in practice. Frustration, disappointment and even anger are natural emotions and I’m not suggesting that we aren’t all entitled to them. What I am suggesting is that they are not helpful in the world of advocacy and the more we allow them into our discourse the more risk we have of spreading them throughout TU and ingraining them into our organizational persona.

I love that TU members are passionate about our mission. I am and I would never suggest that we should be otherwise. Passion can be a powerful force for good but only in the content of the many other forces for good. Let’s make sure these include respect, restraint and reason.
Located in Pisgah National Forest, Wilson Creek starts at the top of Grandfather Mountain in Caldwell county and runs for 23.3 miles through the Blue Ridge Mountains and down into a 200ft gorge before dumping into the John’s River. It’s broken up into several sections along its course — Wild (4.6 miles), Scenic (2.9 miles), and Recreational (15.8 miles).

Wilson Creek was added to the Wild and Scenic River System in August, 2000.

The stream is home to wild brook trout, hatchery supported rainbow, brook and brown trout, several species of bass, bluegill and others. The clear pools and changing terrain transform commonplace recreational activities into challenging and beautiful adventures. Hikers enjoy the trails, casual visitors enjoy a picnic and cooling off in the deep pools and anglers try their luck in the pocket water, runs and riffles that are characteristic of a pristine Appalachian stream system running through the beautiful heart of Pisgah National Forest.

It’s easy to be mesmerized by the beauty of the creek and the backdrop of the forest and to forget about the changes and perils that all mountain streams encounter over time. Wilson Creek has endured high waters and severe flooding — the devastation wrought by volatile shifts in our climate and weather systems. A look up and around at the new emergency notification system and flood warning sirens gives mute testimony to those hard realities.

The remnants and ghosts of the buildings still standing at the old mill and parts of railroad give testament to the destruction of the two major floods in 1916 and in 1940, wiping away the foot print of Mortimer, NC.
The flood tide washed away the edges of Pineola road, leaving its wake gullies up to six feet deep, and rendering the road impassible to all but high-clearance four-wheel-drive vehicles. It changed the path of the creek and dramatically altered the creek bed, terrain and bank structures along the stream.

What were areas of sandy beaches along the banks are now beaches made up of rock beds. Areas that had deeper holes were filled in with rocks or sand, creating new stone beaches while other areas that were once shallow have been scoured out and made deep parts of the creek.

In essence, the flood reshaped the entire system, and left us to adapt.

Popular fishing holes including High Bridge, Emerald Pool, Sandy Beach and Handicap plus several others are almost unrecognizable today. The majority of the damage was done above and around Edgemont continuing through the delayed harvest section and down to the Welcome Center. Several bridges were damaged or wiped out entirely, leaving local residents trapped on either side.

The sand beach that reached out into the water on the Mortimer side of High Bridge has been washed away, leaving deeper pools of water surrounding the large center rock and created a new current flow at the spot. The small rock bed that was downstream from there on the right — the Edgemont side — is now a larger, more prominent rock bed that crowds the middle of the stream. Directly across, the trees that once stood overhanging side that hung are down, and lining the bank.

Emerald Pool was another favorite spot for many and offered a huge sandy area that no longer exists but is now under water. Sandy Beach has been washed out, replaced by rocks, and its sand has filled up areas of the deep pool.

Stretches along the area from Middle Bridge to Handicap Hole have either deepened or have been filled with massive amounts of sand. An area just before Handicap Hole at the bend had a small island of rock before it made a transition into a deeper. That feature is mostly gone.

At the Handicap Fishing Deck Access, large trees now litter the bank and sand has filled in the pool in front of the deck. Today, trees still dangle from high-voltage power lines below the old mill, and more trees and debris are packed in and along the banks. The high waters uncovered a foundation at the water’s edge of the old mill. It appears to have been a trestle, and the reshape of the channel exposes nearly 5 feet of its height.

Phillips Branch, where the Delayed Harvest section meets the Hatchery Supported Waters, was punished by massive amounts of rocks and debris as water rushed down the mountain making its way to the creek.

The area down to and through the campground and welcome center suffered considerable destruction. Debris, decks and trees are left piled against and hanging in the standing trees. The road just below the campground sustained significant damage, resulting in the need for road repairs and a new retaining wall. Buildings and other structures were ripped apart and debris, tin and other items — including a dog house — were left in trees all along the various spots along the creeks edge in and through Edgemont.

Large trees are hanging in trees along the entire section of the creek while others are piled up in large masses against objects such as the trestle above Betsy’s Country Store. Many trees were shove through objects and left splintered like the end of a toothpick that’s been chewed on for a while. Even trees with root systems up to 10-15 feet in diameter were uprooted like weeds, laid over, or carried downstream by the force of the flood waters.

Roads were washed away or damaged by the volumes of water rushing down the mountainside carrying mud, rocks, trees and other items — clearing a path of destruction before dumping into the creek below.

Wilson Creek was devastated, changed, and rewritten in many ways by the flood of 2019. The flood affected not only those living along the creek but the harm to the aquatic species, vegetation and wildlife is hard to determine. Many have been displaced, perhaps destroyed. Broken pipes, debris, trash and contaminants were carried downstream and deposited along the banks as flood waters receded leaving a trail of destruction that could pollute the waters and could cause a longer-term health risk to not only humans but to the entire ecosystem of Wilson Creek.

There’s much work to be done in restoration and cleanup. There are also important questions to be asked about damage mitigation, and climate change, and how we can protect Wilson Creek moving forward; and to safeguard its natural beauty and rightful designation as a vibrant part of the Wild and Scenic River System.
A couple of days ago, and this will come as a surprise to no one who knows me even a little, I was sitting on my deck enjoying a nice cold beer. This particular beverage, the Wayfarer IPA from Asheville’s Green Man Brewing Company, sported a slogan around the top of the can: “Do what you can. Can what you do.”

Catchy slogan for a brewery that cans beer, and it got me to thinking about how many ways those words can be strung together to form meaningful thoughts: Do what you can, can what you do, you can do what, can you do what and what can you do among them.

I got another out of the fridge and popped it open “to make sure it said the same” – also no surprise to those who know me.

And if you know me, you know I’m the world’s worst scientist. It’s not that I haven’t tried or am not interested in biology, geology and the other -ologies, it’s that I’m hopelessly dense when it comes to them. Had I been in charge of the origins of our universe, these billions of years later it would be a dark, cold, lonely place.

When our universe, these billions of years later, it would be a dark, cold, lonely place. Being a TU Volunteer. We are all part of a larger picture, a mosaic if you will, that’s constantly changing as we move and react to the forces of nature – our own, and the world around us. We have our own color, our own pieces to add; the picture isn’t as complete or marvelous without each and every one of us.

Several weeks ago, I volunteered to “help” with a project – the Rain Gardens in Pisgah National Forest – a couple of weeks ago. I’ve got a hip injury that makes it hard to walk on uneven surfaces. Kicking a shovel into the ground is a non-starter. The injury makes it so I can’t carry anything heavy (other than my own girth and possibly a 12-pack of Wayfarer IPA). I wound up sorting and carrying the plants, cutting the jute mat, and filling in the holes after others (including my darling bride) did the heavy lifting, digging and sogging.

It’s what I could do, so I did what I could.

Thankfully, TU offers a diverse array of volunteer opportunities for people like me. In a recent discussion with a friend, he described the work I do on our council communications as its “boots on the ground.” I thought about that for a few seconds, then corrected him by remarking that it’s more like “butts in the chair.”

Managing our council communications efforts isn’t glamorous and sometimes it’s a downright lonely business. You’re “that guy”, and people cringe when they get an email from you mentioning the word “deadline.” They see you in public and find it hard to believe that someone so glamorous and sometimes it’s a downright lonely business.

But this is what I can do, so I do what I can. It’s what I could do, so I did what I could.

A couple of months back I wrote an article for another publication in which I talked about the force-multiplying effects of our teamwork and cooperation. In that article, I invoked the example of “The Butterfly Effect”, which is a simple model of chaos theory: can a single butterfly flapping its wings set off a series of micro-events that eventually cause it to rain half a world away?

What I’ve learned is that a “bunch” of butterflies can do what, can you do what and what can you do among them.

But this is what I can do, so I do what I can. As with my hip injury, I wound up sorting and carrying the plants, cutting the jute mat, and filling in the holes after others (including my darling bride) did the heavy lifting, digging and sogging. It’s what I could do, so I did what I could.

Managing our council communications efforts isn’t glamorous and sometimes it’s a downright lonely business. You’re “that guy”, and people cringe when they get an email from you mentioning the word “deadline.” They see you in public and find it hard to believe that someone so glamorous and sometimes it’s a downright lonely business.

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What if a bunch of butterflies – millions of them – happen to take off at the same time from a field in North Carolina? Will the small changes to wind patterns outside Raleigh manifest themselves as a cool breeze on a hot day in Texas?

If you’re like me, you may have fond memories of playing with kaleidoscopes when you were a kid. You point the thing at a light source, turn the bezel and the shapes and color patterns morph and change into something new with each turn.

I’ve since learned that the “bunch” of butterflies, kaleidoscope of the butterfly effects that happen as a result of the cumulative actions of all the butterflies. It’s the sense of being part of something bigger than ourselves.

Perhaps physical limitations keep you from participating in certain activities, or maybe you just lack certain talents. I’m right there with you. But don’t let those things stop you from trying out other ways to pitch in. Take pictures, write stories, share your passion and insight. Give a few dollars to help keep your chapter afloat. Teach a kid to fish, teach a veteran to tie a fly. Be a friend, send a note, offer encouragement, welcome a stranger.

Maybe, eventually, like that kaleidoscope of the butterfly effects that happen as a result of the cumulative actions of all the butterflies, they’ll see you in public and find it hard to believe that someone so glamorous and sometimes it’s a downright lonely business.
The North Carolina premier screening of the Orvis 50/50 On The Water Film Tour took place Wednesday night, September 25 at the New Belgium Brewing Company in Asheville. Representatives from several organizations, among them — Land O’ Sky TU, Pisgah TU, High Country TU, Casting Carolinas, Casting For Recovery, Orvis, Pisgah Area Women Fly Fishers and River Rangers — talked with attendees about regional opportunities to get involved in fishing and conservation.

A brief panel discussion featuring Reba Brinkman, Debbie Gillespie, Zoë Mihalas, Hannah Myers, Starr Nolan and Jessica Whitmire introduced the film tour and hit on some of the particular issues and challenges women face in getting out on the water.

We had over 125 people in attendance last night and fitting that it was a 50/50 event, because there were equal if not more women in the room including a few young girls under 12! Some great raffle prizes were given away, and lots of people chatting about fishing!

It was so refreshing to see a room with such diversity. Not that we still don’t have work to do, because this is just a starting point. But last night we had men and women of all ages together in one room celebrating stories of women in fly fishing, conversation efforts, and our natural resources. The more we continue to reach others and introduce more people to fly fishing and help them connect with our rivers and streams, the more people will be out there advocating to keep our waters clean and protected.

Contact jessica@headwatersoutfitters.com if you’re interested in scheduling a showing for your chapter or organization — it’s a great way to inform and challenge your own memberships and kickstart or enhance your diversity program. Pisgah TU is doing just that for its November meeting, at which the Pisgah Area Women Fly Fishers will be presenting the films and panel discussion.

Thank you to everyone who supported this event!
I looked river left in time to see the big bushy dry fly being yanked under the water. It hesitated there, about a foot under for a moment, before floating back to the surface. It was then that the angler in front of me, whose mind and spirit were busy somewhere floating twenty feet over the water watching its body below, lifted his rod to nothing.

“Was that a fish?”

I shrugged. “We’ll never know.”

As anglers we like to tell the story of the one that got away. It’s always a big one and continues to grow with each retelling of the story, but what about the ones we never touched. I wonder how many lifetime “trophy” catches never felt the sting of the hook because we were too busy thinking about work, family, life, or the worst case scenario… the angler just up or down stream of us.

I wonder how many missed opportunities I’ve witnessed, or been party to, because of simple inattention. Lack of experience and/or skill are qualities I’ve personally never been short on, and so I never hold blame over another’s head when this is the case; but being asleep at the wheel is almost unforgivable. The truth is that fish was probably just another fish, nothing special, if one can be allowed to describe a fish in such a way. It was probably a chub or a dace, or even worse a stocker.

But then again… “We’ll never know.”

I left the house early this morning and drove over the mountain in the fog. I had crossed the continental divide twice on my way, and each time the little green signs tempted me to pull over and rid myself of too much coffee. It was something I’d read in a Gierach book, or maybe it was Norman Maclean, maybe it was both, I can’t remember. The amusing fact being that I could urinate into two different drainages, and parts of the ocean, at the same time. The ladies will have to forgive me for this aside.

I’m almost certain this is one of those things that, for the most part, amuses men only for reasons both logistic and intuitive.

As I drove the road up and over one drainage, down the next, and back again, I was struck by how many of the businesses, residences, and adult amusement parks were either named after a trout, or contained the image of a trout as part of their logo. Most of this area was once trout water. Cold high mountain streams that flowed east toward the Atlantic, rather than west to the Gulf. I’ve seen studies and articles that indicate that there were once brook trout in these waters, but I have a hard time wrapping my head around how a fish pushed southeast by a glacier moving from the northwest, managed to climb up and over a divide and into an new drainage, but I digress.

There were ONCE trout in these waters, and there are I suppose, a few remnants that hang on up high. For the
morning (the result of being released from the lakes). The water here is a sharp 52 degrees on this August day, but more out of lack of opportunities. Most of the trout water I spend my time on stays cold due to its elevation or the elevation of its headwaters. I am also not known to dabble in waters that are the result of industrial operations, not local here. I am probably alive, but just barely, at the time the waters are considered to live high on the hill, and surrounded by still waters. Most of this development occurred before my time.

I was probably alive, but just barely, at the time the decisions were made that would lead to a massive loss of wild trout habitat, and the eventual ironic naming of the developments, golf courses, real estate agencies, and a few seasonal business that thrive off of the influx of vacationers and part time residents in their summer homes. Continuing on I passed through yet another resort town before climbing once again to drop back down into western drainages. The river I was heading to was not my usual haunt. In truth I was going to play in someone else’s backyard. It’s still my water, just as yours, but I am by no means a local here. I am also not known to dabble in waters that are the result of industrial operations, not out of some high mindedness (well maybe a little), but more out of lack of opportunities. Most of the trout water I spend my time on stays cold due to its elevation or the elevation of its headwaters. The water here is a sharp 52 degrees on this August morning (the result of being released from the bottom of several hydropower lakes that I had passed on my way up and over this morning). The drastic temperature gradient, between the warm saturated air and the cold flowing river, juxtapose to create a dense eerie fog that hovers just above the water, a surreal scene familiar to any summer tailwater angler.

After the missed fish I watched the angler in front of me stick the next few without hesitation. I suppose there is nothing like the knowledge of a missed opportunity to help one regain focus. While he was now in “predator mode”, zoned in, ready for any chance to strike, I began to let my mind wander, and my spirit float up and over the river.

I began to consider this fishery (however artificial it may be), and the opportunity for it to be less so, and so much more than it is now. The opportunity that I and many others missed a few years ago. I missed it because it wasn’t on my radar. I was busy with my first child, second child, a move to a new town, new job, new career, new home, assessing and reassessing life after 2008, basking in the glory of big easy fish, and working for paying clients on a piece of stocked private water. I was a guide, one of the chosen, a gate keeper, a master of the art, “look at the smiles, look at the size of this thing, let’s take a picture of it, hold it out a bit farther.” I was kind of a big deal. You don’t believe me? I’ve still got the pictures to prove it. I drove an old Subaru with flies stuck in the headliner and visor. It smelled of that stale corn chip scent of wet neoprene and feet, and the previous owner’s dog. There was a rotational molded cooler in the back next to a quiver of rods and reels. The back glass was covered in stickers expressing my penchant for this or that maker of fishing equipment, or a particular environmental cause that I thought was cool, and that I should care about because someone told me I should. If those storage lockers for your rods that go on top of your car were around then, I probably would have had one of those too.

So I missed the opportunity because I was busy retooling in life, and “being awesome.” I am not sure why you missed it. Maybe you didn’t. Maybe you were there the whole time, and your voice either ignored or disregarded. Or you could have been like me, too focused on yourself to see what was happening right in front of you. Maybe, you were there and you just weren’t looking at the right target. I’ve seen fish rise just up or downstream from my fly before, and realized too late that I was looking at another bug, and the fish had taken my fly. The opportunity to set the hook on that fish now gone, the only thing you can do is hold on to a scrap of hope that if you wait a bit perhaps another opportunity will come along before the hatch dies out, and you can make this one count.

“The worthiness of any cause is not measured by its clean record, but by its readiness to see the blots when they are pointed out, and to change its mind.”

—Aldo Leopold

This is largely what happened on this particular river. At least that’s what happened where our organization (our organization being Trout Unlimited the protector, defender, and conservers of cold waters) is concerned. Maybe I should back up at this point and lay out some basic foundations of my argument.

• The basic requirements for the survival and proliferation of most if not all living things on this earth are food and habitat.
• When it comes to trout the very thing they live in (i.e. habitat) is water.
• In general the more suitable habitat you provide for a fish and/or animal the more of them there will be, and the healthier overall that population will be.
• The suitable habitat we are referring to when it comes to trout… is water.
• More water = more habitat = more fish.

• TU, as a coldwater conservation organization; should, above all other considerations, seek to conserve and protect, and provide cold water habitat for trout.
• Considerations such as access, and the opportunity for anyone and everyone to safely wade a large river all the way to the middle, the desire and demand for easy fishing, the economic development of an area, the subsidizing of a cottage industry, the need for conservation dollars in the form of license sales and the allocation of federal excise tax monies, and the desire to have a fish on the line every few casts, etc…should come a very distant second to the conservation of a cold water fishery. A very distant second to providing and protecting habitat.

So what happened? What is this great missed opportunity I keep rambling on about? This is a simple concept that requires a complicated and at times labyrinthine explanation. The simple concept being that to protect cold water habitat in a tailwater river below a dam, a year round minimum flow is foundational and essential, and the request of a reasonable minimum flow by a conservation organization seeking to “conserve, protect, and restore…cold water fisheries…” is the bare minimum, and fundamental duty of that organization.
What if what we are defending, supporting, celebrating, wallowing in... is a shifted baseline.

A hard hook set and the ripping of line from the water woke me from my existential mare, and my spirit, seeing my body was in need of it, rushed from its place in the fog bank above the river to assist in pulling on oars, using a certain netting of a fish that was fighting way above its weight class. Laying on its side in the net it pumped its gills and stared back up at me with an eye that was not ready to submit. The look it gave was one of defiance, “Let me out of this net and I’ll fight you again. I’ll break that line, and if not the line, the rod. I don’t need you to let me go. Let me fight. I am not your special captured creature, and you are not my benevolent lord.”

Thick suspension over the surface of the water. The fish I had just released was wild, but certainly not a native. It was a rainbow of acceptable proportions, what should be here, a modal fish for this river system. I thought about that fish and about how it got here. How its ancestors were brought here many generations ago, and how over time it has changed and evolved to suit the water in which it currently resides. I am often times asked by well-meaning folks, when I ramble on about wild fish; “But what about native fish?”

You blind guides, which strain at a gnats, and swallow a camel.

— Jesus Christ (Matthew 23:24 KJV)

Well? What about ‘em? I am certainly not anti-brook trout, but I am also a bit of a pragmatist. What about native people, native cultures, historical ranges? You know what’s right, and I know what’s right, but like I said...I’m a bit of a pragmatist. The native fish, like native peoples and cultures, have been cordoned off into small areas, in the least desirable lands, and subjected to a flood of bureaucratic paternalism. I myself can claim (like most in this area) a small amount of native blood trickling through some random capillary off some random vein somewhere in my body, but its significance is paltry.

Likewise, the other parts of me do not resonate much with their origins either. I am a product of my environment, and some small part of the spirit of my ancestors that resulted in me being here. I am mostly of Scots-Irish decent with a sprinkling and seasoning of a few other blood lines thrown in to enhance the flavor. If you are unfamiliar with the Scots-Irish, they weren’t exactly a well-received bunch, and so, after several relocations they wound up here. They are often maligned as insular with a penchant for violence, but a more fair assessment would be a strong streak of independence. “Let me out of this net and I’ll fight you again. I’ll break that line, and if not the line the rod, I don’t need you to let me go. Let me fight. I am not your special captured creature, and you are not my benevolent lord.”

Let me reiterate again that I am all for the restoration of the natives. However, how can we look to restoring our native trout if we cannot bring ourselves to be concerned with the habitat of the similar non-natives, which now struggle to hang on in
the environment we have created. Simple habitat is the first step in restoration. The distraction of domesticated industrial products has caused us in the past, and continues to cause us now, to miss the opportunities for such changes.

I am also cautious about restoration projects when it comes to the removal of a “nonnative” species for the replacement of a native. (Don’t read too much into this from what was written above, we are all one species, trout are not.) I am cautious because it feels too heavy handed to me. I wouldn’t war against it by any means, but I am more of the mind set of restore suitable habitat, and then for the most part hands off (though I realize this is not a blanket statement you can wrap yourself up in and feel warm and safe).

It’s easy to get behind the movement to restore native species to their habitat and I’m all for it, but first let’s worry about habitat before we get ahead of ourselves in our desire to be completely pious. Those native fish that swim here have a god given right to do so, and that right to all of it should they choose to spread out and establish themselves. Those nonnatives that have become an integral part of this area, and now call it home, have left their mark on it as much as the area has left its mark upon them, have a place as well. They are hardy stock who hatched out a living in what we, in our ignorance and hastiness, left for them. Stocked trout are different.

Stocked trout hold no a birth right, nor have they proven themselves through a will to survive. They are a monster from another world. They are an industrial product grown in a lab and forced upon a disenfranchised public deprived of what is natural and whole. They are a mitigation, originally intended to reduce the severity, seriousness, and painfulness of the loss of what was once a bounty and gift from nature itself (that being our native fish). The decedents of those original plants shook off their bonds of government hatcheries, and the glad hands of industrialists and politicians seeking to pacify a depraved public, and grew into wild things themselves.

Meanwhile back at the farm; mutations, disease, and the wonders of science continued to modify an enslaved creature into a soulless slab of meat grown on a diet of pelletized chow that robs Peter to pay Paul. They morphed into grotesque beasts that would grow well in a raceway, quickly gain weight due to their extra chromosomes, and quickly die after being placed into moving water. Yet not before stressing, bullying, and voraciously consuming the food sources of the fish that are already present.

Somewhere we grew to love these things, and the government teat that provided them. A great number of our fisheries began to be subsidized along with the businesses and outfitters that rely on them. Our baseline shifted and we began to believe that this was fishing. Towns and counties began to compete with one another for who could boast the most heavily stocked streams. Outfitters began to create their own mini Shangri-Las of private sections of river, where one could catch even bigger and more deformed specimens than the state could provide.

Magazines and flyers featuring bearded weathered faces, lowering lips stuffed with smokeless tobacco, and outfitted in the latest fishing fashions; were circulated and promoted to normalize this surreal experience. Photos of naive and unsuspecting tourists, grinning from ear to ear like males eating saw briar, were plastered across social media pages, and email campaigns from state and local governments, as well as outfitters, to get the word out that the fish were in the river, began to fill inboxes of subscribers.

“In the end, we conserve only what we love. We will love only what we understand. We will understand only what we are taught.” —Baba Dioum

This became our reality and our impetus for what we would demand of our governing and regulating bodies, and our industry that controls a public resource. When the time came, we asked for low flows during certain portions of the year so that it might be more convenient for anglers to wade out and catch the stocked trout huddled in a mass in the remaining water, at the middle of a wide stream bed. We gave little thought to what would happen the rest of the year, and little thought to the effect of reduced flows on the habitat and system as a whole.

We missed a great opportunity.

“A true conservationist is man who knows that the world is not given by his fathers but borrowed from his children.” —John James Audubon

We gave little thought to the generations that would follow us and to those downstream. We did not consider our history of independence and self-determination, that part of us that seeks to make our own way with little or no handouts. We gave little thought to the effect “waving on the past” has on the angling community, and the larger community as a whole. We failed to comprehend that fish are more than fish, and that the presence of a sustainable, continuing, and self-propagating resource sets a community free, and a local economy based on the infusion of government capital, in the form of stocked fish, is dependent and subservient to that infusion. We traded long term gain for short term gain, and the melees of artificial abundance. We failed to understand that the more you have of something, the more people will fight over it, and that a finite reproducing resource tends to be shared and loved.

Now we shake our heads and fists at the weekend crowds, weekday crowds, and the proliferation of guides and outfitters all fighting over the last sliver and crumbs of a great big pie — the greater part of that pie going to assure our fears of economic insecurity, and satisfy our insatiable need for convenience. We exact regulations intended to divide up the last sliver with the greater and more accessible parts going to certain and more affluent groups of users. We fight amongst ourselves over the leftovers, and wonder why we can’t all get together to “make a change.”

Meanwhile these things are eating up massive quantities of bunker fish from the ocean in the form of chow. Eating up conservation dollars that could be better spent. Eating up fuel resources and leaving a nasty carbon footprint. Eating up antibiotics and other medications to help them survive the disease and crowding of races. Eating up food and habitat in the river, and young of the year wild fish whenever they get the opportunity.

They are greedily gorging themselves on our remaining water, at the middle of a wide stream bed. We gave little thought to what would cause us now, to miss the opportunities for such changes.

The distraction of domesticated industrial products has caused us in the past, and continues to cause us now, to miss the opportunities for such changes. We fight amongst ourselves over the leftovers, and wonder why we can’t all get together to “make a change.”

Meanwhile these things are eating up massive quantities of bunker fish from the ocean in the form of chow. Eating up conservation dollars that could be better spent. Eating up fuel resources and leaving a nasty carbon footprint. Eating up antibiotics and other medications to help them survive the disease and crowding of races. Eating up food and habitat in the river, and young of the year wild fish whenever they get the opportunity.

They are greedily gorging themselves on our souls.

Nearing the boat ramp I realized that the morning fog had lifted long ago, and this cloud I’ve been drifting in is a dark one of my own creation. The skies are now blue, and above me a large flock of starlings are silhouetteed against the sky. These hypnotizing little birds are a nonnative invasive species themselves. They were brought here by a man who felt that this country deserved to have the regal trappings of the old country, and so decided to introduce every bird mentioned in Shakespeare. They have fared quite well since their haphazard introduction. Often I’ve watched these birds and been mesmerized so decided to introduce every bird mentioned in Shakespeare. They have fared quite well since their haphazard introduction. Usually I’ve watched these birds and been mesmerized by their mid-air murmurations. They move in harmony and coordination, undulating, waiving, and waning in total cohesion. It’s a natural phenomenon we are all familiar with,

Further

(These books and/or organizations have given no endorsement to the author or what was written here. Only the author suggests them as outlets and education for the reader who wishes to dive deeper. There is an entire world below the surface of a stream)

Watershed Association of the Tuckasegee River
American Rivers
Hydropower Reform Coalition
Trout Unlimited
North Carolina Wildlife Federation
Back Country Hunters
Back Country Hunters - NC
An Entirely Synthetic Fish
The Theory of the Leisure Class
Ishmael, A Novel
yet still find intriguing with each occurrence and encounter. It rarely occurs to us that they might not belong here in the first place.

Have I ruined your day? Do you now find yourself floating in the same dark cloud? Are you asking yourself what kind of jerk writes a dystopian article and leaves the reader with no hope? Or did you quit listening long ago, and simply continued reading looking for places to poke holes in my arguments? Do you want hope? Do you have a vision of something other than our current mess?

I beg your pardon.

It is common thought that once the license is done its done. IT IS WRITTEN SO SHALL IT BE!!! That these are all great ideas that we can revisit in twenty or thirty years. For now it is set in stone and there is no chance of changing it.

I can tell you that this is wrong.

I can also tell you that changing it is no easy task (nor should it be). Nothing is ever set in stone, and a good-sized group of reasonable people can make changes. I would also ask that you step outside of your comfort zone and reach across the aisle to other conservationist and conservation groups. What is good for the Elk Toe Mussel is good for the trout. What is good for the Sickle Fin Red Horse is good for the trout. Non-game species have a place too, and many of them are native. While you’re at it reach across the aisle to the gear fisherman, the bait fisherman, the guy or gal who has no idea why any of this is important.

This is about more than fish. It’s about community.

Hydropower Reform Coalition, East Fork of the Tuckasegee
FERC Compliance Handbook

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtfully committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

—Margaret Mead

The rivers still belong to us no matter what you might hear or think. It is our collective will that determines what happens, stays the same, or changes. Industry will seek its own best interest and the best interests of its shareholders, and we must not fault them for that, it is their charge and duty. WE must do the same, and demand it as strongly and as fervently as they do. Industry is a 500 pound gorilla. Culture weighs a 1000.

This is our true task. Public opinion of what is good, natural, right, whole, just, fair, and beneficial is what determines what happens on our rivers and streams. There is no one pulling a lever in some government office, or manically laughing in some corporate one over high dollar scotch and big cigars. There are those out there right now quietly doing the good work and with little recognition or pomp. They are working hard, but mostly alone, attempting to organize what few they have through a somewhat central command. I commend them and admire them, even though I have little hope for them without your help.

In the end a few quiet determined voices (or one loud obnoxious one) will not have the desired effect.

WE must change.

“WE?! I….the royal we, you know, the editorial.”

—The Dude

How?

As I pulled the boat out of the water the little black birds continued to swarm and murmur over the river just out from the ramp. There was no one waiting, so instead of pulling off I leaned against the corner panel of the truck and watched them until they grew into a smaller and smaller undulating black dot somewhere out in an expanse of blue. It’s a funny thing with those starlings. For years scientist wondered what caused them to move the way they do, all in one accord. It was speculated that it was some sort of group think. That perhaps they operated like a hive or with some sort of hierarchy of leadership. Only a mass centralized power that all individuals were plugged into could coordinate such movements. This hypothesis of course turned out to be wrong. It was much more simple. The birds just do what their neighbors are doing. They keep an eye on their seven closest neighbors and move with them. They are influenced by one another and influence one another, and not controlled some central command. Each one’s smallest movements spread throughout the group, and are magnified into an enthraling and captivating spectacle.
Trout Fishing Tournament & BBQ Dinner

4 Prizes Awarded!
- Biggest Fish Overall
- Runner-Up Brook
- Runner-Up Rainbow
- Runner-Up Brown

Sponsored by:

Konehete Park
Murphy, NC
Pavilion on Valley
River behind old
rock gym & pool

Single BBQ
Plates
$8/each
4:00-7:00 PM

This catch and release trout fishing tournament is limited to the Unaka Chapter Trout Unlimited territory which includes Cherokee, Clay & Graham counties and the Nantahala River watershed in Macon County. Participants must report name of the water where fish was caught and provide a photo with scale that clearly indicates length. Entries must be submitted by 5:00 PM; prizes presented at 6:00 PM. Public welcome 4:00-7:00.

$20 Regular
$10 Kids
[Entry Fee includes meal]

Kids Categories
12 & under
Ages 13-17
(Kids can opt to enter the Regular category)

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DAVIDSONFLYFISHING.COM
"The Drift" is the quarterly publication of the North Carolina Council of Trout Unlimited and is edited and managed by council secretary Charles Crolley. The stories and articles remain the property of their individual authors and are used with permission. Where no author name is indicated, the article is generally attributable to the editor.

All facets of the magazine, including graphic design, publication hosting, articles and content have been donated to our council membership by members and friends of Trout Unlimited in North Carolina.

If you have comments, concerns, questions or suggestions, they are most welcome at news@northcarolinatu.org. We ask again that you be courteous and bear in mind that the magazine is meant to reflect a variety of opinions and interests — some of which you may not share. (Pro tip: if you object to a column, most of the time the answer will be to consider submitting a column from your point of view.)