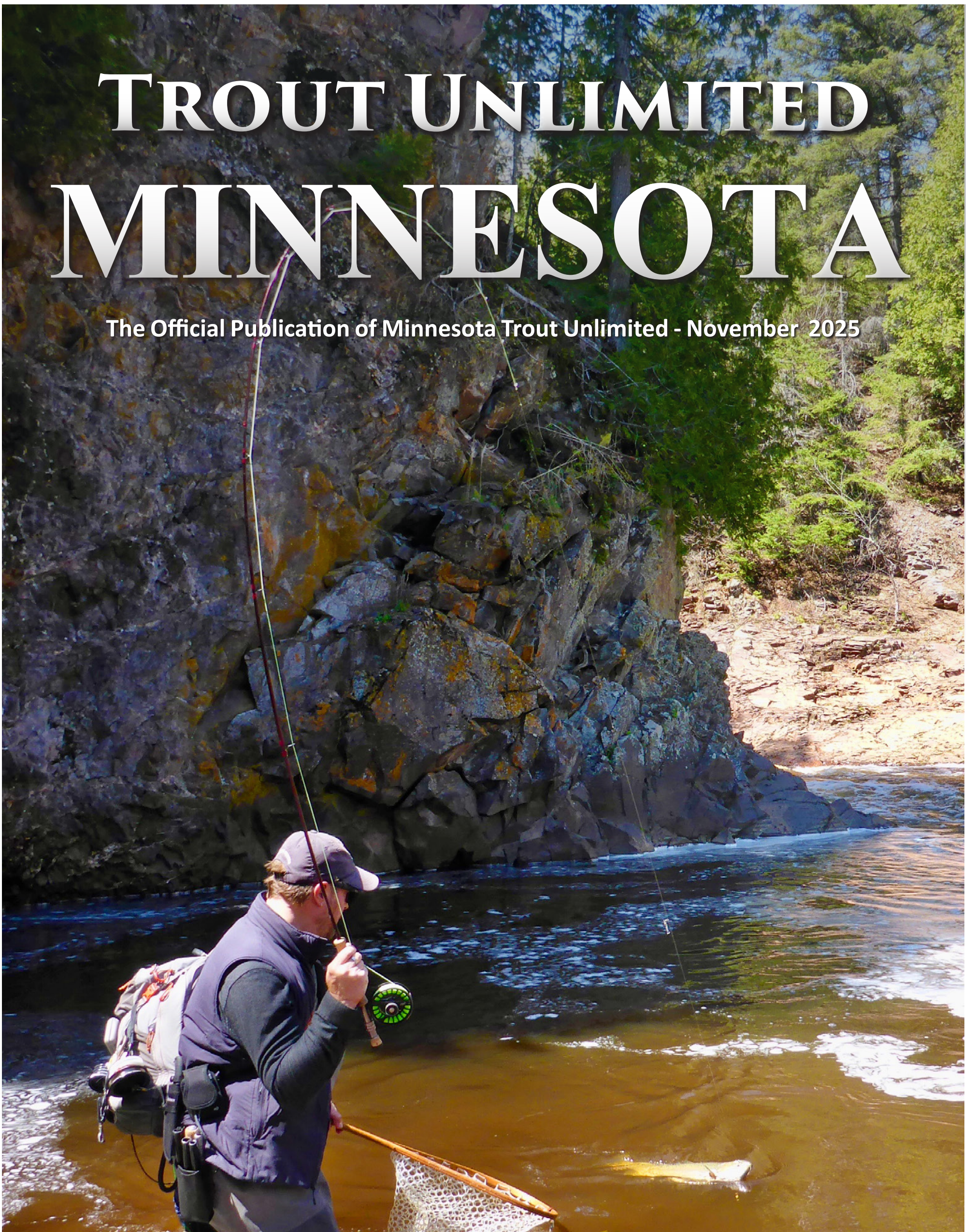


TROUT UNLIMITED MINNESOTA

The Official Publication of Minnesota Trout Unlimited - November 2025



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TROPHY WATER: THE STRAIGHT RIVER
DATA CENTER PROPOSALS NEED SCRUTINY
FISHING RICE CREEK
TYING HIGA'S SOS
T.U.N.E. CAMP
NORTH SHORE TREE PLANTING

Minnesota Trout Unlimited
P.O. Box 845
Chanhassen, MN 55317-0845

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Trout in the Classroom students learned in the field this fall with lessons in water quality.

ON THE COVER

Craggy cliffs of the MN North Shore. Cheri Henderson photo.

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Advertising rate sheet available on request. Send all editorial and advertising correspondence or other inquiries to the editor:

Jade Thomason
 2067 E. Pioneer Rd.
 Duluth, MN 55804
 218-525-2381
editor@mntu.org

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EDITOR’S ANGLE

MULTIFACETED MNTU

By Jade Thomason, Editor

Data centers are suddenly all across the news in Minnesota. For those who haven't followed the dark mark of these massive facilities in places like Virginia, Texas and parts of the more southern Midwest, it's time to quickly be informed of what is being proposed here at home. These are not the data centers of old, and are instead new much, much larger facilities. Stories of wells running dry, constant noise, light pollution and poor air quality adjacent to new massive data centers are plentiful in national news. It's also well known that citizens are often bearing the brunt of power grid upgrade costs, astonishing water consumption and poor land use, and many of these projects are shrouded in secrecy. Minnesota is seen by data center proposers as a place with abundant water, and ripe for expansion.

Data centers have quickly become a priority for MNTU, as many would draw cold water directly from our trout streams' aquifers and exacerbate climate change with new huge power needs. Read Executive Director John Lenczewski's article on Page 6 for a deeper dive

into the issue in Minnesota.

MNTU is multifaceted, and while we have a strong advocacy arm to protect trout streams and watersheds, we also have equal priorities in education and habitat improvement. I'm proud that the November issue of this newsletter does a good job showcasing the range in what MNTU accomplishes. Habitat Program Director Jenny Biederman explores the good work happening up north with our tree planting projects, new MNTU writer Jason Rieke showcases habitat improvement near Chatfield, and Bob Luck shares stories of trophy brown trout in the Straight River, a stream long improved by the Headwaters Chapter.

If you're looking to read about MNTU's education pursuits, check out John Weiss' article on T.U.N.E. Camp, an excellent outdoors experience that MNTU has partnered on for years. I volunteered as an instructor at this camp over a decade ago and know firsthand the formative effect it has on kids. This newsletter issue will also make its way into the hands of 2,100 Trout in the Classroom teachers,



students and their families. Read Education Program Supervisor Amber Taylor's piece to hear what the TIC kids have been up to.

In these times of unrelenting news it can be easy to succumb to "doomscrolling" and feel overwhelmed. Try to channel your frustrations and outrage. There's so much to be proud of and so, so much work yet to be done. Consider including MNTU in your Give to the Max Day donations on or before November 20, or volunteering on a project this winter.

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give to the MAX Nov. 20, 2025

HEAD TO MNTU.ORG/DONATE ON OR BEFORE NOVEMBER 20TH FOR GIVE TO THE MAX DAY

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

CHANGING LEAVES

By John Lenczewski, MNTU Executive Director

It is no secret that the peak season for color change in Minnesota has been shifting later each decade. But at last the forests have reached and even passed peak color for most species and locations. As the remaining leaves from native trees and shrubs fall to the ground, green leaves from nonnative trees like buckthorn stand out in the understory. Not having evolved in our northern climate, they do not know when it's time to call it quits and prepare for winter.

It is easy to spot the infestations of invasive buckthorn and honeysuckle at this time of year. Seeing these bands of green dominating woodlots reminds me that many of our trout streams need our help to be released from the shackles that buckthorn eventually places on streamside forests. Over the past decade MNTU and TCTU volunteers have

cleared many, many acres of buckthorn and other nasty invasives from along cherished streams such as the Vermillion River, Eagle Creek, Hay Creek, Trout Brook, and more. It is encouraging to pass these old worksites and see thriving forests of native species.

November is upon us again and dense stands of green buckthorn stick out along other stretches of trout water. The thermometer will soon be dropping to daytime temps in the 20s and 30s—perfect working weather for cutting and hauling buckthorn. Please stay tuned to our e-news and other event listings for opportunities to help MNTU and your chapter remove buckthorn from a stream near you.

I hope to see many of you on a project site this fall and winter.



MNTU CONNECTIONS

TU MN Editor
Jade Thomason
editor@mntu.org

Executive Director
John Lenczewski
john.lenczewski@mntu.org
612-670-1629

Habitat Program Director
Jennifer Biederman
jennifer.biederman@mntu.org

Education Program Supervisor
Amber Taylor
education@mntu.org

Giving Coordinator
Mark Abner
mark.abner@mntu.org

MN Council of TU Chair
Brent Notbohm
chair@mntu.org

Gitche Gume Chapter
Jason Swingen, President
jason.swingen@gmail.com

Headwaters Chapter
Kris Williams, President
topherjoel01@gmail.com

Hiawatha Chapter
Paul Krolak, chapter contact
pkrolak@gmail.com
www.hiawatha-tu.org

Twin Cities Chapter
Yves Charron, President
yves.charron@twincitiestu.org
612-564-TCTU
www.twincitiestu.org

Win-Cres Chapter
Chuck Shepard, President
shepard@hbc.com
www.mntu.org/win-cres

MINNESOTA COUNCIL UPDATE

THANKS FOR TWO GREAT TERMS

By Brent Notbohm, Minnesota Council of TU Chair

I've been thinking a lot about rivers lately. How they are in a constant state of change—sometimes they run high and sometimes low, but the water is always moving, always flowing. A river is a good metaphor.

In January 2026, my final term ends as Board of Directors Chairperson for Minnesota Trout Unlimited. Serving in this role has been one of the great privileges of my life. Reflecting on my nearly six years as MNTU's Board Chair, I feel a cascade of pride and gratitude, stemming from what we accomplished together as an organization over that time.

When my chair-ship started, I suspect some longtime board members were a little suspicious of this guy from Duluth leading MNTU. After all, he was born and raised in Wisconsin and, even worse, a self-proclaimed diehard Packers fan! Fortunately, during my very first meeting as Chair, former Chair and Dr. Thomas Waters Award recipient, J.P. Little, suggested we create a new strategic plan. I remember thinking "I can do that," having been part of several strategic planning initiatives during my academic career.

A new strategic plan was the perfect vessel to navigate the somewhat rocky waters MNTU was floating in at that time. Any casual observer of MNTU in 2020 would have recognized several systemic issues within the organization, most notably that we had flooded our banks and outgrown our capacity with a single, overworked but deeply dedicated executive director. My first year as chair was an ongoing conversation with TU members from across the state and country—asking questions, taking notes, and appreciating the passion of members for the work of TU and the waters we seek to protect and restore. These discussions led to the formation of revised mission and vision statements and the 2021-25

MNTU Strategic Plan.

The 2021-25 Strategic Plan transformed MNTU and has ensured its continued growth and success as one of the leading environmental conservation organizations in Minnesota. Some highlights initiated by the plan include: the revitalization of key groups like the Habitat, Education, and Advocacy Advisory Committees to help our members get more directly involved in the work of MNTU; the development of key working plans and frameworks, like our annual Advocacy Agenda; investment, financial, and administrative plans and policies, along with expansion of our fundraising initiatives; an organizational roadmap that led to the hiring of a habitat director, assistant director, and executive assistant; personnel and annual review policies for our new staff; policies for Board membership and qualifications; and the creation of statewide service awards to recognize the passion, work, and dedication of our members.

Above are just some of what the plan helped us accomplish. Unfortunately, there are also a few things we did not get done that were outlined in the plan—revising our bylaws to reflect recent changes to MNTU's staffing and practices; development of a long-term funding model for our education program; and the creation and implementation of initiatives to attract new members to MNTU, especially women and youth. My hope is that the next group of leaders will prioritize these items, as each is crucial to the continued success of MNTU. In fact, we are already working on the education program funding plan. It's also very much worth mentioning that we need to continue to grow our fundraising efforts to maintain the ambitious and multifaceted work of MNTU.

That's the pride part, now the gratitude. I wish to thank fellow past and present



MNTU Executive Committee members J.P. Little, Mark Reisetter, Micah Cridder, Randy Brock, Steve Carlton, Doug Moran, and especially Mike Madigan, for his always wise counsel, and Carl Haensel for his boundless friendship and support. I also must express my deep gratitude and sincere appreciation of MNTU staff members Mark Abner, Amber Taylor, Jennifer Biederman, Kristen Poppleton, and, of course, one of the truly great conservationists in the state of Minnesota and my dear friend/best fishing buddy, John Lenczewski.

One of the realizations you have as a leader is that the work is never finished. So as my time comes to an end as Chairperson of MNTU's Board of Directors, I'll finish by quoting Minnesota's Nobel laureate, Bob Dylan:

"But this ol' river keeps on rollin', though.

No matter what gets in the way and which way the wind does blow,

And as long as it does I'll just sit here,

And watch the river flow."

SIX MILES, THREE RIVERS, ONE GOAL

PROTECTING NORTH SHORE TROUT HABITAT THROUGH GAP PLANTING

By Jennifer Biederman, PhD, MNTU Habitat Program Director

Anyone who has walked the banks of the Sucker, French, or Lester Rivers knows why these waters are so special. These are classic North Shore brook trout streams—cold, spring-fed, high-gradient, and woven into the forested landscape northeast of Duluth. They have endured floods, logging, and changing forests for over a century, yet they continue to support some of Minnesota’s strongest native brook trout populations.

But a quiet, growing threat is challenging the health of northeast riparian ecosystems—the spruce budworm. The Eastern spruce budworm, native to Minnesota, has long been part of the natural rhythm of northern forests, cycling between decades of calm and periodic outbreaks roughly every 30 to 40 years. During outbreak phases, larvae defoliate and often kill extensive stands of balsam fir and white spruce, especially in older forests. In the past, these forests recovered as young conifers filled the gaps, but today that recovery has faltered. Heavy deer browsing, fragmented seed sources, and a warming climate are breaking the cycle, leaving behind wide openings where dense canopy once

shaded the ground.

Now those changes are also reaching the water’s edge. As aging white spruce and balsam fir along trout streams die, riparian forests are thinning. Sunlight penetrates the open gaps and summer water temperatures increase. In a warming climate, even a few degrees can create water temperatures that approach or exceed what is healthy and sustainable for brook trout—causing stress and a decline in wild populations. You may recall the widespread wildfires this spring along the North Shore—experts attribute the spruce budworm to exacerbating the risk and scale of these outbreaks, which are also detrimental to the health of cold-water riparian ecosystems.

That’s why in the winter and spring of 2025, Minnesota Trout Unlimited, in close partnership with the Minnesota DNR and local landowners, undertook our largest riparian gap planting effort to date on the North Shore. Over just a few months, we used satellite imagery and ground truthing to identify the areas worst hit by spruce budworm, and strategically cleared dead and dying trees along six miles of riparian corridor

across the Sucker, French, and Lester River watersheds, planting nearly 5,000 native trees to restore long-term shade, bank stability, and climate resilience.

What is gap planting and why here?

So what exactly is “gap planting?” Rather than cutting and replanting the entire impacted riparian corridor of all dead and dying trees (which would deliver a “shock” to the riparian ecosystem), gap planting takes a more strategic, longer-term approach. Using satellite imagery and ground truthing, we marked out “gaps” or areas of approximately 2,000-2,500 square feet along the stream that contained dead and dying trees. We spaced the gaps out every 100-200 feet, alternating on either side of the stream, skipping over forest patches that were otherwise healthy.

Once the gaps were marked, crews cut the dead and dying trees within the marked gaps. The dead trees were limbed and left within the gaps, keeping important nutrients within the landscape. In total, MNTU cleared 240 gaps along three rivers in March and April. In May, the crews returned to plant new trees. In future years, additional gaps can be

created in-between the already planted gaps—helping to create multi-aged stands of trees across the riparian corridor.

Nearly 5,000 Trees, 70% Conifer

Our goal is to build resilient, climate change-resistant riparian forests, with a target of 70% coniferous species to provide year-round shade and structure. In each gap, we planted 20 trees—a diverse mix of native species, including white cedar, white pine, white spruce, red pine, tamarack, yellow birch, sugar maple, and red oak. Cedar and pine provide shade, strong roots to help keep banks stable, and long-lived habitat for wildlife. Tamaracks grow quickly and do especially well in wetter soil, while yellow birch and sugar maple offer great diversity and adaptability to a changing climate.

A Massive Logistical Lift

This was no simple roadside planting! Many of the most critical reaches were in remote, hard-to-get-to terrain with no vehicle access. To complete the work, crews hauled thousands of pounds of gear, tools, and seedlings by hand—including 22,000 pounds of fencing to protect young cedars and pines from



LEFT: A FRESHLY PLANTED WHITE SPRUCE ALONG THE LESTER RIVER. IN THE BACKGROUND, CAGES PROTECT YOUNG WHITE CEDARS AND WHITE PINES. ALTHOUGH WHITE SPRUCE ARE IMPACTED BY SPRUCE BUDWORM, THIS SPECIES IS MINIMALLY SUSCEPTIBLE WHEN PLANTED AMID A DIVERSITY OF OTHER TREES.

RIGHT: THE AUTHOR PLANTS A WHITE CEDAR TREE.



STANDS OF DEAD BALSAM FIR ARE A COMMON SIGHT ALONG RIVERS ON THE NORTH SHORE.

deer browse. The crews navigated steep, sometimes icy slopes, thick brush, and spring mud, but planted each tree with intention and care. MNTU will oversee inspections of the gaps each year to monitor survival, plant additional trees where needed, and maintain caging. We will watch as the forest grows!

Collaboration Made It Possible

This project was built on strong partnerships. DNR Fisheries staff worked closely with MNTU and our experienced local team from Beaver River Consulting to identify high-value reaches where the riparian canopy was failing or at risk, and local landowners provided access to crews (and occasionally some cookies) within the DNR angling easements. Early in the season, Conserva-

tion Corps Minnesota & Iowa (CCMI) crews prepared planting sites by clearing corridors and removing downed timber. When federal funding cuts reduced access to CCMI crews midway through spring, MNTU pivoted by hiring private foresters and contractors to complete the work. The work was supported with funds from the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council.

Why these rivers?

The Sucker, French, and Lester Rivers are considered top-tier native brook trout streams, offering some of the best cold groundwater inputs, healthy in-stream habitat, and best populations of wild brook trout. They now face a perfect storm of threats: spruce budworm mortality, increasing wildfire risk, hot-

WHAT IS GAP PLANTING?

Gap planting is a targeted reforestation technique that focuses on filling small canopy openings within an otherwise intact forest. These “gaps” often form after pest outbreaks, windthrow, or old-age mortality. By planting conifers and other long-lived species into these spaces, practitioners can restore shade, improve microclimates, and increase forest resilience—all without disturbing mature, healthy trees nearby. It’s a low-impact, high-reward approach for maintaining the ecological integrity of riparian corridors.

ter summers, and stream warming. Gap planting acts as both protection and prevention—restoring long-term shade and resilience to ensure native brook trout can thrive in these rivers for future generations to enjoy.

This project is a testament that gap plant-

ing is one of the most effective, scalable, and climate-resilient strategies for protecting North Shore trout streams. Building on this success, MNTU is expanding similar work into the Split Rock River watershed, a long-standing high-priority watershed. Stay tuned as we get back to work!

Psst!

TROUT FISHING IS A GREAT WORKOUT

By John Weiss

Hey you, fellow trout angler, I know we fish, in part, because the tug is the drug but how about another great reason to fish streams: to get in shape!

I’ve suspected for years that stream fishing was good for cardiovascular health but never really figured out how to test it. I was scrolling through my Apple watch’s workout segments such as "Indoor Walk," "Elliptical" and "Outdoor Run" when I was stunned to find “Fishing.”

Ah ha, said I to myself. Now I’ll know.

So I walked down and up two White-water Valley bluffsides, each about 150 foot high and fished for more than four hours. When I checked my watch, I was stunned to find I had burned 1,213 active calories, those in excess of what I would have burned watching TV. That’s more than I burn on a recumbent bicycle but

well below an elliptical workout. But I don’t bike or use the elliptical for more than four hours and I have yet to catch a trout in the gym.

But it made sense—I’m walking up and down and in a stream I’m constantly micro-balancing each second, casting and yes, now and then, accidentally catch a trout.

I’ve tried this a few more times, not going up and down bluffs, and got much the same result: a good workout.

So if you looking for another good reason to fish, there you have it.

John Weiss was a reporter/photographer for the Rochester Post/Bulletin for 41 years and still does freelance. He has been an outdoors writer in the Drifless nearly 46 years. He is secretary for Hiawatha TU and loves fly fishing small streams.



DATA CENTERS NEED SCRUTINY

AN OVERVIEW OF MINNESOTA PROPOSALS

By John Lenczewski, MNTU Executive Director

What is a data center?

A data center is a warehouse-style building specifically built to contain large amounts of computer equipment. They maintain climate-controlled conditions and generally hold backup generators and batteries. Major types of computing in data centers include data storage (“cloud” storage), processing data (processing internet searches and essentially all internet activity), Artificial Intelligence (AI) searches and AI training, and “mining” cryptocurrency (computations to solve huge math problems). Minnesotans have been using data centers for years, since they are part of the infrastructure for all internet activity and cloud storage.

Data Centers in the News

Data centers have been around for decades and there are at least 50 currently existing in Minnesota. The concern is the increased size of facilities and a surge in the number proposed. Data centers fall into three main types based mostly on size:

1. Hyperscale or Hyperscaler: These largest centers do most of the computing functions noted above and are typically proposed by the big four US computing companies (Google, Meta, Amazon and Microsoft).

2. Enterprise or Colocation Facilities: moderately-sized facilities that are often run by a large corporation to store and manage its data.

3. Crypto Mining Facilities: These are typically smaller and can be mobile, including many built in shipping containers that can be easily moved around.

Large hyperscale data centers are in the news and include those being proposed in Rosemount, Farmington, Apple Valley, Hermantown, Hampton, Cannon Falls, Chaska, Becker and several other places. These massive facilities are being proposed at an exponential rate. This rising wave of proposals across the state caught MNTU’s attention and raised concerns over their impact on trout fisheries.

Potential Impacts

Hyperscale data centers can have many negative impacts, but MNTU’s primary concerns for trout streams focus on the huge amounts of electricity and water that these facilities typically use. Computer equipment generates heat and data centers need to cool that equipment to prevent overheating. Data center proposers most often seek to pump out large volumes of cold groundwater to run through single-use cooling systems. Groundwater springs that feed our trout streams are typically 44 to 49 degrees. They are the cold lifeblood of our trout streams. Extracting large volumes of groundwater can lower water tables, reduce spring and stream flows, and elevate



TROUT STREAMS LIKE THE BELOVED VERMILLION RIVER ARE AT RISK WITH NEW PROPOSALS FOR MASSIVE DATA CENTERS.

stream water temperatures. Cold water is essential for trout to survive and thrive.

Potential impacts from data centers include:

1. High Groundwater Use: Many data centers propose to use large volumes of groundwater for inefficient single-pass cooling systems, rather than alternatives that use far less water. **The City of Rosemount indicated that the proposal by Meta could draw 100,000 gallons of groundwater per day from the aquifer that feeds the Vermillion River.** Data centers proposed for Chaska and Farmington could use 15 and 24 times more than Meta’s proposed facility. Our coldwater trout streams are dependent upon consistent inflows of cold groundwater.

2. Thermal Pollution: If water used for cooling is discharged back into natural systems, it may raise the temperature of nearby streams. Trout are extremely sensitive to water temperature, and even slight increases can reduce dissolved oxygen levels and otherwise threaten their survival.

3. Groundwater Depletion: Most trout streams in Minnesota depend on groundwater inputs (natural springs and seeps) to keep them cool and stable throughout the year. Large-scale water withdrawals by data centers may lower water tables, threatening these coldwater systems. The cumulative impacts of several large data centers from the same groundwater aquifers increases this risk. It is worth noting that numerous hyperscale data centers are being proposed in the aquifer that supports the Vermillion River fishery, including sites in Rosemount, Farmington, Apple Valley, and Hampton.

4. Electricity Use and Climate Impacts: Estimates show that the data centers currently being proposed would use as much electricity as is used by every home in Minnesota. The generation of this additional electricity would increase greenhouse gas emissions, potentially exacerbating climate change, and increasing impacts to our coldwater streams. Here in the North, we are already seeing higher air temperatures for longer periods of time, which raise stream temperatures and stress (or kill) trout and steelhead. The increased frequency and intensity of heavy precipitation due to climate change is also tearing apart stream channels and destroying in-stream habitat.

5. Site Impacts: Large data centers significantly increase the amount of impervious surfaces. If facilities are built in poor locations this can increase warm runoff, reduce infiltration (and aquifer recharge), and impact critical wetlands.

Water Use and Alternatives

The proposers of large data centers most often seek to use large volumes of cold groundwater run through single-pass cooling systems, and then dump the heated water as wastewater. This costs the private company less money, but Minnesota citizens bear the rest of the true costs, including loss of valuable drinking water supplies, loss of trout fisheries, damage to other natural systems, and more. Proposers typically wish to spend as little as they can and shift the true costs of water use to taxpayers, as much as government leaders will allow. But other cooling systems exist that use less, or even no, water. In addition to using conventional air conditioning systems to blow cold air in smaller targeted areas, there are systems that use no water at all. These include “closed loop liquid

cooling,” where a coolant circulates in a sealed environment between computer servers and chillers, and “liquid immersion,” where computer servers are submerged in special non-conductive fluids that absorb heat directly and then dissipate it elsewhere. Microsoft appears to be moving to closed loop liquid cooling systems.

Better Regulation is Needed

There is no regulatory framework that examines whether data center proposals are good for the state or a wise use of finite water resources. The 2025 Legislature considered many data center-related bills, both good and bad, but the best and worst did not survive. However, The MNDNR’s authority to regulate groundwater withdrawals was tweaked. Among other provisions, the 2025 law requires a preapplication evaluation by the DNR of data center projects that propose to use more than 100 million gallons of water per year and sets conditions for the DNR issuance of water use permits. The DNR is required to reasonably consider technologies or measures that promote water conservation, efficient water use and watershed health, and direct aquifer tests as needed. It remains to be seen how the DNR will exercise its authority.

Looking Ahead

Proposals to build hyperscale data centers in many locations around Minnesota will remain in the news throughout the coming year. MNTU will be working with members and partners at the legislative, state agency, and local government levels to learn more about specific proposals and press for requirements that minimize or eliminate groundwater use by these facilities.

AN ODE TO TROUT RUN

SMITTEN WITH A TROUT STREAM

By Paul Connors

Fly fishing in a stream you haven't fished before is like going on a blind date: many unknowns, much anticipation, and, for sure, not a sure thing. It can suck. It can be little to show for hours of effort. It can feel awkward, tense, and unnerving. It can also be love at first sight, or first hook-up if the stars align.

I met my wife at her brother's wedding. It was love at first sight. I had met most of her immediate family years before, so I had an idea of what to expect. They were an attractive and dynamic bunch, fun and engaging. She was prettier than all of them and way more intriguing. She was intelligent and funny in subtle ways that others don't always notice. Some would say she is quiet, conservative and private, I suspected there was much more and was correct. I fell hard and I'm still down.

This sounds unrelated, but this spring my brother-in-law had a house painting gig near Rochester, MN and said I could stay at the house for a few days and fish the storied southeast streams near Prescott. I hadn't fished for trout since last year. I didn't check my gear before I left, I just packed up and drove for two and a half hours. I forgot that my fly line was way old, cracked and crazed like the finish on an old guitar. My trout flies were sparse, beat up, and my head was not entirely in the trout game. Smallmouth bass were my latest muse, so powerful and easy to seduce.

My first foray into the Driftless brought

me to Camp Creek. I fished north of the confluence at the South Branch of the Root River. I had a spectacular day in spite of my bedraggled fishing gear. The weather was perfect. Every fish was a beautiful fat brown trout, most about twelve inches, give or take. I had the stream all to myself. It was glorious.

The following day I decided to meet up with Trout Run. That's what they call you, a nickname that sounds fishy in a good way. I heard about you several times, I heard you were beautiful. "Worth the drive," they said. "Hungry and beautiful big golden browns, willing to inhale partridge feathers, elk-hair and ice dub." "Ice-cold water, filled to the brim with willing fish, tumbling through the Driftless," they said. (Or, something romantic like that.) I was skeptical. Anything or anyone with that much hype is likely disappointing.

My rusted out VW Rabbit slunk slowly down the steep and winding forest-lined road, similar to so many other gouged-out gullies that litter southeast Minnesota. I pulled off at the second bridge. It was an early weekday morning, misty and gray with ominous clouds on the horizon. No sun to be seen, no one to be seen. "Not one car at the pull off...hmm, must not be all that," I said, to no one. To my right appeared a beautiful glowing yellow sign that read "Catch and release only." That's always a good sign. Above the river appeared a stunning rainbow. Seriously? Someone or something was telling me something.

I stealthily made my way over to the cement railing of the bridge, so as not to spook anybody below, and slowly peered over the edge. They were there alright. Fish right where they were supposed to be. Lots of 'em. One was sizable. The water looked barely stained. Perfection.

My thoughts screamed, Don't get too excited Paulie, people fish here all the time, it's obvious. Well-worn paths along the bank, plenty of space to park. This place gets pounded, I thought. These trout were likely schooled and spooky. I geared up, clipped my hand-me-down net to the back of my vest, and descended the grassy bank. I eased into the back of a promising run and settled myself. Breathe! First cast, nothing. I knew it was too good to be true. The second cast landed perfectly in the left seam. My size 16 caddis dry got a good float above the nymph and I was about to pick up the cast. *Bang*, the caddis disappeared under the film. I reacted quickly and set the hook. I fought in a very fat and strong 14-inch brown. Wow! Nice fish. Third cast, got 'em! 16 inch fish. On it went, just like that, all morning. Move up to the next pool. Four. More. Browns. Seriously? This isn't fishing, this is catching! In the next hole, a trophy. A gorgeous buttery brown trout, probably all of 17 inches, she had to weigh at least 2 pounds. Fought her for a good five minutes. Up and down the stream on my 3wt with 6X tippet. I was pretty sure I wouldn't land this one, but there she was, stretched out in my net, and almost as long. A beauty. A size 20 black tungsten bead-head zebra nymph barely stuck in

her upper lip. I gently eased the hook out and reluctantly set her free. Perhaps we shall meet again.

I needed my net that day. The fish were dazzling, deliciously sleek and golden. Perhaps I was at the end of that rainbow. I was smitten. I lost count. I got stuck in the mud and didn't care. I tripped and barely noticed. I lost flies, but found a couple more. My waders leaked, it cooled me off. Trout Run, I immersed myself in you and became a part of your existence. Like the fish that day, I was hooked.

Can you fall in love with a trout stream? I did at first sight. Trout fishing is the best. Always will be, always was. Sorry smallmouth bass, I love you too, but you are not as elegant, not as lithe, and your mouth is much too small.

Trout Run, you own me. You seduced me. I spent the entire day with you and fell head over waders. And just today, like a blind-eyed lover in a jewelry store, I purchased a brand new, very expensive, 4wt fly line, just for you.

Paul was a moderately successful chef and pastry chef for most of his adult life. He threw it all away to become a writer of creative non-fiction. He believes he is mostly genuine, sincere, and occasionally professional. He loves fly fishing. He proclaims to be a writer, as he has written the words you are reading. He has a supportive wife, two adult children, and an emotionally supportive teenage golden retriever named Birdie.

WHAT ARE DONOR-ADVISED FUNDS AND HOW CAN THEY BENEFIT YOU?

By Mark Abner, MNTU Giving Coordinator

As someone who cares deeply about conservation and preserving Minnesota's trout streams for future generations, you may be looking for effective ways to amplify your philanthropic impact. A donor-advised fund (DAF) is a popular and flexible option. Whether you're new to the concept or exploring it as part of your giving strategy, donor-advised funds offer a powerful tool to support nonprofits like Minnesota Trout Unlimited while providing tangible benefits to you as a donor.

A donor-advised fund is like a personal charitable giving account, but with additional advantages. It's a fund you establish with a sponsoring organization—such as a community foundation or a financial institution, likely your existing brokerage—that allows you to contribute assets, claim an immediate tax deduction, and recommend grants to your favorite charities

over time. You can think of it as a way to streamline and maximize your charitable giving while keeping your focus on the causes you care about most.

Why choose a donor-advised fund? For many donors, the appeal of a DAF stems from its simplicity, flexibility, and potential for growth. Here are some key advantages:

Immediate Tax Benefits: Contributing to a donor-advised fund allows you to take an immediate tax deduction—up to 60% of your adjusted gross income for cash donations and up to 30% for appreciated assets. This enables you to manage your tax planning efficiently while giving back to your community.

Streamlined Giving: A DAF centralizes your charitable contributions, making it easier to stay organized. Rather than writing multiple checks to various charities, you can contribute to your DAF, allow the fund to grow through tax-free in-

vestments, and recommend grants when you are ready.

Flexible Timing: With a DAF, you don't need to determine right away which organizations will receive your grants. You can make contributions now, take the tax deduction, and decide at your own pace how to allocate the funds. This is especially beneficial during hectic year-end giving seasons.

Gifting Appreciated Assets: A distinct advantage of a DAF is the capability to donate appreciated stocks or other non-cash assets. This allows you to avoid capital gains taxes, reduce your taxable income, and increase the impact of your charitable contributions.

Focused on Legacy: For donors looking to create a lasting impact, a DAF facilitates family involvement in grant-making decisions and fosters a tradition of giving. You can also appoint successor advisors to manage the fund on your

behalf, ensuring your commitment to conservation persists.

By establishing a donor-advised fund, you can sustain vital conservation efforts while benefiting from the convenience and effectiveness of a proven giving tool. Minnesota Trout Unlimited depends on the generosity of supporters like you to protect and restore cold-water fisheries throughout the state. As many of our hundreds of donors have discovered, with a donor-advised fund, you can play a crucial role in ensuring that future generations continue to enjoy Minnesota's pristine trout streams.

Are you interested in discovering how your donor-advised fund can make a difference? I would love to connect with you and explore the possibilities together.

Mark Abner, MNTU Giving Coordinator, mark.abner@mntu.org

FISHING RICE CREEK

EXPLORING HABITAT IMPROVEMENT ON A DEGRADED SE MINNESOTA STREAM

By Jason Rieke



PART OF THE RICE CREEK HABITAT IMPROVEMENT PROJECT, OCTOBER 14, 2025.

Often overlooked and relatively unknown, Rice Creek located in Fillmore County in the southeastern corner of Minnesota does not typically appear on most trout anglers' top destination lists. Originating a few miles east of the city of Fountain, Rice Creek begins its journey northward toward the North Branch of the Root River, traversing a distinctive region characterized by sinkholes, underground streams, and limestone formations. There are numerous sinkholes in and around Fountain, which is often referred to as the “Sinkhole Capital of the USA,” which drain into and flow out of a spring complex known as the Fountain Big Spring. This provides a significant amount of cold water to the headwaters of Rice Creek. There are approximately nine miles of designated trout stream containing mostly brown trout, and two miles of public easement.

A Creek in Need of Help

Despite the numerous cold water influences at its headwaters, Rice Creek is plagued by persistent water quality issues that limit brown trout success, and make it one of the more mediocre trout streams in the area. Water quality deterioration is likely attributed to agricultural runoff from surrounding fields, discharge from nearby active quarries, and other mechanisms. Although the geography of the area provides cold water in places, there are also negative impacts on the water quality of Rice Creek. The central portion of the creek runs through a broad, shallow valley that rarely intersects with the water table, leading to extended stretches of slow-moving water that raise water temperatures. In some areas, the creek can com-

pletely dry up during times of low water. These sources collectively contribute to stress the quantity and size distribution of the trout population.

The Minnesota DNR’s 2022 stream assessment on Rice Creek revealed a decline in brown trout populations over the years, particularly in upper reaches and tributaries. Notably, no trout ≥ 12 inches were sampled in the five assessed stations that spanned the entire length of the creek. Typically there are brown trout ≥ 16 inches sampled in Rice Creek. These are sometimes fish that migrate from the North Branch of the Root River during optimal water conditions. Station 1.51, located within the new habitat improvement project, recorded no brown trout ≥ 12 inches, and estimated a total brown trout biomass of 66.69 lbs/acre. In contrast, nearby Lynch Creek reported an estimated 16-79 brown trout per mile measuring ≥ 12 inches, and a total brown trout biomass 175 lbs/acre during recent assessments.

The Project

In April 2024, Minnesota Trout Unlimited, in partnership with the Minnesota DNR and local landowners, launched a major habitat improvement project on nearly a mile (5,200 feet) of Rice Creek. Located near County Road 6 and Jubilee Drive—just six miles south of Chatfield—the project aimed to reconnect the creek to its natural floodplain, reduce erosion, and enhance habitat for brown trout and other aquatic life. Prior to restoration, this section of the creek suffered from wide, slow-moving channels, eroding banks, and poor in-stream habitat. These all limited the fish populations and contributed to degrading water quality.



SOME SECTIONS OF STREAM FEATURE MATTED IN-STREAM VEGETATION, BUT A DARK BROWN TROUT WAS FOUND LIVING UNDER IT IN JUNE OF THIS YEAR.

A wide range of techniques were used to improve the habitat along the project section. Boulder clusters and rock vanes were added for trout cover. Toewood and pool logs were added to provide cover and food for fish and for aquatic insects. 6,025 feet of streambank was graded to reconnect the creek to its original floodplain, and 1,300 feet of the stream were narrowed to increase baseflow velocity and clean out sediment. Finally, the banks were covered with hydro-mulch, containing native riparian plants, mulch and cover crops, to help keep the banks stabilized.

The project faced a severe rain event just months after completion when the Rice Creek watershed received five inches of rain in just three hours. The North Branch of the Root River rose so high that Rice Creek couldn't drain. Overall, the project itself held up well but the banks, still lacking full vegetative cover, suffered damage. The construction crew returned to fix the flooding damage.

Fishing the Project

Prior to the habitat improvement project in 2024, I had fished Rice Creek on the odd occasion. I explored all but the uppermost reaches of the public easement and caught a few trout here. Overall, I enjoyed the easy access to the stream and the quiet scenery of the valley, but never thought that the fishing was much to write home about.

Following the completion of the project, I have visited the creek several times across different seasons. I first fished it after the project's conclusion in August of 2024, just a few months post-completion. I was happy to see that despite major flooding that happened the month before, the project indeed had held up well. I fished a few holes with a hopper-dropper rig and was rewarded with a handful of healthy browns. My next fishing excursion took place in January. The water was low and exceptionally clear. I could see fish concentrated in the deeper holes, with long stretches of water devoid of fish in between. While

prospecting with a streamer, I successfully landed a respectable brown trout. I next returned in March to explore the water upstream of the County Road 6 bridge. I discovered some appealing pools, but encountered a limited number of small fish. Then in June I made a brief stop to fish a few holes. The stream had a lot of vegetation in the water, which made the fishing challenging; however, I did manage to catch a notably dark-colored brown trout that had been hiding out under some of the matted vegetation. Finally I made a couple of trips at the end of the trout season in October. The stream still contained a significant amount of in-water vegetation, but I was able to find a few smaller browns willing to strike at a stimulator dry fly.

One Angler's Thoughts

I think that this section of Rice Creek was a perfect candidate for a habitat improvement project. The section once was wide, slow, and lacked holding water for trout; it now is narrower, flows faster, and there are many more locations that hold trout. When fishing it, I noticed there were more fish, as well as bigger fish. I don't think that it will ever compare to Trout Run Creek or other higher quality trout streams in the area, but I think that with this project, Rice Creek has improved, and is certainly worth a stop. The challenges that faced Rice Creek before the project will continue to challenge it, but this habitat improvement project was a major step in the right direction. I am optimistic that as this project ages, and if there are future projects and/or improvements in land usage within the watershed, Rice Creek will continue to get better and better.

Jason Rieke is a former fly fishing guide turned composite materials engineer. After years of slinging streamers and noddling through client excuses, he now applies the same patience and precision to the delicate art of pultrusion and persuading fiberglass to behave. Jason works in Chatfield and lives in rural Winona county with his wife and son, sharing his love of trout streams with them.



THE PROJECT AFTER COMPLETION AND FLOOD ON AUGUST 8TH, 2025.



LEFT: FOUNTAIN BIG SPRING

RIGHT: A BROWN TROUT WILLING TO COME UP FOR A STIMULATOR OUT OF IN-STREAM VEGETATION.

Trophy Water

Fishing the Straight River near Park Rapids

By Bob Luck

A mass of hot steamy air had set up camp over southern Minnesota, and didn't show any sign of leaving. My wife was out of town for the week, and northern Minnesota was promising clear skies with highs in the 70s. I decided to take a road trip and try fishing outside of the Driftless Area for a change.

I knew enough about the Northland to realize that the steelhead run was over, and I didn't feel ready to slog through alders and muck looking for brook trout above the barrier falls. I had read somewhere that the Straight River, near Park Rapids, had some monster browns. I decided that a fact check was needed, and that is why I found myself at 6 p.m. on a late June evening, standing on a bridge over a lethargic stream winding through a cattail marsh and wondering if my map was wrong. It looked like perfect habitat for largemouth bass. A couple of guys who looked like anglers were sitting on the tail of a pickup truck enjoying an adult beverage. "Excuse me," I said, "Do you know anything about trout fishing on this stream?" "Do you have a headlight?" one of them asked. "No," I replied. "Well, the first thing you need to do is drive in to Walmart and get yourself a headlamp. The Hex are hatching, and if you don't have a headlamp, you'll regret it."

It turns out I had stumbled onto the biggest hatch of the year on the Straight, and the two gentlemen on the bridge, Ron Miller and Lon Christiansen, had been fishing it together for 37 years. After I returned from my shopping trip, they suggested setting up a few bends downstream from a deep hole they called the rowboat hole. More anglers were likely to turn up, but would probably be float-



ANDREA DUTCHER WITH PROOF THAT LARGE TROUT CAN BE CAUGHT IN DAYLIGHT. OF COURSE, YOUR ODDS ARE BETTER IF RON IS YOUR GUIDE.

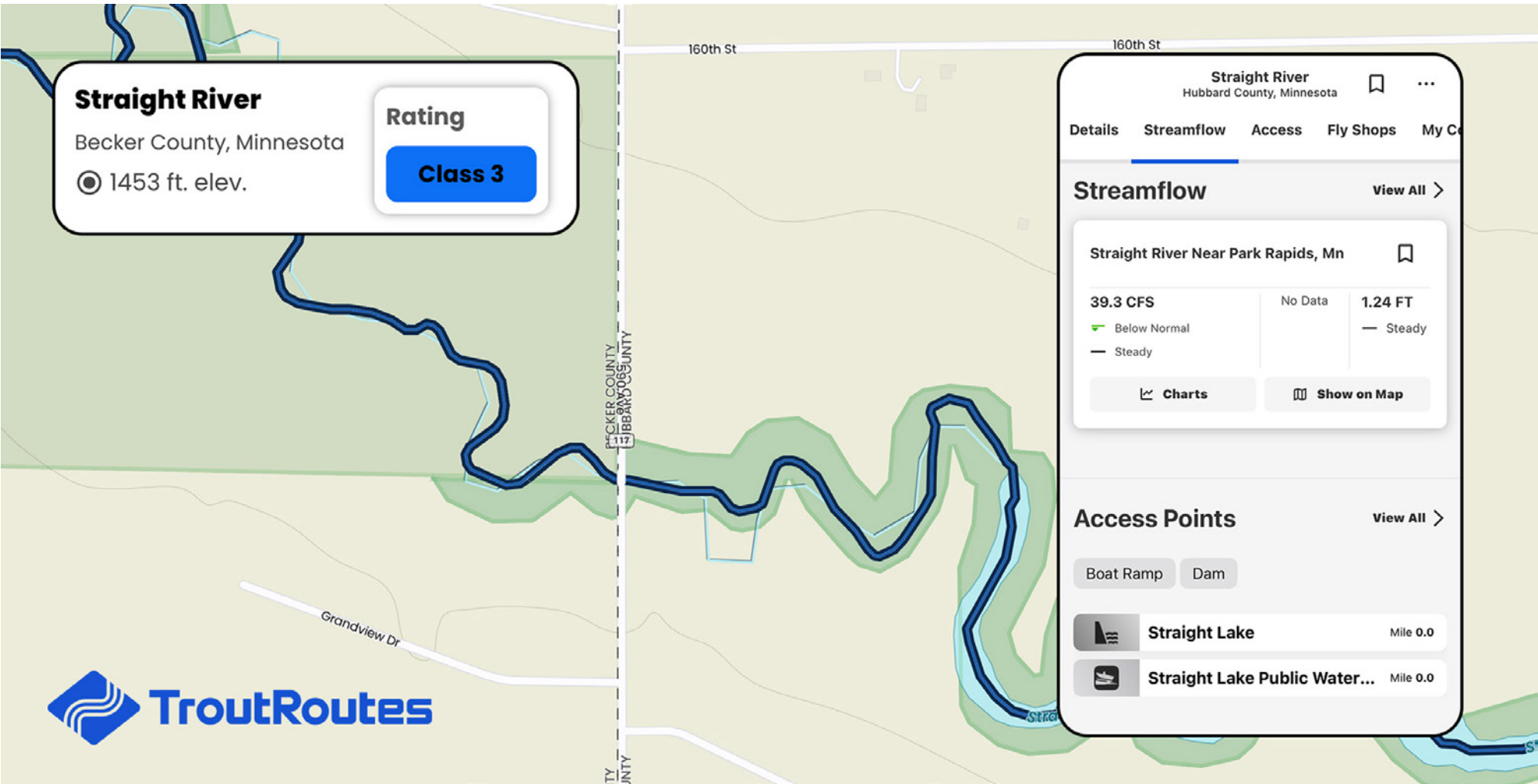
ing, and the river etiquette called for the canoeists to cede the first few hundred yards up and down from each bridge to wade anglers.

I crossed the river and picked my way along the hummocks until I was safely below the rowboat hole, then waded down another hundred yards or so. The river all seemed to look the same, but the water along the bank across from a large dead tree branch had the slightly oily look of a deep run and I figured the branch would serve as a handy bench and staging point to hang my vest and rig my rod while I waited for it to get dark.

At 8:30, a single Hex dun floated down the run and another one at 9:25. Just before it got dark, a high pitched whine that sounded like a Formula 1 race descended on the river. Mosquitoes. I may have been too ignorant to bring a headlamp, but I knew enough about summer in northern Minnesota to soak myself in DEET, and they mostly left me alone. Next came a fluttering sound as the Hex spinners arrived, and, just as I could no longer see my fly on the water, came the slurps. There weren't a lot of fish feeding, but they all sounded big. I cast several times in the direction of one of the slurps and set the hook when I heard a noise near where I thought my

fly would be. Fish on. The trout fought like it was at least 20 inches. Which is exactly how a 16-inch fish feels when snagged. I managed to hook the next fish—an 18-incher—in the mouth. It wrapped itself around a log and I was sure it was gone, but I waded over, freed the line, and found it was still on. The slurps stopped about 45 minutes after they started, even though there were still plenty of spinners on the water. Maybe the trout had gorged themselves to the point where they couldn't hold any more?

I waded back to the bridge and found some anglers loading canoes into their



THE STRAIGHT RIVER FROM STRAIGHT LAKE TO ITS MOUTH AT THE FISHHOOK RIVER. THE TROPHY WATER EXTENDS FROM CTY 123 ON THE WEST TO CTY 115 ON THE EAST. WHOEVER NAMED IT THE "STRAIGHT" RIVER HAD A TWISTED SENSE OF HUMOR. MAP COURTESY OF TROUTROUTES.

trucks, sharing a beer, and talking about the hatch. One of them turned out to be Mike Kelly, the DNR Fisheries Habitat Specialist in Park Rapids. He told me to stop by, and he would give me some info.

In his office the next morning, Mike gave me a virtual tour of the river. The Straight starts out as a small brook trout stream before flowing into the eponymously named Straight Lake, created by a dam at Osage. Coming out of the lake it is a warmwater stream for about a mile before picking up enough spring water to hold brown trout. The trout water extends to the mouth at the Fishhook River, about 12 miles downstream. A short stretch of the lower river, up- and downstream from the Hwy 71 bridge, consists of riffles and runs over cobble that wouldn't look out of place in the Driftless Area. This stretch is important for spawning, but the trophy fish live upstream, where the river flows through swampland. Swamps make wading challenging, but they are great habitat for Hex nymphs, and they buffer the flow. Over the last 39 years, the highest flow recorded at the USGS monitoring station was 91.7cfs, 1.5 times the median of 63.0 cfs. Compare this to flashy Driftless streams where a large rain event can raise the flow rate to 10 times the median, and a 50-year flood may raise it to more than 50 times. Nearly four inches of rain fell in Park Rapids last year on the day I arrived to fish the hex hatch. The river was a bit high, but clear—and filled with earthworms! I am sure that just as many worms wash into Driftless streams during a big rain, but the water is too muddy to see them.

Although the water flow is stable, most of that water flows in from the swamps, and groundwater discharge is limited, leading to high summer water temperatures. I have measured water temps above 70F nearly every June since 2019. The DNR logs temperatures at several sites between June and September, and Mike Kelly shared some data with me from 2012-2017 showing that water temperatures exceed 73.5F, which they define as the “range of thermal stress,” about eight days each year. Climate change is not going to make this problem better, nor is the pumping of groundwater to irrigate nearby potato fields.

Mike gave me some maps of the Straight and surrounding waters, along with a hatch chart created by one Ron Miller. Ron was clearly the guy to know if I wanted to learn more about the Straight. I invited Ron to speak about the Straight at a TCTU chapter meeting a few years ago, and sat down with him this summer to learn more about the river, and his involvement with it.

Ron started trout fishing in 1983 as a way to relieve stress from a busy job as a pediatrician in Fargo. He picked trout fishing because he couldn't afford a boat, and he picked the Straight because it was the closest trout stream to Fargo—90 miles door to bridge. Since then, Ron has fished for trout all over the world in places like Montana, New Zealand and Patagonia, but the Straight is his favorite, unmatched in its complexity and difficulty, along with the ever-present opportunity of hooking into

a rod bender. Did I mention difficulty? It took Ron three years before he caught his first trout on the Straight—all of his fish in those early years were caught on annual trips to Montana. By the late 80s, Ron had learned about the Hex, and figured out that the hatch didn't happen during the daytime. He and Lon, who had joined his clinic as a dermatologist, began to take the third week of June off each year to fish the Hex hatch. In 1992 Ron and his wife bought a three-bedroom cabin on a nearby lake. “That was when things got serious. There was one bedroom for me, one for Lon, and one for everybody else. We would fish all night, come back to make pancakes for the family, go to bed, wake up to tie flies, and then go back onto the river.” Ron fished nearly every weekend as well as that week in June, which eventually became two weeks, then three, and then the whole month.

Hatches and Flies

Trout in the Straight get as much as a third of their annual calorie intake during the two-week duration of the Hex hatch, but there are plenty of other bugs on offer. In the springtime, Ron has had success with the Dark Hendrickson, and Mother's Day Caddis. Right before the Hex hatch, the Brown Drakes come out. Although not as large as the Hex, they are meaty enough at size 10 to bring out the larger trout, and they are considerate enough to anglers to hatch in daylight. One of the largest trout Ron ever hooked on the Straight was on a Brown Drake, and tailwalked across the river like a steelhead and broke off his 3x tippet. In July and August, there is a large hatch of Tricos. Ron spent a number of years hooking and losing large trout on trico imitations with 6x tippet before he learned that he could fish a #18 Ant or Griffiths Gnat on 3x and attract fish. Speaking of Ants, Ron finds that trout on the Straight love them, and has seen them move 6 feet to take an ant. Hoppers have also done well for him.

With all the woody debris on the bottom of the river, Ron has not been successful with nymph fishing, but he finds that streamers are effective in the spring and early summer, before the aquatic vegetation thickens enough to hang up every cast. The first 25" fish that he caught was on an early summer evening using an original streamer he calls the “Hawk-



"MY BENCH AND ROD HOLDER."

eye” due to its black and gold colors. He tied it on a lead headed jig, although he now uses non-toxic heads. He cast it upstream into a corner pool, let it sink deep and twitched it downstream. He lost a fish of equal size that same evening.

Tactics

Other than in June when the Brown Drakes and Hex are hatching it is necessary to cover a lot of water to look for rising fish. It is not easy to do that by wading in a swamp! Ron has found that the best technique is to use a two-person canoe. The rear angler slowly poles the canoe upstream while their partner stands in front scanning the water for risers. A standing position makes it easier to deliver an accurate cast, and, paradoxically, makes the angler more difficult for trout to spot when they are holding in deeper water. Distance casting is not important, but successful anglers are able to hit a tea saucer at 30 feet without dis-

turbing the water. Cloudy days are usually best, but this is not an absolute: Ron once caught seven fish in half an hour under bright sun.

The only absolute is water temperature. Fish won't feed when the water temperature is above 70 unless the Hex are hatching, and even then, the fishing is better when the water temp drops into the 60s. The temp on that bright day when Ron caught seven fish was around 60. Early summer mornings are a great time to fish the Straight. The water temperature drops into the 50s or 60s overnight, and when the sun begins to warm up the water slightly it serves as a metabolic trigger to stimulate feeding activity.

You may have already guessed that Ron is a big believer in heavier tippets. The lightest tippet he uses is 3x, which gives him a decent chance of landing a large fish in a stream loaded with obstacles,



RON MILLER (FAR LEFT) AND OTHER REGULARS AT A HEX HATCH TAILGATE PARTY.

and getting it done quickly so that the trout is not overly stressed from higher water temperatures. A deliberate hook set, similar to a steelhead set, is also key. Fish over 20 inches take some time to get the fly into their mouths, and it is important to wait until the fish has turned back underwater before setting the hook. If you are used to doing a lightning fast “trout set” on 12-inch fish, good luck teaching your muscles to unlearn that memory.

My personal experience on the Straight has been limited to the Hex hatch. I missed two seasons after first meeting Ron and Lon on that bridge in 2019, but have been back every year since 2021. Over 12 nights, I have landed 13 fish; 2 were 12” and the rest were over 16”—a couple of them well over 16”. This is a lot less fish than I could catch if I stayed on my home water in the Driftless Area, but there is something addictive about the sun setting over the swamp, the glow

of fireflies, the howling of wolves, and the splash made by that first large fish as it takes a Hex dun. It doesn’t hurt that the fish are bigger—much bigger.

My 2025 Hex season started on June 24th. After our October heat wave it may be hard to remember, but we had a cold June and the hatch came off a bit later than the typical Father’s Day start. When I arrived at the river a number of DNR employees were pulling out canoes and setting up their rods. I did an informal survey, asking how many of them used barbless hooks. The answer was none. “We’ve looked at the research, and barbs on hooks that small don’t affect fish mortality,” said one of them. “I’m not worried about the fish,” I replied. Have you ever been down to the hospital in Brainerd where they have an entire wall of lures that the doctors removed from anglers? Do you really want to make a trip to the emergency room in the middle of the night?” We good-naturedly agreed to disagree, and they got into their canoes and paddled

upstream. I waded down to my dead tree branch which is still there after six years, I got myself set up and waited for the action to start. I had lost the tip from my 5-weight rod a few weeks earlier stumbling around the Kinni after an altercation with a beaver, so I was fishing an 8-weight ANT rod. At around 10 p.m. trout started rising. After 30 fruitless minutes, just as the hatch was winding down, I cast nearly straight across to the opposite bank and heard a loud slurp. I set the hook and the fish raced downstream. I have hooked large fish on the Straight before, but this one was different. I honestly thought it was going to break my 2X tippet—or maybe my rod. After what seemed like forever but was probably about two minutes, the fish began to tire and I started to reel it in. That was when the hook pulled out. I can’t say whether it was because the hook was barbless, or because I am one of the more guilty practitioners of the trout set, but given how karma works, I am going with barbless. The hatch had ended by this time, and I made a slow wade of shame

back to my car. Fortunately for my ego, the DNR folks had not yet returned, so I made a quick getaway back to my hotel. The next night I retrieved some dignity by landing an 18-inch fish. It felt like a 10-incher on the 8-weight.

I plan to fish the Hex hatch again next year, but am also hoping to try it at other times. If I don’t find a partner with a canoe, I learned from Jody Derks at the DNR that you can mouse the stream at night while wading. Cast once directly upstream, once to the left bank and once to the right bank, retrieving the fly each time with a steady motion that creates a small wake. Take 10 steps upstream and repeat. You won’t catch a lot of fish, but you may get the fish of a season—or a lifetime.

Bob Luck is a former Twin Cities Chapter president and an avid angler. Check out his new book of essays Woolly Buggers Don't Count at www.pocketwaterpress.com

HONORING A LIFE ON THE WATER

A BIRTHDAY GIFT FOR BOB FORSTNER

By Mark Abner, MNTU Giving Coordinator

At Minnesota Trout Unlimited, we are honored to help families celebrate the lives of those who have shared with them a love of rivers, trout, and fishing. Honorary and memorial gifts are one of the most meaningful ways to connect treasured memories with the ongoing work of protecting and restoring coldwater streams for future generations.

This summer, we were privileged to help celebrate the 96th birthday of Theodore Robert Forstner, a lifelong outdoorsman, fisherman, and proud father. His daughter Judy Pofert made a gift to Minnesota Trout Unlimited in his honor, ensuring that his love of fishing will ripple on in lasting ways.

Bob grew up in Madelia, MN, and has spent a lifetime immersed in the outdoors, equally at home in hunting fields and on flowing water. He tells with delight the story of hooking a monster brown trout on Minnesota’s Straight River—only to discover, in the end, that his net was too small to bring it in! The story still brings a chuckle whenever he recounts it.

Fly fishing came to him later in life, but once introduced, he quickly fell in love with it. For many years, he and his late wife Joan traveled together to Montana to fish the storied Big Horn River (well, Bob fished, and Joan strolled the town). Later, as travel became more difficult, Judy and her family stepped in to join him on annual trips to Madison Valley Lodge on the Madison River. Those journeys are filled with laughter, tradition, and trout—and plenty of “fish tales,” like the enormous brown Bob battled for what seemed like eternity, only to spit out the fly right before netting. A sketch of that fish is memorialized in Bob’s leather rod case that attracts attention wherever it goes.

the awarding of a small pin shaped like a fly, passed back and forth to mark the angler who caught the largest fish of the trip. With only one exception, Bob emerged the winner, and today he remains the final holder of that tiny “trophy.” He keeps it framed with pride, and has made it known that when the time comes, he will want it with him. It is a symbol of his joy in fishing and in the memories he created with his family along the way.

Judy recalls their last fishing trip together, spent in Montana in 2019 just before Covid changed travel. Those photos capture Bob’s characteristic smile and his deep love for the rivers he fished so faithfully. Even after a recent fall and move to a nursing home, where he is adjusting to new routines, he continues to talk about fishing, sharing his photo albums, and recounting adventures on the water with anyone who will listen.

For Judy and her family, supporting Minnesota Trout Unlimited was a natural extension of Bob’s life and legacy. Their honorary gift links his personal passion to the mission of preserving cold, clean, fishable waters here at home.

Honorary and memorial gifts like this serve two purposes: they keep alive cherished memories of loved ones, and they fuel the conservation work that ensures trout streams continue to thrive for future generations. We are grateful to the Forstner family for sharing not just their support, but also their story, which illustrates how fishing connects us across generations.

If you wish to celebrate a loved one through a gift to Minnesota Trout Unlimited, we invite you to reach out and share your story. The rivers flow on clear, clean, and cold, with a little help from generous people like you, and because of lives like Bob’s, which remind us what a gift it is to fish, to conserve, and to remember.



BOB FORSTNER HAS ENJOYED MANY TRIPS TO MONTANA OVER THE YEARS AND HIS MOST RECENT TRIP WAS IN 2019.

HOW TO MAKE AN HONORARY OR MEMORIAL GIFT

- To make a secure honorary or memorial gift online, visit the Minnesota Trout Unlimited donation page, where you can also make your designation.
- You may also mail a check (be sure to indicate if your gift is in honor or memory of someone, and include any special instructions) to:

Minnesota Trout Unlimited
Giving Office
968 Fairmount Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55105-3119

- If you have stories or photos of your loved one enjoying time outdoors, we welcome them—please contact Giving Coordinator Mark Abner at mark.abner@mntu.org or call (202) 573-1832.
- For more information or assistance with donations, legacy gifts, or including Minnesota Trout Unlimited in an obituary or memorial, contact our office or visit www.mntu.org.

All honorary and memorial gifts help sustain healthy, fishable waters in Minnesota for generations to come.

EAGLE SCOUT PROJECT ON THE VERMILLION RIVER

DRAINS LEAD TO OUR TROUT STREAMS

By Ginger Flaten

The Vermillion is the largest trout fishery in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area featuring trophy wild brown trout and stocked rainbows. The Vermillion gets a lot of attention from Twin Cities Trout Unlimited. The TCTU chapter is actively involved in the conservation and restoration of the Vermillion River's South Branch and works alongside the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and other groups to remove invasive buckthorn, stabilize stream banks and monitor trout population. The river's population is dependent on groundwater and surface runoff (rain and melted snow) to maintain the health of the river.

As a member of TCTU it seemed like a great idea to see if they had any project ideas for my grandson Skyler, who is working on becoming an Eagle Scout. Bob Luck, former President of TCTU, was contacted for project ideas. TCTU had several ideas to choose from and Skyler began to correspond and partner with TCTU on the Storm Drain Stenciling Project.

After a project is chosen it needs to be approved by the Scout Troop Project Counselor Kurt Benedetto, Advancement Chair for District P. A project workbook is completed with reviews and approvals along the way. Jonathan Boorum, Scout Master of troop 9111 was kept informed.

The Eagle Scout project planning began in June 2025. Earning the Eagle Scout rank in the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) is not an easy task. Historical data suggests around 4-6% of all BSA members earn the Eagle Scout rank. It requires outdoor skills, dedication, leadership and a major community service project. The community project requires the scout to plan, develop, and give leadership to others in a service project helpful to the community.

Skyler of Troop 9111 did just that by completing storm drain stenciling near the Vermillion River in Farmington, MN. Storm drains are the grated openings in the street which collect water from rain and melting snow. They empty into nearby bodies of water such as

lakes, ponds, streams or wetlands, not a wastewater treatment facility as some people might think. The drains stenciled for this project empty directly into the Vermillion River.

With the help of five volunteers (Justin, Joel, Jack, Kyle, father, and Ginger, grandmother), Skyler stenciled 65 storm drains. Drains were either swept or blown free of dirt and debris and trash was picked up around the drains.

Spray painting was done using a plastic stencil to the left or right of the drain. The paint should last a couple of years and bring awareness to the Farmington community about the negative environmental impact of dumping pollutants down storm drains that empty directly into a stream.

As we spray painted drains, we noticed a few were pre-stamped. Pre-stamped grates will last a long time but those also can get worn down or covered up by weeds.

Doug Moran, TCTU Board Member & Habitat Coordinator, provided a TCTU drain keepers map for Skyler to use, which was beneficial to the project. The map let Skyler know which drains had been adopted by TCTU. This map proved invaluable as we drove through Farmington streets and helped us efficiently spray paint the 65 drains. It was a great project for Skyler to work on and was beneficial to TCTU and the Vermillion watershed district. Thank you to Bob Luck and Doug Moran for providing information to Skyler for his Eagle Scout project.

Here is an email excerpt from Douglas Moran after we informed him of stenciling 65 drains.

"The impact of what you've done is considerable, Skyler. Your work will reduce, by tons, sediment and trash entering the Vermillion watershed. Your project:

- Raised awareness that drains empty directly into a stream
- Made it easier for TCTU to quickly clean drains
- Enabled, potentially, schools in the Trout in The Classroom program to di-



SKYLER SPRAY-PAINTED STENCIL MESSAGES AS A REMINDER THAT STORM DRAINS FLOW INTO STREAMS.

rectly impact the water of the streams they release their trout into. There are several schools that have expressed an interest in this."

It takes a community to raise an Eagle Scout and that is what we had. In addition to the BSA and TCTU members we would like to thank McKenna Rodine, Water Resources Specialist from Farmington and Brita Moore-Kutz, Communications & Outreach Specialist from Dakota County for their information on storm stenciling and supplies such as paint, safety vests and stencils.

Here's to clean water and healthier habi-

tats for wildlife in and near the Vermillion River and, of course, to all the young people who work towards becoming Eagle Scouts and volunteers who support their efforts. Thanks Skyler and crew!

Ginger Flaten is a member of TCTU and serves as a streamkeeper, as well as a board member for the Fly Fishing Women of MN in the communications role. She likes spending time by rivers and streams, whether fishing, kayaking, or riding her motorcycle alongside them. A proud grandmother of four, Ginger lives in Eden Prairie near the Minnesota River.



SKYLER STENCILED AND CLEANED 65 STORM DRAINS WITH THE HELP FROM FIVE VOLUNTEERS, AS WELL AS TCTU MEMBER DOUG MORAN.





MNTU EDUCATION UPDATE

NOVEMBER 2025

By Amber Taylor, MNTU Education Program Supervisor



Since mid-September, TIC staff have been busy traveling to all four corners of the state working with our participating schools, teaching students about their local watersheds and the importance of monitoring water quality. We bring bins full of waders, nets, and biotic indexes for students to use when collecting aquatic macroinvertebrates. They then do a deep dive on identifying the macros and inferring the water quality based on the species they find. Fall field days are a TIC student and teacher favorite, as it is the first time many of them have ever gotten to go in the water with waders!

In addition to fall field days, the learning continues in the classroom as students begin setting up their tanks. They get hands on with the setup components, discussing the differences and similarities of the tank with a trout's natural habitat. Some of these differences include a closed versus open system and the presence or lack of predators and other biotic (living) organisms. Once the tank is set up, the nitrogen cycle is introduced and the pre-cycling process begins. Students learn about how the nitrogen cycle works, get practice testing the tank's water chemistry for ammonia, nitrite, nitrate, and pH levels, and use that data to monitor the cycle's progress in their tanks as they prepare for the arrival of eggs this winter.

This year, we are lucky to have support from two sources other than MNTU and its chapters: Hennepin County and the Jeffers Foundation. MNTU has a long-time partnership with the Jeffers Foundation whose consistent donations over the last few years have allowed us to continue running Trout in the Classroom around the state. Their mission is to foster environmental stewardship through education, preserving nature, and establishing productive partnerships with like-minded organizations. The \$95,000 they have donated over the last few years has provided busing reimbursements for schools, funds for our team to implement activities with TIC students, equipment and supplies, and more! This is the first year we've received a Hennepin County Green Partners grant for Youth Environmental Education that helps us to further support schools through leading programs and busing reimbursements.

As the program has grown not only in number but also in its reaches through the state, I have been thinking about trying to do two egg delivery days to ease the pressure from doing it all in one day. With having had a few more teachers come forward requesting a potential after holiday break delivery instead of early December, I decided to give it a try this year. Egg delivery day number one is on Tuesday, December 2 for those teachers that still wanted to get eggs before their breaks. The second date is Tuesday, January 6.

If you'd like to assist with one of the egg delivery days or winter TIC programs and aren't already on the



TIC STUDENTS FROM CHERRY SCHOOL USE BIOTIC INDEXES AND DICHOTOMOUS KEYS TO IDENTIFY THE AQUATIC MACROINVERTEBRATES THEY FOUND IN THE ST. LOUIS RIVER.

list of volunteers, contact Amber Taylor, education@mntu.org, for more information. Our team will be leading biomimicry and habitat lessons, fly tying, and ice fishing programs with our TIC students from January through March.

Not all tanks are a success story each year! There are always a handful of tanks that have major die offs for one reason or another. The teacher testimonial below is from a second year TIC teacher in Proctor and demonstrates how a lot of learning can still happen with a tank where the fish are unable to be released and difficult decisions have to be made.

"This year's program yielded unexpected results. Everything seemed to be going as planned until mid-January, when 1-30 fish started dying each day. I was in communication with Amber and the pathology lab, and on February 11, I sent 45 fish to the lab for viral and bacterial testing. The tests came back positive for *Flavobacterium*, a bacterium that is fairly ubiquitous in the environment and can act as opportunistic pathogens when circumstances/stressors are right. Certain *Flavobacterium* are capable of causing disease and mortality in many species of fish, including rainbow trout." Unfortunately, this led to the fish being deemed unreleaseable.

The fish unexpectedly dying was actually a great example of the scientific method. Students had lots of ideas on what might be causing fish death, including disease, water conditions, and equipment malfunction. Upon receiving the *Flavobacterium* diagnosis, we learned that science sometimes has unexpected results, and that this was, ultimately, a science experiment.

The students and I decided to continue raising the fish until the end of the school year with the hopes of getting them large enough to dissect. After completing the

disease testing, we had roughly thirty fish remaining. We raised the tank temperature to 56 degrees fahrenheit and started feeding them once per day. The fish grew to only about 4 inches in length and we were unable to dissect them, but we still used them to observe genetic differences within the population. It was an excellent example of "survival of the fittest" during our evolution unit.

Even though this year had unexpected results, the students were highly invested and engaged with the tank and solving the mystery as to how the fish were dying. In a way, more lessons were learned this year than last because of the unusual circumstances. I have invited this year's students to come visit the fish next year, and I plan to invite them to the release

party so they can still experience the entirety of the program. I look forward to using the lessons learned this year to raise fish and release them next year.

Overall, this was an amazing opportunity that I would recommend to any teacher interested. I was worried about student interest and involvement at the middle school level, but even sixth and eighth graders would come to my room to visit the fish and ask questions. I look forward to raising and releasing fish again next year! Thank you so much for this incredible opportunity."

Contact Amber Taylor, Education Supervisor with questions, mntu.education@gmail.com.

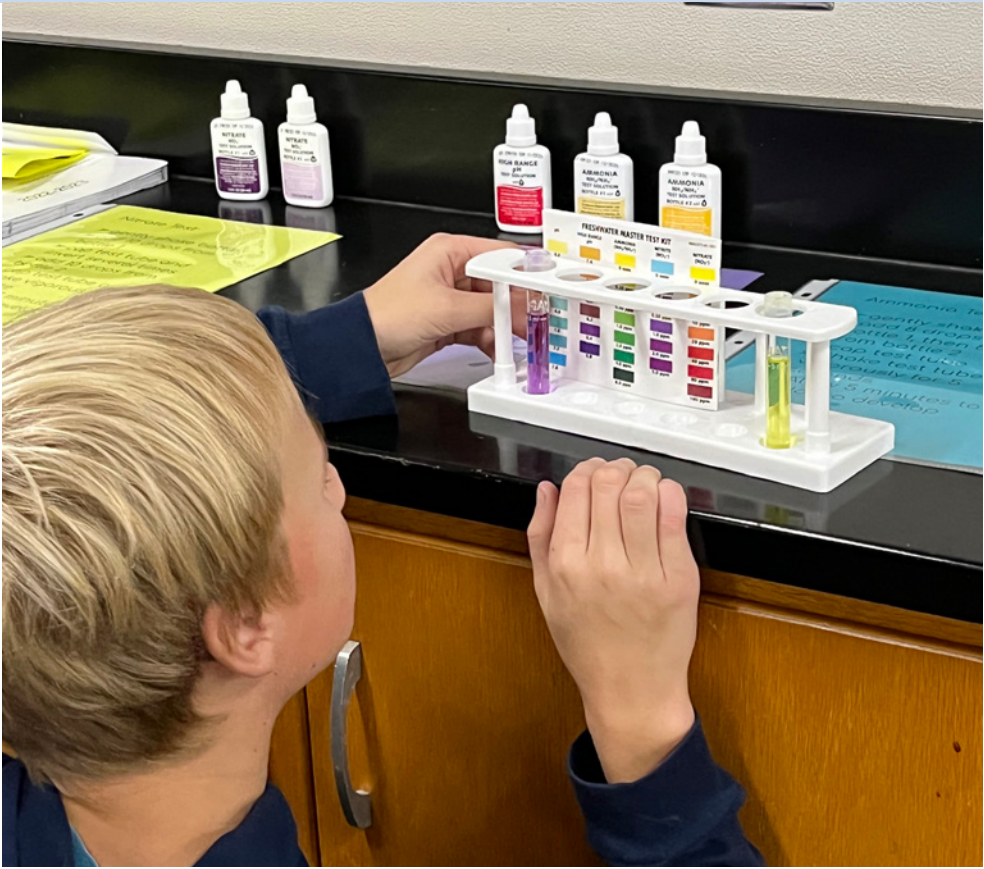
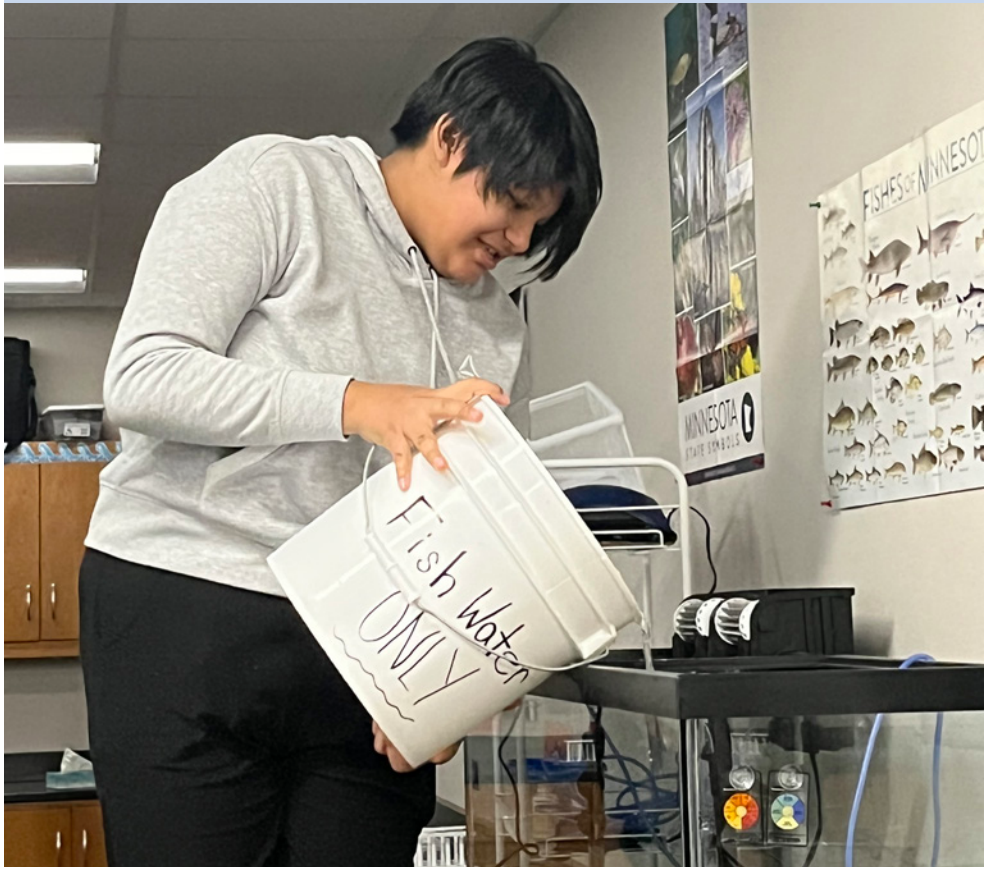


STUDENTS WADE ALONG THE SHORE OF THE ST. LOUIS RIVER COLLECTING AQUATIC INSECTS TO LEARN ABOUT AND IDENTIFY FOR LESSONS ABOUT WATER QUALITY AND HEALTHY WATERSHED ECOSYSTEMS.

PERFECT CONDITIONS

YOUTH SERIES

By Jim Emery, MNTU Educator



A LOT OF CHEMISTRY AND CARE IS NEEDED TO CREATE AN ARTIFICIAL ENVIRONMENT FOR YOUR TROUT. NATURE DOES THE WORK ONCE THEY ARE RELEASED.

Rainbow trout need such precise conditions to thrive that raising them is going to be a big responsibility for your class! You'll need to maintain the water chemistry and temperature to be certain the tank remains properly balanced. In a trout stream, numerous factors work in harmony to create the balance trout need to thrive. To build a whole trout stream in your class, you would need to bring in hundreds of different plants and animals, healthy soils, a way to control the temperature of the air, constant cold water flow from an underground spring, and a tank that holds a whole lot more water than yours does. Even if a project that big sounds like fun to try, it would take a very long time for this ecosystem to establish the balance needed to remain healthy without constant human maintenance. Your class will take a shortcut by cooling the

water with a piece of equipment called a chiller, adding some commercially prepared chemicals, monitoring the water chemistry, and maintaining the tank to remove waste and refresh the water.

Though once your trout are released they will swim in water that is kept in balance by nature. A complicated interplay of plants, animals, soil conditions, and replenishment from ground water maintain the health of the streams and rivers where our trout are released. Observing the diversity of life in and around a trout stream can help you learn a whole lot about the importance of every species and element in the natural world. Observing nature will also always bring you joy!

You probably know something about the food web. Plants and animals decay

by having their bodies broken down by bacteria, fungi and insects. Bugs and small fish are consumed by larger ones, like your trout, which are eaten by still larger fish and birds. When animals die, their decaying bodies start the process over again. Aquatic plants drink pollutants from the water and regulate water temperature. Animals breathe and excrete waste, returning nutrients to the water. Grasses on the shore hold the soil in place so that it doesn't fill the stream with sediment. Trees provide shade so the water doesn't overheat. Birds keep insects from overpopulating, and your trout will help with that too. On and on it goes. There are so many natural processes that must happen in order for a stream to be healthy. You could spend your whole life learning about them, and lots of people do!

It's a symphony out there, all the parts working together, contributing to a healthy ecosystem. It's all right there for you to experience and enjoy. Take a walk near a trout stream, or anywhere else for that matter. Count how many species you can see and hear, and think about how many more there must be that make up the part of the world where you are standing.

This year, it is your job as trout technicians to create and maintain the ideal tank environment. Keep changing that water. Feed those fish when they need it. Monitor the water temperature, ammonia, nitrites, and the nitrates. It's a lot of work, but in the spring you can release your trout into a natural body of water where nature will take over.



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T.U.N.E. CAMP

THE ULTIMATE NATURE EXPERIENCE

By John Weiss

The Ultimate Nature Experience (TUNE) camp attracted 36 youths and a few dozen volunteers in early July to the Eagle Bluff Environmental Learning Center near Lanesboro where the youths received a score or more lessons in the outdoors that will help them become more passionate about nature and helping it.

I spent a day there and saw them learn about birds, insects, soil health, how a trout hatchery works, casting a fly rod and shooting bow and arrow. The youths didn't need any coaxing to want to get involved. They were there, they were already engaged and hooked on the outdoors.

But what lessons could we learn from them, the volunteers and others about what would get other kids, ones not as eager to spend a week at the nature center? As it turns out, several lessons stuck out to me, including why youths and adults were there.

First, let's learn more about the camp itself. Bruce Gockowski, camp director, said it began in 2007 with the first camp in 2008. Pheasants Forever began the camp and later Minnesota Trout Unlimited joined as a partner with chapters helping with scholarships and volunteers. Bruce joined early as a volunteer but soon saw that the mission was larger than just shooting sports. "I began looking at what in the environment was having a problem: songbirds, insects, fish," and expanded into those fields. The camp's motto is "Becoming stewards of the land through balance, harmony, love and respect." The need for stewardship was one lesson several adults highlighted.

"I like to think we're planting seeds," Bruce said. We retain everything but not to the surface, he said. But later, something happens "and all of a sudden that seed will open up and they will remember, I learned this and I learned that." He hopes the lessons there will spread out to family and friends.

This is a list of topics youths learned about: native grass habitat, aquatic invasive species, wetlands and waterfowl, stream labs, trout biology, pollinators (they get to put on bee suits), going into the Root River, canoeing, macroinvertebrates, songbirds, insects, soil biology, fly tying, hunting dogs, fly rod casting, shooting .22-caliber rifles and shotguns, going on the high-ropes course and canoeing. All in six days.

Even mosquitoes and rain were lessons. "Oh definitely. We like to call it weathering," Bruce said. "We can try to predict the weather but in today's world it's ever-changing, our climate, it's constantly throwing things at us. We have to deal with what we get and move on, we can't stop our programs for it."

"Be on the positive side so they feel they can make a difference with the environment," he said. "It's their world, it's up to them to change it."

Those are a few good lessons.

Youths had a good diversity—big cities, small towns, rural areas and they had a large age range and some kids were about two feet taller than the shortest.

Mckenzie Spaeth, 11 of Pelican Rapids, said she came to hang out with friends, including a friend who asked her to come to Eagle Bluff. And "because I like hunting and learning about science and animals. I love the outdoors." At the camp, "I learned a bunch of trees, birds." Yes, there are skeeters and rain but "it's part of being outdoors." When she got home, she said she wanted to spread the word about it, and it will make her a better angler.

The friend was Allie Field, 11, also of Pelican Rapids. She said her grandmother read about it and suggested she might like it. "I like to hunt and fish," she said. At the camp, she learned about birds.

Jacob Kozcur, 15 of Duluth, said he was there for his second time. He said he likes "just about everything, really. I like the activities," he said while touring the Lanesboro State Fish Hatchery. He said he talked with friends about it and two also came. Yes, Duluth has a lot for the outdoors, but "we don't have anything like this," he said, the city doesn't have a concentrated course. He loves just about everything about the outdoors, he said. One of the critical things he was learning was "things to do to preserve the amazing nature that we have, so more people can experience it." His advice to adults trying to interest other youths in the outdoors is that kids listen differently, they might really be digesting things, but they also need more stimulation.

Madisyn Murray, 13 of Anoka, was also in her second year. "I love nature," she said. "I love bees, I think they are fascinating," they have so many sides to them. But she added, "mosquitoes suck." She



EXPERT FLY ROD CASTER MONTA HAYNER TEACHES ALLIE FIELD TO CAST.

intends to be a surgeon, "I want to help people," she said. She isn't sure how the camp will help but "I do know I love it here," she said.

Her friend, Payton Stubblefield of Minneapolis said she tried casting a fly rod because she has never fished before. "I'm not really a fan of it, I don't find it amusing." The hardest part was casting a perfect loop.

Did you notice all of them came because of friends or with friends? Another lesson.

To help the youths learn requires many volunteers with many things to teach.

David Brockway from Twin Cities, a member of Twin Cities TU said he came for three days because "it seemed like a good opportunity to volunteer...I liked the philosophy, the idea of kids being introduced to nature, conservation." A main point is to get the kids away from the screens.

Jerry Pruett of Rochester, a member of the Zumbro Valley Audubon Society and one of the state's best birders, talked about birds. He said he came out because Joel Dunnnette, a fellow Audubon member, asked him. "I decided to help out," he said. "Every little bit counts." If I can just get interest in a few kids, "it's worth



RICHARD ROHRER OF THE MINNESOTA SOIL HEALTH COALITION SHOWS STUDENTS HOW TO TEST SOILS.

it.” One lesson he emphasized was “GET OUT THERE.” He also said that birds are under stress from habitat loss, climate change and pesticides. “This is a critical time for the birds.”

When teaching new birders, tell them “you will hear more birds than you will see... You bird with your ears, listen for the birds.” For example, there is the “witchety, witchety” of the common yellowthroat, a usual bird that is not easily seen, he said.

Dunnette spent part of the afternoon teaching about insects, stressing the beauty and specialness of even mundane bugs. “They are a glorious part of our world,” he said. Some insects, such as dragonflies, can move each of their four wing segments separately, “they are tremendously maneuverable,” he said.

And then there was a lesson, not as obvious but one that is incredibly important: soil health. Campers were “learning about soil and how to improve it because it’s been degraded for so long,” said Tim Radebach from the Minnesota Soil Health Coalition. He and Richard Rohrer used water poured over different soils, from one soil used to raise corn or soybeans to native prairie soil, and demonstrated just how different they are, how much better the prairie soil is.

“Fifty years ago, the farmers were more connected to the farm,” they were partners with the land but that is changing, they said.

Lily Kohn, a youth guide who’s been at the camp before, said maybe we adults are overthinking things. “Take them outside, take them for a hike, a night hike,” she said. Look for lightning bugs, then



MCKENZIE SPAETH PREPARES TO LOOK FOR BIRDS.

let nature do the rest.

Did you notice the passion all the teachers brought? A good lesson.

I helped Monta Hayner teach about casting fly rods in the evening. I’d show a youth the right way, they’d get it right, and within a few casts, go back to really bad form, slapping the rod back and forth. I quickly noted it’s not an easy thing to teach, I needed patience. Another good lesson.

Eagle Bluff Education Director Jenna Moon had more insights. “I think any time kids are given an opportunity to be hands-on and involved in their learning,

that is when we see the highest success,” she said. Maybe it’s just making a fire. “Here’s matches, light it up, that is going to get kids excited.” She strongly recommends younger children see adults also take an interest but as youths get older, let them loose to explore.

There’s more.

She also stressed finding friends for the youths, especially middle and high school students. She remembers being in the fifth grade and spending time at Eagle Bluff where her best memory was sitting on an old dead tree with friends. “We were laughing and being silly and being with each other’s company,” she

said. She doesn’t recall her outdoors lessons but she did come away with those sweet memories of being outdoors. “It’s all about trying to get people to form connections with whatever makes sense to them,” she said.

A final lesson.

John Weiss was a reporter/photographer for the Rochester Post/Bulletin for 41 years and still does freelance. He has been an outdoors writer in the Driftless nearly 46 years. He is secretary for Hiawatha TU and loves fly fishing small streams.

BOOK REVIEW: WOOLLY BUGGERS DON'T COUNT

By Chris O'Brien

Bob Luck, former president of the Twin Cities Chapter and frequent contributor to *Trout Unlimited Minnesota*, has just published a book of essays on trout fishing in the Driftless Area.

In *Woolly Buggers Don't Count*, Bob shares a series of detailed glimpses into an often obsessive and occasionally rewarding pastime – while also articulating a determined conservation ethic honed through his time living in Minnesota, Wisconsin and Japan. Fans of writers like Thomas McGuane and John Gierach will appreciate how he effortlessly drifts between heartfelt appreciation for the natural world and biting commentary on our troubled relationship with it. Here are a few of Bob’s observations:

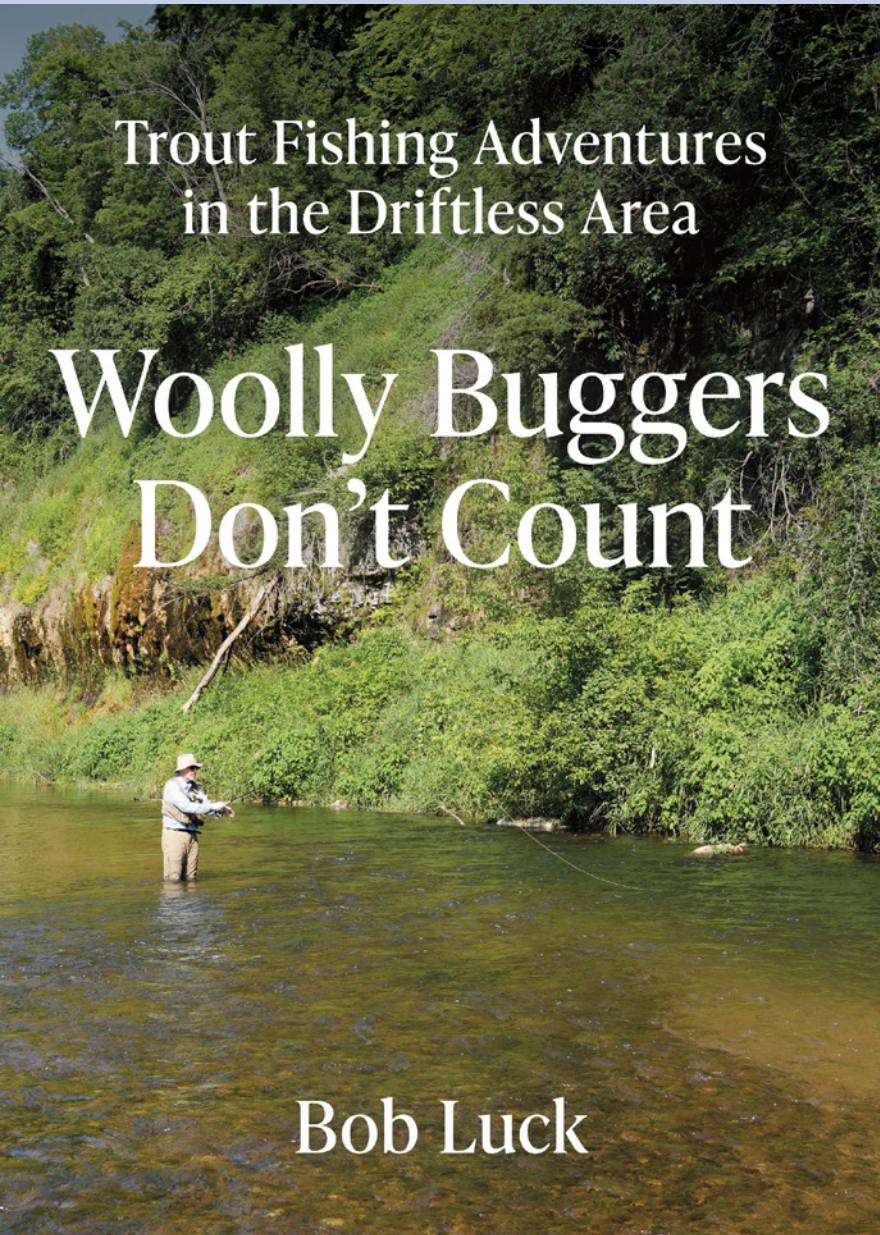
On beavers:
Why bother with poplar bark when acres of corn are there for the taking?
On broken rods:
Why didn’t you just grab an axe and chop it in half?
On insecticides:
Minnesota did enact a statute that prevents Neonics from being used on public land, but given their ability to travel through groundwater, that is like setting up a no-pee zone in a swimming pool.

Woolly Buggers Don't Count is both a love letter to wild places and a call for action to defend them from careless intrusion.

Bob will be donating \$5 from the proceeds of each book sold through December 31st to Trout Unlimited councils and chapters encompassing the Driftless Area.

To download a free sample, find a list of fly shops carrying the book, or place an order directly from Bob, visit his website, www.pocketwaterpress.com or point your phone camera at the QR code below.

Chris O'Brien is Public Affairs Director for the Freshwater Society, and Advocacy Chair for the Twin Cities Chapter of TU.



THE RAVINE

A PERSONAL ESSAY

By James McCrary

My boy and I are going fishing today. It's about an hour and twenty minutes' drive to the ravine, with the drive seeing you through the wearisomeness of farmland, for the most part. "Fly-over country," they say. I'll admit, before I adventured to this part of the world myself, I had felt the same. After studying the landscape for signs of life for what feels like an eternity, a yellow sign on the side of the road stirs our excitement. The sign warns of steep inclines ahead, and, seemingly out of nowhere, you're in free fall; ears popping, brakes squealing, the car hurriedly snaking into the valley below. Endless rows of corn, soybeans, alfalfa, and other assorted sustenance suddenly give way to beauty unimaginable in places like Corn Belt, USA.

We find ourselves winding hundreds of feet down the switchbacks into the dense green foliage of the deciduous forests of the Driftless Area. This is a special place. Untouched by the most recent glaciation, this area is a relic of the past. A glimpse into what the upper Midwest might have looked like before the mile-high sheet of ice, flowing like a slow-motion tsunami, crushed its way across the landscape taking sand, rubble, and boulders, all with the same ease, as its prisoners for thousands of years. When the ice retreated, water did what water does best. Patient as it is, over time, it carved deep valleys through the dolomite, sandstone, and limestone while on its way to meet the Mississippi River, where, especially there, you can see her art on full display. The topography fashions itself into a place of wonder and imagination. Nourishment for the soul powered by caves, bluffs, valleys, sinkholes, and, most important to this story, clear and cold streams. This place is home to trout. Some native. The trout, and their forage, will tell us how healthy our water is, and it behooves us to listen. This is the destination. I sound a "we're here," but he's keenly aware. His eyes are affixed on something out his back window. I'd love to know what he's looking at, or what he's thinking, but I respect that sometimes we just need to be alone in our minds, lost in quiet contemplation, to find wonder in the natural world. At his nascent age of nine, this practice is of the utmost importance. Nurturing a reverence that, once established, readily self-seeds.

We make quick work of getting our waders on, grabbing our fly rods, and breaking out down the trail for a place to hop in. We catch the spring ephemerals at curtain call for the season, as they nestle themselves back into a long slumber, conserving energy until next spring. The patience of these plants is laudable. Waiting all year for only a few short weeks where they can, at last, stretch their legs. Just as soon as they arrive in an array of colors and shapes, though, they're gone. Back into waiting. Preparing to do it all again next year before the broad-leaved trees begin to outstretch their own weary, winter-hardened branches for a taste of sunlight and warmth. I find myself caught



THE MCCRARY FAMILY AT WHITEWATER STATE PARK, SUMMER 2025.

in a trance, just as he was in the back seat a few minutes ago. My boy breaks the spell I was under. "Dad... what are you doing?" he says with an edge of fear. He had gotten a bit ahead of me on the trail. I suppose it might be jarring seeing your father stopped dead in his tracks, staring off into the distance, blank expression on his face, punch-drunk by the beauty of this wild place. When we reach the bottom of the ravine, we stop and look up to the top of the valley, and admire our efforts thus far. I remind him, as I often do, that it's ok to be proud of yourself. Even for the little things.

This place is alive with the sounds of eastern wood-peewees, American redstarts, common yellow-throats, and other bird friends chirping incessantly, as well as, the usual assortment of woodpeckers knocking their heads against the trees. What are they saying to each other? What bugs taste the best to a downy? All this over the sounds of water rushing, and critters scurrying, unseen, through the brush at our feet. We found the spot. "This is where we'll get in," I told him. I go first, of course, as a man does when making the concerted effort to lead his son by example. The water is cold around my shins as I step down into the small stream, on what is a particularly warm late May Saturday morning in southeastern Minnesota. The cold at my legs is the only relief from the heat. Growing up in the humid, salty air of gulf coast Texas prepares a person to deal with the heat, but the sheer solar power of the Midwestern sun cannot be overstated. Feeling more like a pointed laser from space than the moist convection oven of my youth. From the knee up my sweat is accumulating, unable to be wicked away through my waders which are wrapped tightly around my bottom half as I stand in the thigh-high current. I've always loved the feeling of waders around my body, shielding me from the soak. These feelings go all the way back to fishing trips with my dad wading for flounder on the edge of Pelican Island in Galveston, Texas when I was my son's age. Warm glazed donuts and chocolate

milk from Shipley's at 5:00 a.m.; he had coffee. It's one of my favorite places to go in my mind. My son breaks me from my daydream once again when he hollers down at me from the top of the bank. He's asking me for my hand to help him down. The water is just above the knee on me, which puts it at mid-top thigh for him. I reach out my hand, he grabs ahold, and after clearly pushing through the urge to say "I'll just stay up here," bravely hops down into the flowing water. "It's cold!" he exclaims excitedly. His voice is still small, but his youth is fleeting. Children do, indeed, grow up too fast. When he joins me in the creek I'm flushed with excitement. Nearly moved to tears. He is too. His eyes are wide. I imagine his feeling is similar to those men setting sail around the globe hundreds of years ago in the Age of Discovery. Striking out on what they perceived to be a new path. Going places, they perceived, yet unseen. When we're young, life is new, thinking is visceral, and everything is exciting. Even now the smell of the first cool autumnal breeze can transport me 25 years back in time to the city parks of my own youth. Saving the ability to feel this way as one ages is a life-skill worth honing. I love to see this excitement in him; more than many things. He's as cautious, and skeptical as I was in my youth, but once he's standing steadfast in the water, the world melts around him. It's just him, the babbling stream, the jays in the distance, and, with any luck, a couple of fish lacking in the foresight department.

We walk, we cast. We walk, we cast again. We can see the trout under the water's surface, but at this moment in time they clearly have the intellectual advantage. I'll never claim to be a good fisherman, but a fisherman nonetheless. It's less, to me, about the actual catching of a fish, but more so putting myself in their environment. Letting all my reading and studying flow off the page, and into the cold, rushing water of the places I find myself obsessed with, and that's currently keeping my waders tight around my legs. He eventually grows bored

with fishing, so he explores the bank on his own. Thoughtful as he is, he periodically asks "Any luck, Dad?" to which I routinely reply, "I guess they're smarter than me today." He laughs at this. I smile back at him.

This is why we do it; this is why we fish. First and foremost, it's time together, outside of the beckoning chains of comfort, fostering and nurturing a connection and love for nature. For moving water. For the trees. For the fish themselves. I trust he'll be more inclined to care for Mother Nature after getting to know her in this deep, and meaningful way. This is something I hope to impart to him. That these places are worth protecting, and that there aren't many things more important in the inherent meaninglessness and chaos of the universe than making memories with the ones we love while we have the chance. One hundred and fifty years from now we'll be forgotten, but, for today, we're here. Together. Through all of that, if a small, native brook trout just happens to be fooled by our crudely tied fly, and we land him in the net, we'll just take that as a bonus on the day. We fish all we can until we've run out of potable water. "You hungry for lunch, Dad?" he asks. I'm not, but I reply "Sure, let's head back to the car." When we arrive back after a couple mile hike, we quickly shed our waders, and talk about how sweaty we are. I pull out the camp chairs while he divvies up the peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. I'm filled with gratitude, as there's time to kill today. In this ancient place where cell service doesn't reach the ground.

James McCrary was born and raised in Seabrook, TX on Galveston Bay. James, his wife, and their two kids have lived in the Twin Cities since 2019, and have been in Mound, MN since 2021. They explore the outdoors by camping, hiking, fishing, birding, and identifying plants. They're well on their way to visiting all of Minnesota's state parks (36 so far), and pack their poles wherever they go.

GIVE TO THE MAX 2025

By Mark Abner, MNTU Giving Coordinator

On Give to the Max Day, please join supporters who help Minnesota Trout Unlimited protect, restore, and sustain the state’s coldwater fisheries. Thanks to your support, we had an outstanding year. During our most recent fiscal year, approximately 300 individual donors made contributions totaling \$130,000; both record amounts. With your donations, we:

PROTECTED

We worked together with partners and advocates to secure policy outcomes that safeguard Minnesota’s coldwater streams and trout populations. In 2025, supporters like you helped us strengthen protections against stream-polluting practices from livestock manure and neonicotinoid-treated seeds—reducing fish kills and benefiting more than 2,500 miles of trout streams across the state.

RESTORED

Minnesota is blessed with trout streams, and we’re restoring even more every year. In 2025, we complet-

ed more than 8 miles of in-stream habitat projects, north and south, including planting trees, removing barriers and restoring channels, each making trout water healthier, cleaner, and more fishable. With your help, this work will continue and expand—bringing new life back to impaired waterways and connecting people with resilient natural resources.

SUSTAINED

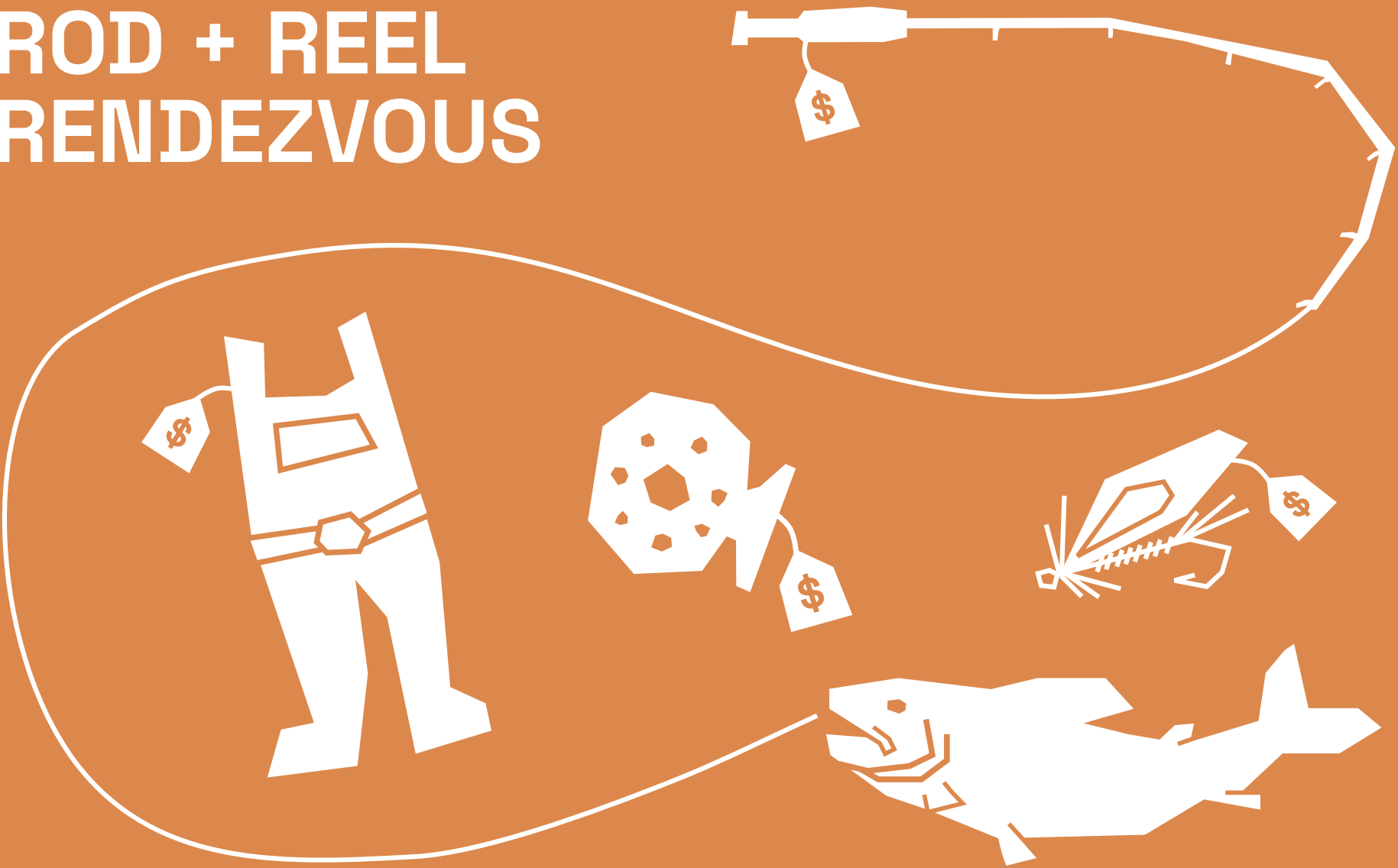
Education and engagement are essential to sustaining conservation for future generations. Minnesota Trout Unlimited’s youth programs reached more than 5,000 students this year, fueling the next generation of trout stewards. 86 tanks in 74 schools and two nature centers are now active in our education efforts, building a legacy of care for Minnesota trout streams.

Head to mntu.org/donate on or before November 20th for Give to the Max Day, or you can mail your check to Minnesota Trout Unlimited, Giving Office, 968 Fairmount Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55105-3119. Thank you for your support!



VISIT [MNTU.ORG/DONATE](https://mntu.org/donate) TO MAKE YOUR CONTRIBUTION!

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FLY TYING

HIGA'S SOS

By Paul Johnson



The Higa's SOS was created by Spencer Higa to fish on the Provo River in Utah. He was fishing a Pheasant Tail Nymph that caught a couple fish then stopped working. So he switched to a Zebra Midge that also caught a couple fish and stopped working. So he thought, "What if I combined those two flies?" That is how he came up with this fly.

My introduction to the Higa's SOS was several years ago. Our Laughing Trout Fly Tying Club meets every Wednesday night at the American Legion in Wayzata. One evening as we were tying in the dining area at the Legion, one of the patrons from the bar came by and asked if I ever fished with a Higa's SOS? He said that he goes on a trip every year to Montana and this was his favorite pattern.

At that time, I was not familiar with the Higa's. I did look it up and tied some up and maybe fished with them, maybe not? After that, they ended up in one of the many fly boxes that are tucked away

Materials List

Hook:	Size 14 Emerger
Bead:	Silver Tungsten
	2.5mm
Thread:	Black 70 denier UTC
Tail	Black Pheasant Tail
Ribbing:	Silver Wire Size Small
Thorax	Superbright Dubbing
	Peacock
Wing Case:	Red Holographic
	Tinsel Size Medium
Legs:	Red Krystal Flash
	Size Midge



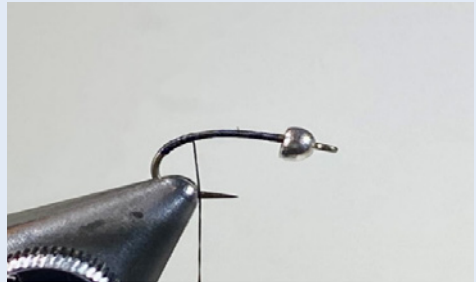
in my basement and forgotten.

Earlier this year I came across the fly or heard someone mention it. So, I looked it up again on YouTube and tied up a dozen or so. Well, it is not going to be a forgotten fly to me any

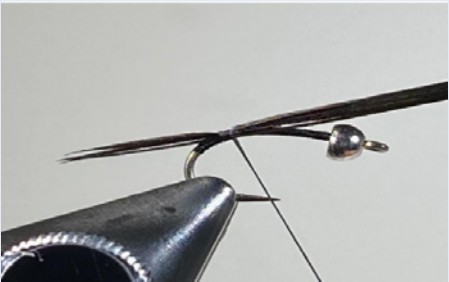
longer. Every time I tied on one, they caught fish.

You should tie up some of these flies and give them a try. I have an idea that you will be as impressed with them as I am.

As always, if you have any questions or if I can ever help you with your fly tying, please feel free to reach out to me: paulwaconia@gmail.com



Step 1. Put a bead on your hook and insert the hook into your tying vise. Start your thread behind the bead and wrap a smooth thread base down the bend of the hook.



Step 2. Tie in five pheasant tail fibers in at the bend of the hook. The tail feathers should be about a hook shank in length.



Step 3. Further secure the pheasant tail fibers to the top of the hook shank up to the bead. Take care to avoid lumps and bumps along the way.



Step 4. Tie in a length of silver wire. (I almost always counter wrap my wire so I tie it in on my side of the hook shank.)



Step 5. Give your bobbin a good counterclockwise spin to flatten out your thread. Form a smooth thread body ending with your thread behind the bead.



Step 6. Wrap the wire forward with even-spaced wraps. Secure it with your tying thread and clip off the excess wire.



Step 7. Tie in a length of tinsel directly on top of your hook.



Step 8. Form a smooth dubbing noodle on your tying thread.



Step 9. Create the thorax with your dubbing.



Step 10. Tie in two pieces of Krystal Flash on your side of the hook directly behind the bead.



Step 11. Gently pull the front two pieces of Krystal Flash to the far side of the hook. Secure with several "X" wraps of your tying thread.



Step 12. Add just a little additional dubbing directly behind the bead. This will help to push the legs back.



Step 13. Pull the tinsel forward on top of the hook and secure it with your thread directly behind the bead.



Step 14. Clip the tinsel wing case off. Clip the legs to be about 1/2 the hook shank in length. Go fish!

INCLUDING MNTU IN YOUR ESTATE PLANNING

Any loss in a family is challenging. It's much easier to delay answering uncomfortable questions such as, "What happens to my assets and my loved ones when I or my partner dies?" So it's no surprise that roughly half of Americans don't have a will, and even fewer have an estate plan. While it is a hard subject to discuss, an estate plan goes much further than a will. Not only does it deal with the distribution of assets and legacy wishes, but it may help you and your heirs pay substantially less in taxes, fees, and court costs, as well as benefit the people and causes that you care about.

Including MNTU in your estate plans not only helps to provide for future programmatic and organizational security, it can take many different forms to balance your financial and philanthropic goals. Drafting these documents may seem like a daunting task at first, until you realize all the good that comes from having them. A gift in your will or living trust lets you make a meaningful gift to MNTU with ease and be flexible in your commitment. You can give cash, specific property or a percentage of your estate, with restrictions or without. You can also make MNTU a beneficiary of

your 401k, IRA or life insurance policy. Because your gift doesn't come to MNTU until after your lifetime, you can change your mind at any time. To make sure your will accomplishes your goals according to your wishes, we recommend that you obtain the professional counsel of an attorney who specializes in estate planning. We've included specific bequest language below for usage with individual or estate planning.

Bequest Language

The official bequest language for Minnesota Trout Unlimited is:

Unrestricted General Legacy:

"I give Minnesota Trout Unlimited, a Minnesota non-profit corporation, presently at P.O. Box 845, Chanhassen, MN 55317-0845, EIN# 52-1766036, the sum of (dollar amount)/ or percentage of (___%)/ residue of my estate to be used at the discretion of its governing board."

Specific:

"I give Minnesota Trout Unlimited, a Minnesota non-profit corporation, presently at P.O. Box 845, Chanhassen, MN 55317-0845, EIN# 52-1766036, my (specific personal property item(s) and/or real property located at _____) to be used at the discretion of its governing board."



Gift of Residuary Estate:

"All the rest, residue and remainder of my estate, both real and personal, and wherever situated, I give, devise and bequeath to Minnesota Trout Unlimited, a Minnesota non-profit corporation, presently at P.O. Box 845, Chanhassen, MN 55317-0845, EIN# 52-1766036, to be used at the discretion of its governing board."

The information above is not intended as legal or tax advice. For such advice, please consult an attorney or tax advisor. Contact our executive director, John Lenczewski, with any questions, or for assistance with estate planning, using this language or using this process: jlenczewski@comcast.net or at 612-670-1629.



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MNTU CHAPTER NEWS



LEFT: GGTU HELD ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL PADDLE THE PADS FLY FISHING TOURNAMENT ON THE ST. LOUIS RIVER. PICTURED ARE THE WINNERS.
RIGHT: THERE'S A NEW FLY SHOP IN HOUSTON, MN! CHECK OUT MONEY CREEK OUTFITTERS NEXT TIME YOU ARE IN THE AREA.

Gitche Gumee Chapter

This summer flew by quickly, filled with excellent fly casting clinics and our popular Paddle the Pads event. A big thank you to all who participated in this year's Paddle the Pads! We had a fantastic turnout (despite the morning's weather). There was great food, exciting prizes, and some truly amazing fish caught.

Congratulations to our winners: Deb Fenner, Mel Bowman, Carson Spohn, John Wagh, and Brian Barry. A special shout-out to Superior Fly Angler for their generous prize donations! Deb Fenner landed our top bass, a massive 18" smallmouth, and Brian Barry won our bonus prize for the biggest non-bass species with a HUGE 47" musky! If you enjoy fly fishing for bass, be sure to stay tuned for next year's event.

We have another full winter season with monthly events. We had Brent Notbohm present on Fall Migratory Fishing in October and he shared all of his secrets for successfully targeting big steelhead, migratory browns, and king salmon. Our upcoming events include:

- November 13, 7 p.m. at UMD (Montague 70): Trolling for Trout and Salmon in Lake Superior with Jamie Cotner.
- December 11, 7 p.m. at Superior Fly

Angler: Holiday Fly Tying Social with special guest Mitch Albers.

- January 20, 6 p.m. social, 7 p.m. meeting at Boomtown in Duluth: MN and WI DNR Update. (This is a co-hosted meeting with the Arrowhead Fly Fishers)
- February 1, at Clyde Iron Works: International Fly Fishing Film Festival (IF4)
- April 9, 7 p.m. at UMD (Montague 70): State Of The Steelhead event

Our conservation efforts focus on several key areas, including ongoing projects on Keene Creek, Sucker River, French River, and Stewart River, primarily involving tree planting and maintenance. We are also completing major MNTU gap cutting projects and planning significant restoration work on Amity Creek. Our main goals are to maintain shade, reduce erosion, and reconnect waterways by replacing perched culverts. This allows trout to access cold water, which is crucial during increasingly warm summers.

All details about the chapter's activities will be shared on our Facebook page and through email. If you would like to stay up to date on GGTU's activities please sign up for GGTU's email list by contacting: gitchegumee.tu@gmail.com.

Jason Swingen

Headwaters Chapter

During the summer, our chapter held three events to connect with people. In addition to a successful fly casting and fly tying event at the Beltrami County Fair, the organization ventured into the International Falls area on August 14 to host a fly fishing video presentation and meet local members. Given that the chapter now covers over 37,000 square miles, connecting with all members is a challenge. To address this, the organization has begun seeking representatives in other towns to help identify local needs and improve member connections.

We also had another successful Youth Outdoor Activity Day in Alexandria. The event provided an opportunity for 300 people, many of whom were new to the sport, to try fly rod casting. Two volunteers tied about 100 flies and also taught children how to tie them. As a memento of their participation, each child who cast a fly rod received a hand-tied fly, resulting in a total of about 400 flies being given away over a five-hour period.

Our 10th annual Pike Hunt proved to be a challenging but rewarding experience for the 32 participants who joined us on September 27. As one of our major fundraising events, the hunt serves as the next level for our fly fishers, invit-

ing those ready for a bigger challenge to trade panfish for pike. A fleet of 14 volunteer boat captains helped guide the anglers.

The unusually hot weather made for tougher-than-expected conditions on the water, but our dedicated fly casters rose to the challenge, landing a total of 47 pike, three walleyes, 16 bass, 24 crappies, and four rock bass. The day's events concluded with a fish fry and festivities enjoyed by around 50 participants, both young and old. The record-setting attendance included eight women and over a dozen youth, highlighting the event's broad appeal. Highlights included door prizes and a thoughtful donation from "the fish leather man," who purchased the pike skins to support our chapter.

This memorable event was only made possible by the incredible teamwork of our volunteers, whose efforts provided a fun and engaging activity for our members and their families.

Finally, we held our Fall Macro Field Days on Oct. 9-10 in the Bemidji area. Over 420 students from Aurora Waskonnet, Schoolcraft Learning Community and Gene Dillon Elementary schools participated in the event. After an introduction from Jim Emery students fabricated macroinvertebrate traps by filling produce mesh bags with sticks, dead leaves, and a rock. Donning waders, students then placed the traps in lo-



MNTU CHAPTER NEWS



cal lakes and ponds. After several weeks they will be retrieved and examined to see what invertebrates were trapped and what clues they could provide regarding water quality. TU642 volunteers helped make the day a success

Kris Williams

Hiawatha Chapter

Hiawatha Trout Unlimited took much of the summer off but not before helping out at the annual senior citizens fishing outing at a pond, stocked with DNR rainbow trout.

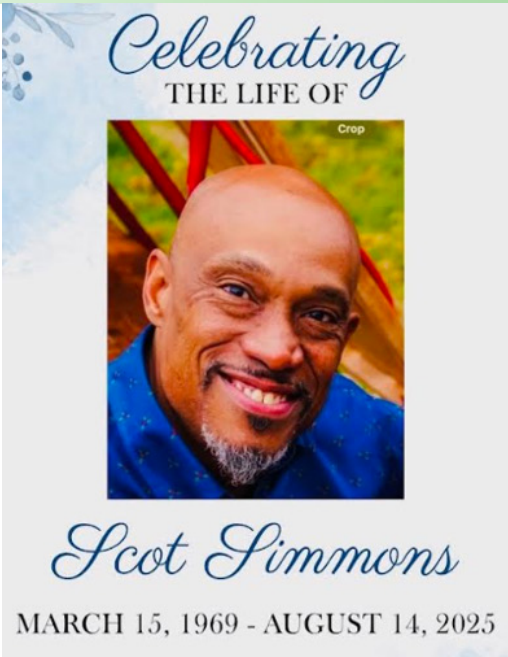
HTU bought and served food for the DNR staff and some others who came. Unfortunately, the first date brought a threat of thunderstorms and really unhealthy air so it was pushed back a few weeks. Only a handful of elderly came the second time. HTU members Al Bierly Jr. and Todd Christenson helped some of them land fish and also helped John Weiss with serving hotdogs, chips and pop—and cookies for dessert.

HTU members then volunteered to help eat the extra hot dogs at a midsummer get together in Chatfield. We chatted, caught up on who was catching what and then Mel Hayner from Driftless Fly Fishing Company of Preston came and demonstrated some ways to mend line. We easily finished off the hot dogs but had enough chips and pop left over for an upcoming fall roadside cleanup on U.S. 52 south of Chatfield.

John Weiss

Twin Cities Chapter

Here are a couple of updates from Twin Cities Trout Unlimited starting with remembrance of Scot Simmons.



TCTU LOST A FRIEND, VOLUNTEER, AND FORMER BOARD MEMBER THIS SUMMER. IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO SUPPORT SCOT'S FAMILY VISIT: WWW.GOFUNDME.COM/F/SUPPORT-SCOT-SIMMONS-FIGHT-AGAINST-CANCER

Remembering Scot Simmons: The Twin Cities Trout Unlimited chapter would like to pay tribute to a friend, volunteer, former TCTU board member, and family man who passed away this summer.

Scot was always willing to help. He loved teaching others and giving back to the community. He was a devoted husband and father to his son and daughter. See the photos commemorating Scot's life.

Elections: The Twin Cities Chapter of Trout Unlimited (TCTU) will hold its Annual Meeting and Elections for its Board of Directors on Monday January 26, 2026 at 7 p.m. The meeting will be held in-person at The Gnome Craft Pub in St. Paul, MN and online via Zoom. All members of TCTU in good standing with dues paid are eligible to vote.

Five of our fifteen board seats are open for election each year. Please consider submitting your nomination for election to the board. Serving on the board is a great way to make a difference in coldwater conservation with a fun and engaging group of colleagues. Sometimes we even fish together. If you are interested in joining the board, please e-mail to Yves Charron at yves.charron@twincitiestu.org



twincitiestu.org Nominations are due Dec. 31, 2025.

Yves Charron

Win-Cres Chapter

Win-Cres has continued to putter along through the summer. Activities include:

Outreach: We had a presence at the Winona County Fair, renting a booth again this year. It was staffed by members and provided a great opportunity to interact with the public. Many thanks to Roger Berg for leading this effort.

Habitat: Trail work: Volunteers mowed a path along Garvin Brook again this year.

There is an access to upper Rush Creek from the Enterprise Rest Stop along the interstate. The trail was cleared by volunteers all the way down to Rush Creek. Many thanks to Dave Schaffer for leading this effort, helped by Klaus Friedli, John Weaver, and Neal Mundahl.

Brushing: At the request of a landowner on Garvin Brook, volunteers cleared

willows, box elder, and some small cottonwoods from 200 yards of the stream corridor. Thanks to Dave Schulz, Neal Mundahl, Dusty Hoffman and Dave Schaffer.

Japanese knotweed: We found a new colony on my property on Garvin, which was treated by myself with help from Mark Reisetter. We are currently in negotiations with two downstream landowners who have knotweed on their property. We are seeking permission to enter their property to treat those colonies, the last known untreated colonies on Garvin. We re-treated a colony on East Burns Valley Creek.

Up Next: Our membership meetings start on Wednesday, Oct. 22. Luke Pfeffer, a guide at Root River Rod Company, will talk about techniques for fishing improved areas. Root wads and boulder fields have proved challenging to some of us. Bruce Fuller and Dave Schulz will provide a meal, moose stew. Our meetings start at 6 p.m. at Sobieski Lodge, Winona.

Chuck Shepard



LEFT: THE HIAWATHA CHAPTER HELPED OUT AT THEIR ANNUAL SENIOR FISHING OUTING. RIGHT: THE WIN-CRES CHAPTER CONTINUED ON THEIR MISSION OF JAPANESE KNOTWEED REMOVAL USING THEIR EFFECTIVE INJECTION TECHNIQUE.

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We'll assign you to a local MN chapter. Chapters meet regularly to hear about fishing hot spots, discuss conservation issues, plan work days on their home waters, organize fundraisers, and, of course, swap a few fish tales and learn how to tie the latest fly patterns.

All members also receive this publication, as well as TROUT, TU's national magazine. Other benefits include a 16-month TU calendar, car rental & hotel discounts and more. TU offers a variety of membership categories.

Visit www.tu.org today to sign up.

OR SUBSCRIBE!

For those of you who are members of chapters in other states, or who would like to directly support MNTU's newsletter, we welcome subscribers who would like to receive and support the newsletter. Sign up to get three colorful issues annually. Sign up online at mntu.org or mail in this form to receive the next issue arriving in February!

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Minnesota TU is the leading voice, your voice, advocating for coldwater fisheries and watersheds in Minnesota and the region. Our effective advocacy work, and the work necessary to obtain grants to fund our stream restoration and environmental education programs, **cannot continue without your direct financial support of Minnesota TU.** We receive none of the donations raised from TU's direct mail and other fundraising efforts, and the small portion of your membership dues we receive is less than the cost to print and mail this newsletter. We need direct support from you - members and non-members alike - to keep us working effectively for you, your family and your friends. Every dollar of your donation will be used here in Minnesota.

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We also welcome gifts by check sent to:
Minnesota Trout Unlimited
968 Fairmount Ave, Saint Paul MN 55105

SELECT POETRY

Terrestrials By Larry Gavin

Two things, terra, the zone of inspiration,
and water, that gives terra life. So
roam this earth, touching with each step
its firm presence. Reliable, like a child's
promise, it's voice, this stream, bubbling
over rocks older than city and road. Indeed,
older than anything that marks civilization.

Here and there insects slip and drop in the foam.
Food for those fish I seek to fool, never mind
the real fool stuck in this alien world, kneeling
as if in prayer, rod in hand.

Grasshoppers and ants out of their element. Trout tricked by
moose mane, foam and feathers, all an illusion.
Earth and water indifferent to it all: water
obeying gravity, and earth busy being earth.

Larry Gavin is a poet from Faribault, Minnesota. He is the author of five books of poetry. His newest, *A Fragile Shelter: New and Selected Poems*, is available from Red Dragonfly Press. www.reddragonflypress.org

Crossing the Lake By James Hobbs

Floating through clouds
on the sky's watery twin
across a heavenly mirror
light as a mayfly I skim.

Leaving long portages behind,
snow here and there,
shallow lakers cruising along,
a chill in the evening air.
Only a narrow white band
of fog lifting slow
divides the blue above
from the blue below.
I paddle quietly
two strokes left then two strokes right.
This compromise leads straight
keeping my landing in sight.
That place of refuge lying ahead,
it sustains my illusion of choice.
I feel I am doing what needs to be done
all that I can to give breath to my voice.

Always working so hard to get somewhere
always thinking I'll be there soon.
But for just this moment I drop sunlight into dark water
while dancing on the edge of the moon.

James Hobbs has been a TCTU member for several decades. His father and uncle instructed he and his brothers when they were very young in the ways of trout. Over the years he has expanded that pursuit to include freshwater lakes, saltwater backcountry and ocean beaches, angling for everything from crappies to tarpon.