

# TROUT UNLIMITED MINNESOTA

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**A TOAST TO WINTER TROUT**  
**MAJOR THREATS TO TROUT WATERS**  
**2025 MNTU HABITAT IN REVIEW**  
**MEET YOUR DRIFTLESS FLY SHOPS**  
**TYING THE BWO SPECIAL**  
**RIGGING FOR TROUT**

Minnesota Trout Unlimited  
P.O. Box 845  
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TROUT EGG DELIVERY DAY WAS A BIG SUCCESS THANKS TO THE MNTU EDUCATION TEAM AND CHAPTER VOLUNTEERS!

ON THE COVER

2026 Trout Opener - Jason Rieke

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Jade Thomason  
 2067 E. Pioneer Rd.  
 Duluth, MN 55804  
 218-525-2381  
[editor@mntu.org](mailto:editor@mntu.org)

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EDITOR’S ANGLE  
 WORK TO DO IN MINNESOTA

By Jade Thomason, Editor

Planning for this summer's Boundary Waters trip has been a welcome mental escape this winter. With a permit secured, dreams of lake trout, glassy waters and calling loons have brightened my days. But attacks on the BWCAW are back (again) and this remains a core issue for MNTU. The idea of a sulfuric acid-producing copper-nickel mine at the headwaters of one of our nation's most water-rich wildernesses is unthinkable. This is not a question of weighing an economic boon against a small risk. Copper-nickel mining is classified by the EPA as "America's Most Toxic Industry" and a Minnesota mine would work only to line the pockets of a Chilean company. MNTU and partners continue to push back. Lend us a hand to protect these special places and experiences.

For a quality escapist read within this

newsletter, check out John Weiss' article on Canfield Creek. It's more than a fishing story; it's a consideration of all the factors adding up to the moment of contact with a trout. Millions of years of geologic time fortifying streams with essential minerals, over a century (that we know of) of stream management by humans, John's new shoulder, and a bevy of friends came together to make for a good fishing day on Canfield. It was one of those stories that made me feel like a speck on a rock floating in space. It's helpful at times like these to zoom way out, for a just moment, to catch your breath.

With so much happening in our state, environmentally and beyond, we must all stand up and find our voice. Governing bodies work for us, the people, and we must not adopt passivity. These fights are never over, and often can progress only



because people believe they are decided. Identify the issues that make your heart beat faster and find a role to step into. A call or email to your representative is a great start and MNTU and other non-profits can help you find the language you need to communicate your story.

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
 COMMUNITY

By John Lenczewski, MNTU Executive Director

Recent events in Minneapolis, as well as the larger Twin Cities area and state, have many of you thinking about community and the importance of free speech in our democracy. There are many definitions of “community,” but Trout Unlimited members frequently think of it as “a group of people with common interests.” We talk of the “trout and steelhead angling community” or “community of conservation-minded trout and steelhead anglers.” As Trout Unlimited members, we are united by our interest in conserving, protecting and restoring coldwater fisheries and their watersheds.

But community at its best, as residents of Minneapolis are demonstrating, includes an element of helping or looking out for others in the community. One of the most rewarding aspects of my position is that every day I see examples of TU members helping others, whether mem-

bers, non-member anglers, or non-anglers.

The Great Waters Fly Fishing Expo is a wonderful gathering of people from our trout and steelhead angling community. MNTU is proud to organize this annual get together, even though we are not a fly fishing club, but a conservation organization. We are welcoming to, and help, all anglers, regardless of their preferred angling method—be it bait, spinning gear, fly fishing, float fishing or trolling.

I recently had a conversation with someone who declared that Trout Unlimited was “a bunch of elitist fly fishing snobs” who want to ban other methods of angling. I acknowledged that some members do exclusively fly fish, but assured him that many of us use all methods depending upon location, conditions, and whim. We ended up having a real conversation. I think he began to see that I was just a fellow angler trying to



protect and improve his beloved river for everyone to enjoy. We still had differences of opinion, but by freely sharing them through a respectful conversation we recognized our common interest.

Whether we are sharing a river with other anglers or exercising our right to free speech at a public meeting, we should do our community proud by looking out for one another.



# MINNESOTA COUNCIL UPDATE

## A NEW COUNCIL CHAIR

By Mike Madigan, Minnesota Council of TU Chair

By way of introduction, I have been a lifelong trout fisher. Both my mother and father were fly fishers. They gave me my first fly rod when I was seven, a short Fenwick glass rod. For the first few years, I spent most of my time extricating my flies from trees and bushes and re-rigging my rod. While regrettably that need has not disappeared, it has diminished and my love for rivers, woods and fly fishing has only grown.

My initial engagement with MNTU began about 30 years ago. I was doing a lot of pro bono environmental work at the time and Dan Callahan, then a news producer for WCCO, approached me about a proposal to dam Boiling Springs, which is an important groundwater source for Eagle Creek in Savage. MNTU and allied stakeholders were subsequently successful in defeating that proposal. Dan has become the Riverkeeper for that aquatic jewel and, largely as a result of his advocacy, Eagle Creek remains a healthy coldwater stream with native trout.

Over the years, I have represented MNTU and other environmental organizations in other legal battles regarding the protection of public waters from agricultural runoff, copper sulfide mining, nitrates, neonicotinoids, and PFAS. During the last six years, I have had the privilege of joining a wonderful group of folks and serving on the State Council, chaired by Brent Notbohm, a truly great leader and one of our unsung heroes. Brent led us through the trying times of the last six years and MNTU has accomplished a great deal under his leadership. Make sure to thank him for his exemplary service if you get a chance.

MNTU's council and chapter members, both past and present, have largely worked in the shadows protecting Minnesota's trout streams and I am always heartened and energized by their passion and commitment. This is a truly wonderful fellowship and MNTU has proven

to be the leading state champion of cold-water ecosystems.

Our habitat, education, and advocacy programs are among the very best in the country. That is largely due to the efforts of MNTU staff. John Lenczewski has served as Executive Director for over 15 years and is one of the state's great conservationists. Dr. Jennifer Biederman, our Habitat Director, holds a Ph.D. in conservation biology with a concentration in fisheries and aquatic biology from the University of Minnesota. She is one of the state's leading authorities on trout and coldwater ecosystems. Amber Taylor, our Education Director, has done an exemplary job leading our Trout in the Classroom program and related education endeavors, which expose young people to the interconnections of land, water, fish—and people. Last, but by no means least, Mark Abner, our Development Director, has expanded our fundraising base year after year so MNTU can continue its important work. Please thank each of them for their great work if you get a chance.

In the Upper Midwest, we are surrounded by natural beauty and an abundance of water. In fact, water, to a large degree, defines us in Minnesota. We are the "Land of 10,000 Lakes" and "Sky Blue Waters." Along our rugged north shore, we border the world's largest freshwater lake by surface area. In our northern boreal forest, we harbor the country's largest canoe wilderness—over one million acres. Minnesota encompasses over 3,800 miles of trout and salmon streams, much of which lies in the geologically unique Driftless Area.

Enjoy our natural bounty but also heed the call from Thomas McGuane to do your part to protect it.

"We have reached the time in the life of the planet, and humanity's demands upon it, when every fisherman will have to be a riverkeeper, a steward of marine shallows, a watchman on the high seas.



We are beyond having to put back what we have taken out. We must put back more than we take out. We must make holy war on the enemies of aquatic life as we have against gillnetters, polluters, and drainers of wetlands. Otherwise, as you have already learned, these creatures will continue to disappear at an accelerating rate."

There are many opportunities for MNTU members to engage with the organization and utilize their unique skills and talent. Your advocacy is needed before the legislature, regulatory agencies like DNR and MPCA, and local units of government. Your angling knowledge and talent is needed to introduce others, particularly young anglers, to trout fishing and the interconnected web of life in which they live. Your dedication and strong backs are needed in MNTU's work to restore degraded trout habitat. Finally, your time, talent, expertise, and donations are needed to help build the organization to better fulfill its mission. I encourage and invite all members to engage. The challenges to these unique ecosystems from global warming, development, logging, mining, runoff, and similar encroachment never ceases. So too must our commitment, engagement, and advocacy never waver. Tight lines and enjoy the beautiful, clear waters of our state!



### 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**  
Mike Madigan  
chair@mntu.org

**Gitchie 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



2025 SUPER VOLUNTEERS WERE HONORED AT THE ANNUAL TWIN CITIES TU OKTOBERFISH FUNDRAISER. SUPER VOLUNTEERS PARTICIPATE IN AT LEAST FIVE HABITAT OR EDUCATION EVENTS DURING THE YEAR.



# 2025 HABITAT IN REVIEW

## SHADE, FISH PASSAGE, AND BETTER TROUT WATER

By Jennifer Biederman, PhD, MNTU Habitat Program Director

If you've spent any time along Minnesota's trout streams, you know the best habitat work can be pretty simple: a cooler pocket of water under a shaded canopy, a stream that can move sediment, a riffle that feeds a pool, and a culvert that no longer acts like a wall. Behind that simplicity is a lot of planning, field time, and partnership.

In 2025, Minnesota Trout Unlimited's Habitat Program focused on enhancing coldwater habitat, improving connectivity, and building resilience in our streams across the state, from the steep, forested North Shore to the spring-fed valleys of southeast Minnesota. Thanks to support from the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Fund (LSOHF) and the work of many partners, especially the Minnesota DNR, Soil and Water Conservation districts, and our chapters, we were able to deliver tangible habitat wins that trout and anglers will benefit from for decades.

### North Shore: Riparian Shade and Fish Passage

North Shore trout streams like the Sucker, French, and Lester Rivers are classic wild brook trout waters; these cold, high-gradient systems weave through a forested landscape. But in recent years, the North Shore has faced a serious canopy problem: As spruce budworm impacts mature balsam fir and white spruce stands, the canopy within riparian corridors are thinning out, allowing more sun and leading to increased summer water temperatures. In a warming climate, even small temperature increases can cause stress for trout and diminish long-term resilience.

That's why one of our recent habitat initiatives has been riparian gap planting. This targeted reforestation restores shade without "resetting" an entire corridor. Rather than clearcutting impacted areas, we identify small canopy openings (often around 2,000–2,500 square feet), clear dead and dying trees within those gaps, and replant with long-lived native species to rebuild future canopy in a way that mimics natural forest structure.

Building on this strategy, our North Shore work has included large-scale gap planting across miles of riparian corridor, with a focus on conifers for year-round shade and bank stability, including species like white cedar and white pine, along with a diverse mix that includes red pine, tamarack, yellow birch, sugar maple, and red oak. This is not a simple "walk-in-and-plant" project: Many sites have limited access, steep slopes, and heavy materials to haul by hand (including browse protection for cedars and pines).

In parallel with restoring shade, we also advanced one of the most direct habitat benefits there is along the North Shore, which is replacing or removing fish passage barriers. Culvert replacements are high reward habitat work.

4 When a perched or undersized



MAZEPPA CREEK BEFORE HABITAT WORK (TOP) HAD STEEP, ERODING BANKS INUNDATING THE STREAM WITH SEDIMENT. THE NEW CHANNEL (BOTTOM) SUPPORTS BANK STABILITY, MODERATED TEMPERATURE AND QUALITY HABITAT. VOLUNTEERS HAVE SINCE ASSISTED THE MN DNR WITH THE PLANTING OF HUNDREDS OF NATIVE PLANT PLUGS. DUSTY HOFFMAN PHOTOS.

culvert is corrected, trout regain access to upstream coldwater refuges, spawning habitat, and seasonal movement corridors. In 2025, we replaced one of the last barrier culverts in the Baptism watershed to restore miles of coldwater habitat. MNTU is a leader in incorporating critical habitat for trout in our fish passage projects—in addition to replacing undersized pipes, we also add pools, woody habitat, and restore riffles in the process.

### Southeast Minnesota: In-stream Habitat Improvements to Rebuild Function

In southeast Minnesota, our work in 2025 centered on in-stream habitat improvement, with projects including the "meat and potatoes" of restoring channel function so trout streams can transport sediment, maintain depth and cover, and reconnect with their floodplains.

One highlight was the Spring Creek habitat improvement project near West Albany (Wabasha County). The construction phase included a thoughtful mix of design elements which work together to restore function:

- Channel narrowing to improve sediment transport and reduce chronic deposition
- Bank sloping and floodplain reconnection to spread energy during high flows
- Habitat features that drive trout productivity and survival, including riffles (spawning and food production), large pools, and toewood (cover and bank protection)

Projects like Spring Creek are not "one-and-done." The post-construction phase includes establishing native riparian vegetation, ensuring stability, and monitoring performance through variable flows. The thick cover crop in the photo shown

is to quickly provide soil stabilization following construction; these grasses are already giving way to native forbs and grasses, which will become established in the years to come.

A second southeast spotlight comes from Mazeppa Creek (Wabasha County), where we've been encouraged to see early signs of riparian recovery in areas following in-stream work in 2024. Native forbs establishing well in the first year of vegetation management are a small but meaningful signal that the system is moving in the right direction. Healthy riparian vegetation supports bank stability, moderates temperature, and contributes organic inputs that fuel the aquatic food web, especially important in the highly productive spring creeks and tributaries of the Driftless. In 2024, volunteers from our chapters and MNDNR assisted in planting hundreds





IN JUNE, VOLUNTEERS FROM THE GITCHE GUMEE CHAPTER ASSISTED WITH PLANTING AND MAINTAINING TREES AT KEENE CREEK (HERMANTOWN).

of native plugs. This year, those native plants are doing well and beginning to flower.

**Partnerships Are the Habitat Program**  
None of this work happens in isolation. In 2025, our accomplishments were built in collaboration with the Minnesota DNR (Fisheries and ecological resource staff), local partners, landowners, chapter volunteers, and technical specialists. Depending on the project, that partnership web includes watershed groups, SWCDs, cities, consultants, and field crews that bring the horsepower to make restoration happen. We’re also grateful for the contractors who deliver high-quality construction, and the chapter volunteers who show up for the often-unsung work of planting and maintaining, battling invasive plants, and helping with long-term stewardship.

Most importantly, these projects were supported by the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Fund, which continues to be one of Minnesota’s most effective tools for translating conservation priorities into on-the-ground outcomes.

**Looking Ahead**

The best stream habitat work is both immediate and patient: immediate in the way it fixes barriers, stabilizes channels, and plants trees; patient in the way it plans for the next flood, the next drought, and the next generation of anglers. From rebuilding riparian shade on the North Shore to improving channel function in southeast Minnesota, 2025 was a year of great progress for MNTU and trout across the state. We have much more in store in 2026, including habitat improvement projects in the southeast, metro, and northeast shore.



IN 2024, THE MN DNR AND CHAPTER VOLUNTEERS PLANTED NATIVE GRASS AND FLOWER PLUGS AT THE MAZEPPA CREEK PROJECT. THEY FLOWERED IN SPRING OF 2025. STREAM PROJECTS TAKE SEVERAL YEARS TO ESTABLISH HEALTHY, NATIVE VEGETATION. DUSTY HOFFMAN PHOTO.



THE SPRING CREEK HABITAT IMPROVEMENT PROJECT RESTORED 1,500-FEET OF COLDWATER HABITAT NEAR WEST ALBANY AND WAS COMPLETED IN JULY OF 2025. THE COVER CROP SHOWN HERE WILL GIVE WAY TO NATIVE GRASSES AND FLOWERS IN FUTURE YEARS, WITH PLANS TO ALSO PLANT NATIVE TREES FOR SHADE AND WILDLIFE HABITAT.



# MAJOR THREATS TO TROUT WATERS IN 2026

## MNTU'S CURRENT ADVOCACY PRIORITIES

By John Lenczewski, MNTU Executive Director

Strong advocacy to protect water quality, watershed health, and trout fisheries remains at the core of Minnesota Trout Unlimited's mission and work. There are many threats to our coldwater fisheries, but MNTU has developed a strategic plan that focuses most of its work on the greatest threats and those where we can “move the needle” toward better resource protection. Below is a brief overview of the major issues that MNTU will work on in 2026. Greater detail is available at [mntu.org](http://mntu.org). We can use your help on any or all of these issues. Opportunities to comment on legislation, agency rulemaking, and local government actions (such as from a poorly planned or sited data center) can come and go quickly, so be sure to watch for our monthly e-newsletter or routinely check the MNTU website blog.

### Preventing Fish Kills

Between 2015 and 2022 there were at least four large fish kills on southeast Minnesota trout streams where the cause could be identified, and more where the origin could not be determined. Investigations identified these causes: discharge or runoff of pollutants from the land, including runoff of manure, pesticides, fertilizers, high-temperature stormwater, wastewater discharges, and toxic spills. The precise cause or property involved is often difficult to pinpoint due to time lags between when a fish kill occurs and when it is investigated. Water levels, water temperature, water quality, and amount or type of runoff can quickly change before samples can be taken. However, there is strong evidence that applications of manure and pesticides washed off the land by rainfall are often a major cause of the fish kills in our Driftless Area streams.

In 2023 MNTU helped pass legislation requiring state agencies to identify regulations that could be changed to reduce the risk of fish kills. Their report in January 2024 created momentum for review of feedlot permits, feedlot rules, and more. Since feedlot operations and agricultural runoff are the primary causes of fish kills, MNTU continues to focus on strategies and actions related to those intertwined issues.

### Agricultural Runoff and Leaching – Nitrates & Neonicotinoids

Runoff from tilled fields can carry chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and soil to trout streams by overland flow (horizontally) and groundwater infiltration (vertically). The risk of water pollution is especially high in the “karst” geology which makes southeast Minnesota's Driftless Area such a phenomenal trout mecca. This karst region has porous bedrock close to the surface which creates the large, cold springs which, in turn, produce the amazing spring creeks concentrated here. Unfortunately, the porous bedrock also allows contaminants on the surface to easily reach this groundwater and our beloved trout streams. Rivers in the Central Sands region, including the Straight River, are also particularly vulnerable to contami-

nation of the groundwater aquifers that feed those streams.

### Nitrate Contamination

When too much nitrogen fertilizer is applied, or at the wrong times, it can move downward through the soil (leach) past plant roots into groundwater and eventually into surface streams. The nitrogen cycle is complex and results in various nitrogenous compounds, including nitrate and ammonia. Nitrate is the predominant form of nitrogen in trout streams in the karst region, and testing reveals that nitrate levels are often high enough to harm and kill aquatic life.

Elevated nitrate levels kill aquatic insects and other invertebrates, reduce trout survival, and harm trout reproduction. In 2020 the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) reviewed the results of 110 scientific studies and determined that nitrate concentrations above 5 mg/liter were detrimental.

In January 2025 MNTU and several partners sued the MPCA and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) to force them to do a better job protecting trout streams from harm being caused by high nitrate levels and fish kills. Current state rules governing commercial fertilizer application and manure management are not working well enough. Our goal is to urge the MPCA and MDA into rulemaking procedures that will tighten regulations on manure and commercial fertilizer applications. We are not seeking to punish anyone, only to get the public rulemaking processes started. Since then, the MPCA has started the process to strengthen both the Feedlot Permit and Animal Feedlot Rule.

### Groundwater Protection Rule

The Groundwater Protection Rule is the state's framework for commercial fertilizer management. A key goal of our 2025 lawsuit was to compel the MDA to reexamine the Groundwater Protection Rule and consider strengthening it to better protect coldwater ecosystems from harm caused by high nitrate levels. In January 2026 the MDA opened a comment period for the public to provide input on whether the Groundwater Protection Rule is adequate to prevent nitrate contamination of groundwater and the cold streams closely connected to groundwater. The current Rule is not adequate. MNTU will be submitting comments to the MDA by the March 12, 2026 deadline.

Practices that retain or slow runoff and increase infiltration, reduce fertilizer and pesticide use, and reduce erosion are beneficial to maintaining the health of our trout streams. Both manure management and continuous living crops can play important roles in reducing nitrates and improving overall nutrient management in agriculture. MNTU continues to press for rules and incentives that are most effective at reducing nitrogen loads that wash or leach into our streams, including the use of cover crops, buffer strips, and the restoration and retention



of wetlands.

### Neonicotinoids

Aquatic insects form the base of food webs that support trout fisheries in Minnesota. Neonicotinoids (“neonics” for short) are a group of chemicals designed for one thing, killing insects. Neonics are applied in agricultural settings in two ways: as a coating on seeds prior to planting and as a water-based foliar spray. When neonics are applied to seeds as a coating, only a small percentage is absorbed by the plant as it germinates and grows. In Minnesota virtually all corn seeds are coated with neonics, as are more than half of all soybean seeds. Unfortunately, less than 10% of neonics in the seed coatings are absorbed by the plants, leaving 90% in the soil. These water-soluble, long-lasting chemicals then wash directly into streams as runoff, or leach down through the soil into groundwater and eventually into streams via springs and seeps. In our trout streams, neonics do what they were designed to do—they kill insects.

Recent research in Minnesota showed neonics in 97% of water samples from rivers and streams, and 74% of groundwater samples, including at levels that kill aquatic insects. Extensive water testing by the MDA showed concentrations of two neonics are routinely found in Minnesota streams at levels lethal to aquatic insects. The MDA also determined that seeds coated with neonics are the leading source of these persistent toxins in Minnesota waters. Neonic-treated seeds are not regulated by the state or federal government. MNTU is supporting legislation to regulate neonic-treated seeds, as well as measures to increase cover crops and practices to filter chemicals and pollutants from runoff.

### Feedlot Impacts

A livestock feedlot is a type of animal feeding operation used in intensive animal farming for finishing livestock, including beef cattle, swine, sheep, turkeys, and chickens prior to slaughter. Large feedlots are called “concentrated animal feeding operations” or “CAFOs”. Feedlots are used to increase the amount of meat each animal produces as quickly as possible. Animals confined in feedlots put on weight more quickly than those pastured and allow a farm to raise more

individuals. Operations produce large volumes of manure which is then applied to farm fields. Manure contains nitrogen which is converted to nitrates and ammonium when it interacts with soil microorganisms. When manure is applied and a large rainfall occurs, the manure can wash directly into streams, leading to oxygen depletion and fish kills.

The MPCA regulates the collection, transportation, storage, processing and disposal of animal manure. Following MNTU's lawsuit, the MPCA has begun the processes to strengthen both the Feedlot Permit and Animal Feedlot Rule. We will continue to monitor and advocate for greater protections throughout these processes.

### Data Center Impacts

Over the past two years we have seen a rising wave of proposals to build large data centers around the state. These projects have the potential to seriously impact trout streams, primarily through groundwater pumping that reduces spring flows to streams and raises stream temperatures. The article in the November 2025 issue of this newsletter, “Data Centers Need Scrutiny” details MNTU concerns. We anticipate that several bills addressing data center regulation will be in play this legislative session.

### Sulfide Mining

Water pollution from proposed sulfide mining operations in northeast Minnesota poses significant threats to native lake trout in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, as well as wild trout, steelhead and salmon fisheries in Lake Superior and its tributaries. Sulfide mining targets sulfide ore deposits which contain very small concentrations of nonferrous metals such as copper, nickel and gold, yet would generate huge amounts of waste rock containing sulfides. Unlike iron mining, this new type of mining would produce sulfides, which when exposed to water and oxygen react to produce sulfuric acid. This water-rich area that drains into the BWCAW and Lake Superior is simply the wrong place for this new type of toxic mining.

In 2026 MNTU will continue work with many great partners to fight efforts to allow these mines in or near the BWCAW and Lake Superior.





# FLY TYING

## BWO SPECIAL

By Paul Johnson



The BWO Special is one of my favorite flies. I don't think it's much of an exaggeration to say it's the GOAT (Greatest of All Time), at least for me. There are several reasons why the Special is special to me.

1. It's a near-perfect imitation of the baetis mayflies that we have in the Driftless Area. It floats like a sailboat, just like the naturals. In the spring, I will typically fish it in a size 18 and switch to a size 20 in the fall. This is definitely a fly that should be in your fly box all seasons.

2. This is the fly I was using when I caught my most memorable trout, a Yellowstone cutthroat way up on Slough Creek in Yellowstone National Park.

3. In 2008 I was taking a fly tying class at the old Bentley's Fly Shop in Bloomington. The instructor that night was Jim Thomson. Jim had us tying his Cripple Dun pattern. The BWO Special is what happened when I tried to tie Jim's fly. My recent BWO Specials look a little

Materials List	
Hook:	Size 18-20 Dry Fly
Thread:	UTC Ultra 70 Denier Olive
Shuck	Mayfly Brown Zelon
Abdomen:	Tying Thread or Superfine Dubbing
Wing	Deer Hair/ Elk Hair or CDC Feathers
Collar:	Dun Rooster Hackle

nicer than that first one, but that's where it started.

4. What was special about that night was when Jim suggested that I join the Laughing Trout Fly Tying Club. There is no question that I would not be half the fly tyer that I am now without all the help from the members of Laughing Trout.



You will absolutely want to have this fly pattern in your fly box this spring. OK, break's over; start tying!

please feel free to reach out to me.

Paulwaconia@gmail.com

If you have any questions or comments



Step 1. Start your tying thread at the 2/3 mark and lay a base of thread back to the bend of the hook.



Step 2. Tie in a length of Zelon at the bend of the hook and tie down on top of the hook shank. Trim the tail end of the Zelon to roughly a hook gap in length.



Step 3. Spin your bobbin counter-clockwise to uncord (flatten) your tying thread. Form a tapered thread body. (On a size 18 hook, you can use dubbing to form the abdomen of the fly.)



Step 4. Clean and stack a small clump of fine deer hair. Tie the deer hair in on top of the hook at the 2/3 mark. Start by making two loose wraps, then pull tight. Make six or seven additional wraps to secure the deer hair.



Step 5. Lift the butt ends of the deer hair and clip off excess, leaving just a short stub of the butt ends.



Step 6. Advance your tying thread in front of the clump of deer hair. With your thread, form a dam in front of the deer hair to get the hair to stand up.



Step 7. Return your tying thread to the back of the deer hair clump. Prepare a rooster hackle feather by closely trimming the barbs off the stem ( 1/4" or so). Tie in the feather at the point where you originally tied in the deer hair.



Step 8. Advance your tying thread to the front of the deer hair clump. Palmer the hackle with two turns at the back of the clump of deer hair and one turn in front. Secure the hackle with your tying thread. Clip the excess. Whip finish or make two or three half-hitches.



THE AUTHOR WITH HIS MOST MEMORABLE TROUT, CAUGHT OUT OF SLOUGH CREEK IN YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK ON A BWO SPECIAL.



# A TOAST TO WINTER TROUT

## AN OPENER TRADITION

By Jason Rieke

January 1st seemed to come quickly this year. Maybe it was because our firstborn son recently entered the toddler stage. Maybe it was because my wife and I moved this fall and have spent the last few months renovating our new house. Or maybe it's because the world keeps moving faster and faster, refusing to slow down. Whatever the case, the new year came fast.

Before we knew it, we were parked along a trout stream, zipping up coats, cinching wader belts, and running laps up and down a dark gravel road to get some blood pumping and prepare ourselves to fly fish for winter trout with temperatures in the single digits. The January trout opener has become a marker in our lives. It is a day that a few buddies and I look forward to each year. We have started 9 out of the last 10 years this way, standing in cold water together.

To us, winter trout opener is like a fishing version of Christmas morning. We go to bed the night before full of anticipation and never quite know what to expect to find the next day. We know that we will be walking icy stream banks and fishing to sluggish fish that have not seen an angler since at least October. We know that how we approach the stream and how we present our flies make a bigger impact on our fishing success now more than any other time of the year. We know that fishing in the cold winter is often downright miserable. What we don't know is how the fish will react, how the weather will play out, how long we can fish before we get too cold, or how long it will be before one of us breaks a rod tip while trying to remove ice out of our guides (something I managed to do again this year...).

Winter trout fishing in Minnesota has never been about convenience. It's about choosing something deliberately harder when easier options are everywhere. While most of the state eases into the new year indoors, we step into cold water that refuses to freeze. Winter does not tolerate lack of preparation, sloppy casts, or weak willpower. It demands intention, precision, and perseverance; you have to want to be out there in the elements and embrace being uncomfortable. Winter fish are also not generous—they sit tight, conserving energy, and make you earn every opportunity. Unlike the last two years, this opener we were blessed with a healthy covering of snow. Snow does not make things any easier, but it adds significantly to the experience as it helps us align with the season—accepting a slower pace and making you earn every cast.

We started the morning on a stream familiar to us, one that we cut our teeth with fly fishing on years ago in our college days. It was a balmy 9°F, snow falling steadily—unreasonable conditions for fly fishing, yet perfect for irrational anglers. After fishing up a few bends we found a couple of slow pools fed by quick riffles, deep through the middle, and anchored by logjams in the back—classic wintering locations



JANUARY 1, 2026, BUSTING THROUGH SNOW BANKS TO ACCESS WATER UNTOUCHED SINCE OCTOBER

for Driftless trout. Trout were there and stacked up, and sluggishly reacted to the small streamers that we tossed their way. Before long, we were rewarded with the first few trout of the year, small fish but trophies to us in their own way. High fives were exchanged, followed by the obligatory debate: were these the first trout caught in Minnesota this year? It seemed possible, at least in that moment. We continued fishing upstream until we reached the end of the easement and then turned around and hiked out.

Around 10 a.m. we made it back to the car and decided to bump from fishing access to fishing access as we traveled toward a new stream that we wanted to check out. The fishing was slow but consistent, and we caught a few fish here and there. We found most of the streams to be flowing freely—a testament to the springs in our area that provide water at the same temperature year-round. We arrived at the new stream, on a stretch without public easement, and got permission to fish from the landowner. The reach was a cow pasture with twists, turns, high

banks, and deep pools—typically the type of place that Trout Unlimited might consider for habitat work. We walked to the back of the pasture and fished our way back to the car. The fishing was great, with more fish and a noticeably larger average size of the fish than earlier in the day. By the time we reached the end of the pasture, it was clear this new stream had earned a return visit.

After getting back to the car, we still had a couple of hours of light left so we hit the road and headed closer to home. There was a stretch of easement a long hike in from the nearest public access that we wanted to check out. I knocked on another landowner's door to see if we might be able to access the creek through their property. The conversation was brief but meaningful, and a great reminder that trout streams don't exist in isolation—they flow through working land owned by people who care deeply about the creeks. We were granted access and spent the remainder of the day fishing up the valley until darkness came upon us.

In total, we fished five different streams—four we had fished before and one new one to check off the list. We fished hard, put miles on our boots, caught fish of all sizes, and I was fortunate enough to land the largest Driftless trout I have caught in a couple of years.

So here's a toast to winter trout: to water that keeps moving when everything else stops; to friends who show up at 6 a.m. when the thermometer reads single digits; to cold hands, icy guides, and the patience they teach us; and to starting the year not with resolutions, but by standing in a creek that reminds us all to slow down.

*Jason Rieke is a former fly fishing guide turned composite materials engineer. After years of slinging streamers and nodding 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.*



A GREAT BROWN TROUT ANY DAY OF THE YEAR, AND PARTICULARLY SPECIAL ON OPENER.



# SELF CARE

## DOGS, CAFFEINE, WORDS, AND FLY FISHING

By Paul Connors

I woke this morning to the muted sounds of my wife trying her best to not wake me up. “Good morning,” I mumbled. “What’s the temp outside?” I knew it was going to be a frigid day. “Ten,” was her response. I slipped back under the covers with no guilt and my “therapist” cuddled up behind me. (My current therapist is a golden retriever named Birdie). I luxuriated for a bit but never did get back to sleep. A hard Bird Claw to the temple, a couple of steamy Bird Breaths in my left ear, and my caregiv-er retrieved me from my dogged slumber.

On my way to the espresso machine, my aged brain started to slowly fade back to the tragic events the night before here in Minneapolis. Someone else had been shot (non-fatal) by a federal agent. Yikes. Minneapolis in crisis mode. My stomach sank.

I love my little white Krups espresso machine. That paltry twenty dollar Craigslist purchase has changed my life. The anticipation of my vanilla latte jazzed with agave syrup, and lion’s mane mushroom powder thaws the ice in my varicose veins. I feed my “Bird” and retreat to the red couch with an unread Stephen King novel, my steaming mug, and my Birdie, nested beside me. Some well written words, my dog, some sweet caffeine, exhale.

A half hour into my novel, the latte working its magic, my mind wanders back to last night. Minneapolis, my ad-

opted hometown, is in crisis mode. How can I be of help to my neighbors today? What can I do to support our schools, students, and teachers? I made a plan. It’s a good plan and feels right. For this present moment, reading Mr. King has sparked my love of written words. I only wish I could write as well.

Typing words on a laptop screen centers me. I’m writing this today for you to read, but it’s truly for me. Writing is cathartic. And oftentimes, I just need to start writing to know what the hell I’m gonna write about. That happened today. I guess what I’m writing about is what keeps me sane, centered, and sustained. Dogs, strong sweet coffee, written words, and certainly not least, fishing with flies.

It’s never too cold to go fly fishing, unless you’re me and it’s ten degrees outside. I have a sound body, a relatively functional brain locked in with lion’s mane, but 68 year old bones. I rarely get the motivation to head to the water unless it’s 50 degrees or warmer. Usually. Two weeks ago I hit the Mississippi below the nuclear power plant north of Monticello. It was a tad over forty degrees, foggy, and cold. I fished for two hours, slipped on ice, almost lost my left hearing aid, and caught two hammer handles. At the time, it wasn’t worth going. In retrospect, therapeutic. That may be why when I say to my wife, “I think I may go fishing tomorrow,” she says “Please, GO!” I’m grateful for her, she loves me

and sees things I don’t. She sees someone who comes back recharged, refreshed, and relaxed. Fly fishing and all that surrounds it, gives me joy. The thought of it, the gear, the weather, the stories, the friends, feathers, fish, and dubbing. Every ounce of it. It’s disappointing when you get skunked, right? But, would you rather have just stayed home? Answer that yourselves.

The thought of fly fishing makes everything good with the world and me. One of the things I do to fall asleep is to think about a particular fishing experience. Does anyone else do this? I often replay one event in particular. Many years ago, I was fishing the Rush River in Wisconsin, well downstream of the Wonderland bridge, and just above the “Snowmobile Bridge” hole (IYKYK). I rarely do well in that stretch of water, I have a hard time figuring out how to fish it with any consistency or luck. There was a caddis hatch earlier in the day, but I caught nothing. The hatch was mostly over, but there was one fish rising to some unseen bugs in the middle of that pool. I walked downstream through the woods, and entered the water at the tail out. I slowly waded up within casting distance of that rising trout, waist deep and immersed in the current. I tried hard for this fish. I still had a caddis tied on, and, being a newbie at fly fishing, it would have taken too long to switch flies. My casting techniques still sucked, but I was determined. I just kept casting. I probably lined the fish twelve times, but you

know that feeling when you’ve just made the perfect cast, and you get just the right drift, and everything in the world aligns? Sure enough, that fish came up, slurped in that well worn fly, and I proceeded to bring that beautiful 16-inch buttery brown to the net. The nicest, prettiest, and fattest brown I had ever caught on the Rush. I recall that cast often as I prepare to sleep, the way that fly floated down through the filtered sunlight to gently land on the surface film. It gives me silent solace, and peace of brain.

Tough times are here in Minneapolis at the moment. Hopefully soon, this too, shall pass. It’s too cold for this old boned geezer to get the gumption to gather the gear and gravitate to the water. But if I can write something readable, hang with my sweet furry friend, do something positive for my fellow Minnesotans, or maybe tie a few flies and think about what fish will want to eat them, my brain will be OK. Thanks for reading my words. Stay strong Minnesota. Lets hope by the time you do read this, all will be better in our beloved state, and the state of ourselves.

*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.*

# 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.



# MEET YOUR DRIFTLESS FLY SHOPS

## BUY LOCAL!

By Bob Luck

How would you like to open up a specialty retail shop in a small and slow-growing market? The business is seasonal and weather dependent. Inventory management is complicated. Your neighbors have no clue about what you do. Most customers are willing to spend money, but you just know that some of them are going to milk you for advice, make a small purchase and then go buy the big-ticket items from the internet.

An MBA would say it is crazy to open a business like this, but fly shop owners tend not to be MBAs. They aren't crazy either—at least no crazier than other fly anglers. They are passionate about fly fishing and fly tying, about bringing newcomers into the sport, and protecting their local streams. And they have some great stories to tell.

### The Driftless Fly Fishing Company

The Root River is the longest, and arguably the best, trout stream in Minnesota. It boasts three fly shops on its banks, which, if my math is correct, is three times more than any other stream in our region. The oldest of these is The Driftless Fly Fishing Company in Preston.

Owner Mel Hayner grew up fishing for trout in Michigan and Oregon. He and his wife ran a concession business for fairs, rodeos and pow-wows, spending their winters in Houston, TX and summers in Minnesota. After having children, they decided they needed to settle down, and bought a house in Luverne, on the South Dakota border. About five years later, they got divorced, due in part to Mel's drinking. Mel joined AA, got sober, swore never to marry again, and moved to Albert Lea where he got a job selling used cars. Mel had fished for walleyes and other warmwater species but had no idea there were trout streams here until one of his customers mentioned he was going trout fishing.

"I asked him, 'Where in the heck do you go trout fishing in Minnesota?' 'Oh, in the Southeast there's all kinds of trout streams. But first I have to go down to Florida to see my nephew in spring training.' 'Who's your nephew?' 'Kent Hrbek'. So it was Kent Hrbek's uncle that told me we have trout fishing in Minnesota!"

Mel started exploring the streams of the Southeast by himself and with friends from the AA program. It was great therapy, and he fell in love with the Driftless Region. In 2004, Mel went back to school at Mankato State to become a licensed drug and alcohol counselor, and found himself sitting in front of a computer. "There's this young guy next to me with piercings all over, and I said, 'how do you turn this thing on?'" Mel's new friend turned out to be a computer science major, and Mel convinced him to build a website, "Minnesotaflyfishing.com" in exchange for a large pizza and 50 bucks' cash. Mel started selling flies and offering a guide service on his site, and was soon spending his week-



MEL HAYNER STANDS READY TO HELP AT THE DRIFTLESS FLY FISHING COMPANY IN PRESTON.

ends sleeping in the back of his jeep and guiding clients in the Driftless area to help pay for child support.

After Mel graduated and became a licensed counselor, his take-home income doubled, and when his youngest child turned 18, it doubled again. Mel cashed in his 401K and put all of his savings into a dilapidated old building across the street from the Fillmore County Courthouse. "I squandered my youth doing field research in chemical dependency, so that was all I could afford. I had been dating an awesome lady who lived in Mankato, and I told her 'Hey, I'm going to buy an old building in Preston and live in the apartment upstairs and open a fly shop.' 'What about us?' she asked. 'You know I live in Mankato.' And I said 'Well, I was just hoping you'd marry me and move there with me and we'd live happily ever after.' And she said okay. So much for never getting married again."

Mel and his new bride tore out the stained orange carpet and fixed the oven in the apartment upstairs. They have since moved to a house in Preston and rent out the apartment to anglers. Downstairs, Mel repaired the original tin ceiling and replaced a fire-damaged section with a large handmade lighting fixture. He built cabinets and shelves, and put a fly bin below the lighting fixture. He converted the back room, which had been used for card games and other adult activities during Prohibition, into a gear storage area and The Driftless Fly Fishing Company opened for business in 2013. In 2014 it became the first and only Orvis-endorsed shop and guiding service in Minnesota. Mel's bottom line: "I have fished here for 32 years, guided for 20 and started tying flies when I was nine. I have been a member of TU for 25 years. Experience matters."

### Lightning Round

What's your favorite fly?

Beadhead pheasant tail. #18-20 in the winter, and #14-16 in the summer.

What should fly anglers be spending money on?

A lot of anglers don't have a net, but everybody should have one. It helps with safe fish handling, and improves your confidence in landing larger fish. It doesn't have to be expensive, but if you like 'functional art,' there are some beautiful handmade nets.

What do they buy too much of?

Split shot. Usually, you are better off changing to a larger bead. The fly drifts more naturally, and it is easier to detect strikes.

Favorite fish species?

I love to catch the trout that are native to the area I am fishing. In Minnesota, that is the Driftless-strain brook trout. We thought this strain was extinct, but genetic testing has shown that they have survived.

Favorite time to fish?

April. The Driftless is coming awake. The wildflowers are blooming, the weeds are low and fish are rising. The trees haven't leafed out yet, and you can see through the woods to the bluffs. It still gives me goosebumps.

### The Root River Rod Company

Eleven summers ago, Lance Prado and his wife Alayna were eating dinner at the Pedal Pushers café in downtown Lanesboro when they noticed a "for sale" sign in a building across the street. When they got back home to Minnetonka, they mentioned the building to Alayna's parents, Steve and Vicky Sobieniak. Steve had taught Lance to fly fish when he was a boy and had since become an ac-

complished bamboo rod builder. "We said, 'that would be a cool place for a fly shop,' thinking nothing would really happen." A month later, Steve and Vicky came over for dinner to announce that they had purchased the building and would be moving down to Lanesboro to restore it and convert it into a fly shop. I haven't heard of any law requiring fly shop owners to be DIY whizzes, but it doesn't hurt. Steve, who had worked for 35 years as a finish carpenter, did all of the woodwork. Lance, who worked as an electrician in the Twin Cities, drove down with Alayna on weekends to rewire the building and help with construction. They would work all day and take the evening hours off to fish. The building, first erected in 1885, was moved on rollers from a corner lot to its current location to make way for a bank. In a town blessed with lovely turn-of-the-century buildings, this is one of the loveliest.

Steve opened the shop in 2017 and Lance and Alayna, who had fallen in love with Lanesboro, moved down in 2019 with their daughter Adeline. Steve passed away from cancer in 2022 after selling the shop to Lance and Alayna; Vicky still lives in a house in town. A few of Steve's rods are on sale in the shop, along with other vintage bamboo rods, and a stack of Tonkin cane is waiting in the back room for a future rod builder.

The South Branch of the Root is one of the few streams in the Driftless area floatable with a drift boat, and Steve and Lance were some of the pioneers of drift boat fishing on the Root, along with local legends Dan Michener and Andy Szaboda. When Lance got involved with the shop, he realized that guiding was going to be a large part of the business, and decided to take a shot at drift boat guiding along with the classic "walk and wade." He attended the Sweetwater



Guide School in Montana, put together a “how-to” manual, hired his first guide, and now boasts a fleet that includes a Hyde Montana Skiff and rafts from Flycraft and Upriver Boatworks. There are more boats on the river now than there used to be, but crowds are rare and floating the Root is a special experience.

**Lightning Round**

What’s your favorite way to fish?  
Streamers, followed by dries.

Favorite fly?  
The Mini Dungeon.

Favorite fish species?  
Brown trout. They are just so aggressive. Savages. They will sip little flies on the surface but if you want to see the dark side of a brown trout, just throw them a big streamer. It goes from this cute bug-sipping fish to “I’m going to devour this thing.”

What kinds of water do you like to fish?  
I like fishing it all, but I would say small to medium streams are my go-to. That’s where I’ve found the biggest fish, which is surprising. I caught my personal best fish a year ago. It was 28 inches and I caught it in a stream you could jump across.

Favorite time to fish?  
Spring. I like the rapid change from white to brown to green. And the fishing is awesome.

What should fly anglers spend more money on?  
A good line can make a \$100 rod cast like a thousand dollar rod.

Less money?  
I do run a fly shop, you know [laughs]. But anglers don’t necessarily need all the gadgets they buy.

**Money Creek Outfitters**

By the time it flows past the town of Houston, smallmouth bass and channel cats have replaced trout as the key gamefish species in the Root River. But coldwater tributaries are plentiful and a short drive will take anglers to some of the best and least-fished waters in the Driftless Area.

Josh Norlien caught his first trout with a spinning rod on Beaver Creek as a teenager. He got interested in fly fishing when he inherited some gear from his grandfather. “I was flailing and failing until I decided I had to abandon conventional gear and focus on fly fishing. Soon after, I caught my first trout on a Pink Squirrel, coincidentally on Beaver Creek.”

Fast forward a couple of decades. Josh and his wife Angela have five girls and a boy. Angela is a medical transcriptionist at Mayo Clinic and Josh works as the maintenance supervisor at a barley and wheat malting facility in Winona. Six kids and a couple of full-time jobs would be enough for most normal people, but if you’ve read this far you know that fly shop owners are anything but normal. To fill up their spare time(!), Josh and Angela opened Money Creek Outfitters in March of 2025 to help anglers explore the waters in and around Houston County. Located just south of the terminus of the Root River State Trail, the shop features a guide service and a selection of



LANCE PRADO AND HIS WIFE ALAYNA ARE THE OWNERS OF THE ROOT RIVER ROD CO. IN LANESBORO.

fly fishing products with some spinning gear thrown in. “We want to enable customers to catch trout, and we also get a lot of customers who start out with spinning gear and then move on to a fly rod.” The entire family pitches in with the operation of the shop, especially daughters Reece and Julia. My hot take: Josh is not the most experienced fly shop owner I’ve ever met, but he may be the most enthusiastic.

**Lightning Round**

What should anglers spend more money on?  
You don’t actually need to spend much money to enjoy fly fishing, but if you really take to the sport, get yourself a set of durable, comfortable waders.

What could they spend less on?  
If you fish for trout in the Driftless, you can get away with a simple, inexpensive reel.

What’s your favorite way to fish?  
I like to catch fish! Which means that I will usually fish a nymph under an indicator. Unless there’s a hatch.

Where do you like to fish?  
Some of my favorite streams are Rush Creek, Gribben Creek and Beaver Creek. I like to hike in and find some solitude. Rush and Gribben have tons of public access. Some of the best streams in Houston County have little or no public access, but I have rarely been turned down when asking a landowner for per-

mission to fish.

Favorite fly?  
The Pink Squirrel. Last year a gentleman came to present at the Win-Cres chapter meeting. He told us he had fished in seven countries and caught trout on Pink Squirrels in all seven. He was planning a trip to his eighth country, and he planned to catch a trout on a Pink Squirrel there, too. If it is good enough for him, it’s good enough for me.

*Bob Luck is a frequent contributor to Minnesota Trout Unlimited. He is a former president of Twin Cities Trout Unlimited and the author of “Woolly Buggers Don’t Count,” a book of essays about the Driftless Area, find it at [www.pocketwaterpress.com](http://www.pocketwaterpress.com)*



MONEY CREEK OUTFITTERS IS THE NEWEST SHOP IN THE GAME AND IS LOCATED IN HOUSTON.



# RIGGING FOR TROUT

## SUCCESSFUL OPTIONS FOR FLY FISHING

By Carl Haensel • Photos by Jade Thomason

When anglers open the trunk of their car along the trout stream, the rubber meets the road for all the planning for a day of fishing. From rod weight to fly choice, everything can make a difference in catching fish on the water. To be better prepared for what you might encounter, here are a few rigging methods, setups and plans to follow to help make your fishing trip more productive.

In fly fishing, it is easiest to start off using a floating fly line. Most anglers use a weight-forward floating line for ease of casting. To the end of this, a leader is attached. Modern commercial leaders are often made of tapered nylon monofilament, and come in standard sizes of 7.5, 9 and 12 feet in length. To begin rigging your outfit, the next step after attaching the leader to the line is to add on a piece of tippet. To achieve an easy casting rig, adding on 12 to 20 inches of tippet is usually best. Specific situations and methods for dry fly, nymph and streamer rigging will be detailed further below. Use a knot like a surgeon's or blood knot to achieve a smooth connection from your leader to your tippet, and try to step one tippet size smaller from your leader to your tippet to continue the taper.

### Dry Fly Rigging

Whether you have stepped out to the stream and found rising fish, or you are prospecting for trout looking up, there are plenty of reasons to rig your rod and tackle for dry fly fishing. From mayfly and caddisfly hatches to terrestrial opportunities in the summertime, dry fly fishing is one of the most visual and rewarding aspects of fly fishing. In most circumstances, the goal is to achieve a drag-free drift. This presents the fly on the flowing water in a way that appears as natural as possible, with the fly simply floating downstream with the current. How you rig for dry fly fishing is key to making this work for you on the water.

When you're setting up to dry fly fish, many anglers worry about the fish being "spooky." For gently rising fish following a sparse hatch of small mayflies, this can certainly be the case, and that happens plenty of times through the season in Minnesota. When preparing for skittish fish, I often see anglers creating leaders of 10, 12 or 14 feet—or sometimes even longer. When I guide new anglers on a spring creek, these long leaders can work, at times, but more often they're likely to frustrate even veteran anglers, since they can be extremely hard to cast. The challenge of long leaders often arises when anglers add lots of tippet onto the end of a preexisting commercial leader. Adding 4 feet or more of fine tippet to a 7.5-foot or even a 9-foot leader rarely casts well. In even a light breeze, fine tippet will often pile in a bundle on the water, making for a poor drift, or worse, an epic tangle. It can be hard to "turn over" or get it to straighten out. Here's how to fix that issue, and catch more fish.

Start by shortening your leader.

**12** I find that shorter leaders lead



POSITIONING YOURSELF DOWNSTREAM OF YOUR TARGET CAN LEAD TO A CLEANER PRESENTATION, AND ALLOW FOR A SHORTER LEADER.

to better presentations for most anglers. While you might spook more fish, casting more accurately and with an improved presentation will convince more fish to bite when you have a cleaner dry fly drift. I recommend anglers set themselves up for success by working within their bounds. Use a leader length you can effectively cast and stand as close as you need to reach the fish. Casts that land feet short of the target or tangled balls of tippet won't catch fish either, work up to those long distances and stealthy leader lengths.

When adding to your leader, add length throughout your system versus tacking on thin tippet only to the end. Adding an additional thick butt section of a couple of feet will carry energy further through the leader when you cast. This is the best way to increase overall leader length. Then add some medium-thickness tippet like 3x. It's fine to add some length to the end of your leader, but more than a couple of feet of 5x or 6x often causes casting problems. To achieve stealth without a long leader, try different casting angles if possible, and position yourself quarter downstream, so that fish see the fly first before any leader reaches them. While not always an option, it's an excellent way to fish shorter, but sneakier.

In other dry fly situations, trout rise with wild abandon to caddisflies skittering on the water, without any care of an angler's presence. I find that shorter leaders intrinsically work just fine in these situations. In fact, a shorter leader can allow for better control of your fly. Try lifting your rod tip above the dry and adding in some light movement to match the egg-laying behavior of the caddis. This is a standard technique for me and it can bring on huge strikes in the right circumstances.

When fishing larger terrestrial patterns

like grasshoppers, I like to significantly increase the strength of my tippet, which can help turn over a longer leader if the fish truly need the additional stealth. Instead of the classic 5 or 6x tippet used when fishing mayflies or caddisflies, heavier tippet is better. Try using a loop knot on 12 to 20 inches of 3x or even 2x tippet on a 7.5 or 9 foot leader. Often, the more free fly movement imparted by a non-slip loop knot can help convince finicky trout to smack a hopper, even on a shorter leader.

Fishing a dry fly with a dropper (nymph or emerger) behind it can lead to excellent fishing opportunities but can complicate casting for beginners. Common dry-dropper options that are great to start off with include caddisflies with an emerger-style trailing fly, or a larger dry fly with a smaller, less visible dry fly behind it. Fishing a "hopper-dropper" rig with a large dry terrestrial as a lead fly and a beadhead nymph is another classic option. For smaller dry-droppers, try using 18 to 24 inches of tippet between the flies. For hopper-dropper combos, longer lengths can be used, though casting becomes challenging. I avoid tippet lengths for droppers below terrestrials longer than 36 inches.

### Nymph Rigging

When you get to the trout stream and you're not seeing much activity, it's usually a good time to start fishing with nymphs. Aquatic macroinvertebrates make up the vast majority of the food that trout eat, and many nymphs imitate the mayflies, caddisflies, midges, scuds, stoneflies and other organisms the trout feed on. Rigging for nymph fishing has many similarities to dry fly rigging. Weight-forward floating fly lines are great to use, and the most common option for many anglers. The graphic on the following page shows the classic rigging of indicator, split shot, lead fly and trailing fly and is a great way to get

going as you set up to fish. It's important to note that there is much variability in nymph rigging, based on where you want to present your flies in the water column. It's generally more successful to get your flies down so that they can be near and occasionally bounce off of rocks and other bottom debris. In general, I believe that if you're not snagging the bottom occasionally, you're likely not fishing deep enough. To achieve this I often start with a 7.5- or 9-foot leader and then build it out from there. Begin by adding a 12 to 15 inch piece of tippet, lighter than the main leader to the end. Then attach your first fly. I often start with a 3x or 4x leader, and then add 4x or 5x tippet.

Be sure to have the heavier fly first (your lead fly) on your two fly rig, if you're fishing an indicator setup that requires mending. This is particularly important on larger streams and areas with complex currents. Different options are available to try if you're fishing Euro-style or fishing in particularly small waters where regular high-stick drifts are possible. Attach your lead fly to a piece of tippet that is tied on to the end of your leader, if you are using a commercially available knotless tapered leader. This way you can place the split shot above the tippet knot on the leader, and be able to avoid having the shot slide down to the fly. The target length of this piece of tippet should be around 10 to 14 inches, depending on stream size and water depth. The tippet diameter from the first lead fly to the second fly should be smaller and lighter than the segment above it. This way, if you snag up your trailing fly on a nymph rig, you will be likely to break only that fly off, and not lose the entire rig. In most trout fishing situations, I use either 4x tippet to the lead fly and 5x to the trailer, or if greater stealth is needed, 5x to the lead fly and 6x to the trailer. Fluorocarbon tippets are useful for increased abrasion resistance and the



ability to disappear underwater.

Anglers will find that in fast currents, thin tippets on the end of your leader can be a benefit in getting down to the fish quickly. They can slice through the water cleanly and easily, and work well, to a point. Though as long as you're reaching your target depth and are engaging with the bottom of the stream, heavier tippets can land more fish and reduce breakoffs.

When fishing, it is important to regularly adjust both the amount of weight on the rig (split shot) or the depth of the strike indicator. I often move the indicator first, for ease of use, which can occur multiple times in a single run, and certainly when moving between pools or runs of differing sizes or current speeds.

Similar to dry fly rigging, nymph anglers often are concerned about scaring their quarry. Combine that with a need to regularly get deep, and I've had anglers show up with 18-foot leaders to nymph fish on small streams. While there are plenty of circumstances where longer leaders can produce well—think Euro nymphing rigs, some drift boat setups, New Zealand etc.—classic shorter strike indicator rigs are the bread and butter setup for the majority of anglers and locations. Two heavier nymphs, some split shot and an indicator make it easy to create a rig that is challenging to cast. Pair that with a lengthy leader, and I regularly have folks that are challenged to turn their cast over, especially when roll casting. To fix these issues, I usually shorten leaders. Overall, it's common for many of my nymphing leaders to be only 8 or

9 feet in total length. If you have more than a couple of feet between the start of your leader and your indicator, it becomes challenging to cast, especially as more weight is applied to the rig. This challenge is lessened if you're floating down the river in a boat alongside your nymph rig, but in most cases, the need to cast effectively outweighs the benefits gained by the length.

**Streamer Rigging**

Anglers looking to imitate baitfish, crayfish and other large prey often use streamer patterns. They're a great way to chase large trout, and they can motivate fish to move from cover for the potential of a larger meal. It's often a great choice when covering lots of water to find fish, or when waters are up and off-color. It's important in many streamer fishing scenarios to get your fly deep in the water column, and there are a variety of ways to achieve that goal.

Rigging your leader and tippet for streamer fishing is often easier and simpler than for dry fly or nymph fishing. The key is to keep your leader short, often shorter than you may realize. Streamers are intrinsically challenging to cast for many anglers due to their heavy weight. When fishing smaller trout streamers, I choose a weight-forward floating fly line, paired with a 7.5-foot leader and a 12-inch piece of tippet on the end for much of my trout-based streamer fishing. Loop knots like a non-slip loop are key to use when streamer fishing to provide maximum action to the fly. This is easy, simple, and makes switching back and forth from nymphing to streamer fishing a breeze. In most small to medium trout streams, you can get as deep as you need this way. Avoid adding split shot to streamer rigs if possible, because overhead casting with this type of rigging can lead to problematic hinge effects when casting.

In other circumstances, adding in a sink tip or sinking leader into your rig can get you deeper when larger, deeper water calls for it. Using a sinking leader such as the Sonar series from Scientific An-

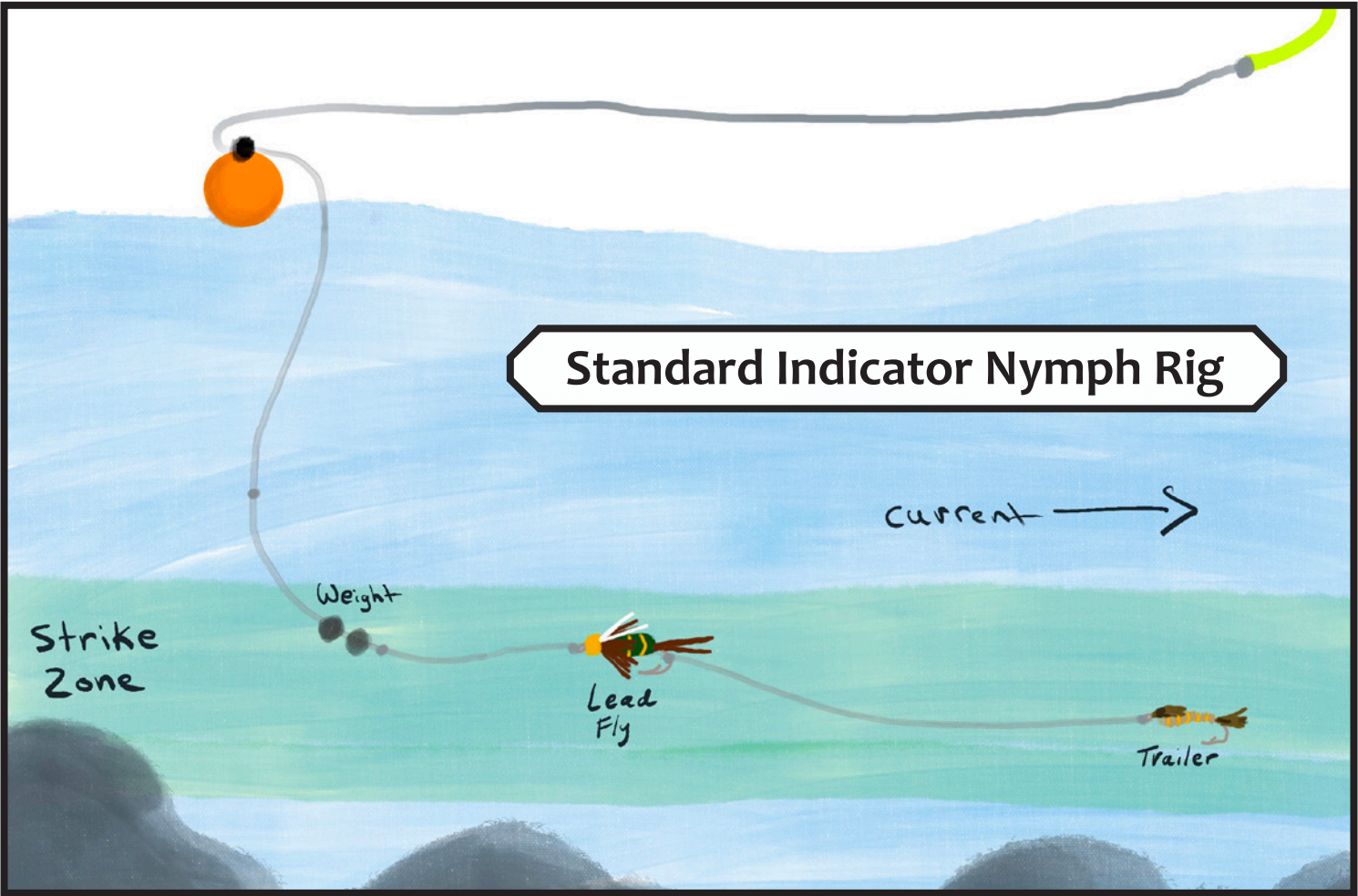


USING A SHORTER LEADER CAN BE USEFUL FOR TERRESTRIALS OR IF YOU WISH TO IMPART MOVEMENT ONTO YOUR FLY.

glers is a fast and easy way for newer anglers to start fishing streamers deeper. Featuring a variety of sink rates in either 7- or 10- foot lengths, they offer simple loop-to-loop connectivity with your fly line. I change them out in just a couple of minutes on the water. A micro-swivel on the end of the leader allows for the addition of tippet. In many cases, you can add a length of around 4 feet of tippet attached to the leader. When fishing larger streamers, I often increase tippet size to as high as 2x or even 1x, which can help pull flies out of snags and muscle fish out of log jams and timber.

These rigging options for dries, nymphs and streamers are just a few of the many varieties of ways that you can get on the water and be successful. There are plenty of advanced and creative options that a wide variety of anglers use and continue to innovate with to achieve fun days on the water.

*Carl Haensel is the Northern Minnesota Vice Chair for MNTU and lives in Duluth. He operates the fly fishing guide service Namebini and is the author of Fly Fishing Minnesota.*



LEFT: STREAMER FISHING IS A STRONG OPTION IF YOU WISH TO TARGET THE LARGEST FISH IN THE STREAM.

RIGHT: THE STANDARD INDICATOR NYMPH RIG INCLUDES THESE BASIC COMPONENTS WITH THE GOAL OF BRINGING YOUR OFFERINGS INTO THE STRIKE ZONE.





# MNTU EDUCATION UPDATE

## MARCH 2026

By Amber Taylor, MNTU Education Program Supervisor



Minnesota Trout in the Classroom (TIC) is a robust and dynamic education program that has people perking up when I explain all that it entails. A ton of questions are also generated when talking about TIC. A few of the most common are below.

Where do the eggs come from? A commercial hatchery in Washington. While it would be ideal to get eggs from a MN DNR hatchery, this has not been an approved source since I started in 2018.

What species do you raise? Currently, rainbow trout. This is controversial for some people as a nonnative species, but MNTU has no control over what species is raised. The DNR fisheries staff maintain each year that this is the best and only option for MNTIC schools at this time.

Where are they released? MN DNR approved bodies of water throughout the state where they are already releasing rainbows. Our fish are never released into bodies of water where they do not already exist.

What safeguards are in place to prevent disease from entering Minnesota waters through released TIC trout? MNTIC schools have the privilege of releasing trout at the end of the school year. This is not the case in all states where TIC exists. The Arizona Game and Fish Department supports and coordinates the TIC program around the state, but no schools are allowed to release their fish. Instead, the trout students raise are frozen and donated to conservation and wildlife rehab programs to feed their animals. Here in Minnesota, we have a few processes that every teacher with a tank is required to follow each year in order to continue their participation with the program and prevent disease. These include the following:

- Each year before receiving eggs, they must sign the MN DNR permit acknowledging they have read and understand the rules and regulations in place for running a TIC tank.
- All eggs received are certified disease-free and no outside organic materials are added to the tank to prevent contamination.
- They maintain a mortality log tracking fish death as the year progresses. If a cumulative mortality (CM) of 60% is reached, disease testing is required. In this case, teachers must send in fish from their tank to be tested for possible viruses and bacterial infections at the DNR pathology lab.
- Prior to releasing fish, they must share the mortality log with me and the pathology lab manager. Schools may not release any fish until receiving approval to do so.

Over the last few years, the lab has pulled data from these logs and the end of year reports to exam-

ine what is happening in tanks around the state. They present their findings each year to teachers during December's virtual training session. At the end of this article there is a link to the 2025 presentation for those interested in learning more about the pathology lab's role in TIC and checking out the breakdown of results from their 2024-25 school year tank analysis.

As a year-long, immersive, hands-on program that brings nature education into the classroom, TIC has become an essential mainstay within school communities throughout the state. One new teacher in the program this year emailed to let me know her tank was fully hatched and the tiny fish "[have] been absolute celebrities so far."

Teachers in this program are always looking to improve and expand TIC's impact in their classrooms and school communities. The effects of TIC are long lasting and go well beyond the classroom. Many teachers wrote about this in their 2024-25 DNR end of year reports, observing how TIC was important not only for students working with the fish, but the entire school and broader community.

"This year I moved the tank to just outside my classroom, previously it was housed in our environmental classroom building, but that had limited exposure/foot traffic. [This move] exposed it to 100s more students who could see the trout develop each day on their way to class. I had countless conversations with many students about everything from trout biology to environmentalism and conservation, to tank care and water chemistry. It is interesting to hear what some students think who have never seen a trout or even a 'wild' species of fish before."

"Our trout tank is a big highlight on our school tours for new families. [It] also provides the opportunity for our fifth graders to grow in responsibility [coming up] to our middle school science lab three times a day to care for the tank. Our first group of students who participated in Trout in the Classroom are graduating seniors from high school this year. They still talk about their experiences with their classmates and the fun trips they had with this program."

"Our agriculture department and FFA program has a Facebook page where we did many updates on the trout. The community loved to see the progress made and the different stages the trout went through. It became a very positive point within our district and even had the attention of the superintendent who shared with the local radio station. I had parents and community members come up to me at various events to talk about the trout and we even had a parent come with to chaperone the trout release field trip."

As I write this, our team and group of wonderful volunteers are just beginning a very busy winter of programs with



A STUDENT HELPS POUR THEIR NEWLY ARRIVED EGGS INTO A BASKET IN THE TANK. THIS BASKET WILL HOUSE THEM WHILE THEY HATCH INTO ALEVIN AND EVENTUALLY START SWIMMING AND EATING.

Trout in the Classroom. Winter programs wrap up at the end of March and we will have worked with almost 2,000 students from Iron Junction and Bemidji to Grand Meadow and Rushford, teaching them about biomimicry and tying flies, MN fish identification, ice fishing, habitat restoration, and more. A huge THANK YOU to the volunteers that assist with these lessons. Having extra adult hands helping students with things like fly ty-

ing and ice fishing is essential and ensures that they not only learn more, but have a good experience!

URL of the pathology lab's role in TIC: [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KhRUiHsFtf\\_YPiQG\\_4dQ9C6woETdnspd/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KhRUiHsFtf_YPiQG_4dQ9C6woETdnspd/view)

Contact Amber Taylor, Education Supervisor with questions, [mntu.education@gmail.com](mailto:mntu.education@gmail.com)



A TIC STUDENT HOLDS UP A FLY SHE TIED WITH OUR TEAM AND GROUP OF AWESOME VOLUNTEERS. HUNDREDS OF STUDENTS LEARN ABOUT BIOMIMICRY DURING THE WINTER THROUGH FLY TYING.



# SEASONS OF A STREAM

## YOUTH SERIES

By Evan Griggs



LEFT: HAY CREEK IN SOUTHEAST MINNESOTA IS AN EXAMPLE OF A SPRING CREEK. SPRING CREEKS ARE FUELED BY COLD UNDERGROUND SPRINGS AND PROVIDE STABLE TEMPERATURES FOR TROUT THROUGHOUT THE SEASONS.

RIGHT: A ROCKY TROUT STREAM ON THE NORTH SHORE OF LAKE SUPERIOR IS AN EXAMPLE OF A FREESTONE RIVER. PHOTO BY CHERI HENDERSON.

**T**ROUT streams are kind of funny. It seems like every day is opposite day for them. For example, when it's the hottest day of summer, the water will feel ice cold. And when it's the coldest day of winter, the water is still flowing and even looks like it's steaming. When I look at a trout stream, I always wonder, "Where are the trout hiding? Why isn't the water frozen, or too hot?" The best way to find out is to jump into the seasons of a stream!

Healthy trout streams are clean, oxygenated, and cold. In the Driftless Region of southeastern Minnesota, all the trout streams "spring" from an underground aquifer. This is why we call those trout streams, "spring creeks." The springs constantly gurgle out cold, clean water. The water will typically be around 55 degrees when it comes out of the spring. Water gets oxygen by flowing over rapids, where all the whitewater catches oxygen in the bubbles. Having aquatic plants also helps put oxygen in the water and gives trout places to hide. On the North Shore, most streams flow from lakes and bogs instead of from springs. Their water levels and water temperatures are dependent on melting snow and rain. These types of streams are called "freestone." Let's check out a snapshot of a healthy trout stream's year!

In the summertime, trout are quite happy to be in their cold, clean stream. There

are lots of bugs to eat and lots of plants giving them oxygen and hiding spots from predators. Trout do best if the water stays less than 68 degrees, which usually isn't a problem in a spring creek. In summer on the North Shore, you'll find trout hiding in the colder headwaters of the streams or in deep pools below waterfalls and rapids. These areas will be the coolest and most oxygenated areas of the river.

Fall in a trout stream is an exciting time. In the Driftless, brown and brook trout make nests (called "redds") in shallow rocky areas and spawn. One brown trout can lay more than 10,000 eggs! Trout in the Driftless don't migrate to spawn. On the North Shore, salmon and steelhead do migrate. To lay eggs, they make their way up the rivers they were born in. Steelhead can migrate multiple times over their life to spawn, but salmon only return once and then die after spawning.

Do trout get cold in the winter? Spring creeks have pretty consistent water temperature. The water will be slightly colder, but not cold enough to freeze. You can even go fishing in the winter at Whitewater and Forestville State Parks! Trout like to group together in the deep, slow moving areas (called "pools"). They can stay warm and save energy in pools. In winter on the northern freestone rivers, water levels get low and slow. These rivers will freeze, and trout

must congregate in the deep pools under waterfalls and rapids. The water in those areas stays deep and flowing, and trout live there all winter.

As things warm up again in spring, Driftless trout move out of the pools and head back to their summer hiding spots. On freestone rivers, the melting snow and ice (called "spring runoff") allows the fish to move around the stream or back to Lake Superior again. There's also another migration of steelhead that will swim up the rivers to spawn.

That was a snapshot of a healthy stream. But sometimes streams can get too much mud (called "silt") in them, and can become deadly for trout. Silt enters a stream when the stream eats away at exposed soil on its banks (called "erosion"). Silt will cover up rapids, fill in

pools, and choke out aquatic plants. Without rapids, the water is less oxygenated and the trout can't make their redds to spawn. No plants or pools means less places to hide. The slow, shallow water can get too hot in summer and freeze in winter. No pools on a northern freestone river, and the trout won't survive through winter. To stop erosion, there has to be lots of plants with strong roots on land. It's also good to have boulders or dead trees on the stream banks to lock in the soil. This is what Trout Unlimited does in restoration projects on our streams! Their work helps streams stay silt-free and keeps the trout healthy.

Visit a trout stream every season and try to find the trout! In winter, look in the deep pools. In spring and fall, look in the shallow rapids. In the summer, just follow the bubbles.



TOP: IN THE FALL, BROOK TROUT LIKE THIS ONE MAKE NESTS CALLED "REDDS" IN SHALLOW ROCKY AREAS AND SPAWN.

LEFT: GRASSHOPPERS ARE A COMMON FOOD ITEM FOR HUNGRY TROUT DURING THE SUMMER.

RIGHT: MARSH MARIGOLDS CAN OFTEN BE FOUND ALONG TROUT STREAMS IN SPRING. PHOTOS BY JADE THOMASON.



# To Catch A Trout

## GEOLOGY, BAKED TROUT FLIES AND GOOD ADVICE ON CANFIELD CREEK

By John Weiss

At the base of a 80-foot tall bluff, cold, clear water, loaded with trout-friendly chemicals, flowed wide and shallow out of Big Spring of Canfield Creek. Caddis in round pebbled cases freckled the creek's rocks. Water soon gathered into a tighter bed, welcomed more water from a second spring and wended its way a half mile to me where I stood with fly rod in hand and dreams of brown or Minnesota Driftless brook trout in my head.

I've fished the stream in Forestville/Mystery Cave State Park many times and always see, and sometimes catch, trout. I waded in the tailwater and quickly noted change: In the last flood, many of the large flat pieces of limestone set atop two poles parallel to the stream were gone or kittywampus, while a few large trees were stuck below the riffle, messing up the flow to the deep refuge beneath the rocks. But then, change and trout streams are coterminous.

I tied on one of Wayne Bartz's orange scuds and cast into the deepest part. Nothing.

I recalled John Stoeckel's advice that the indicator should always move a little slower than surface bubbles or foam so the fly wouldn't be moving too fast near the bottom. A larger piece of split shot. I cast again. The orange indicator indicated fish. I set the hook, played the fish gently, changed my rod from right to left hand, and reached back for my long net Joe Armstrong made for me. A deft scoop, 9-inch measure on the ruler-handle, I let it go. "This was a good fish, a real good fish," I said. Dialed in, I caught three more, then a fifth. Ah, the fifth. It made a few Simone Biles jumps that awed me. I landed and released it. I missed one on a dry fly. Reluctantly, I left.

What did it take to catch that first trout? I've wondered much about that and began to look and think about it a few years ago. I was thrilled to find out so much more of the history of one stream. The story is unique to Canfield but there are also many commonalities with others. Here's what I found:

From where it flows out the cave and enters the Root River, Canfield Creek, according to a 1970 Department of Natural Resources report, is 1.42 miles long, has an average width of 20.8 feet and average depth of 11.7 inches, with the deepest point at 7 feet. A 1955 DNR report said its flow is 5 cubic feet per second and the water 48 degrees but flow reached 11.5 cfs after rain and water was turbid. The "valley is deep and canyon-like ... there is an excellent succession of fine pools and rapids, the pools range in depth from two to six feet."

The story of how it got to be a deep and canyonlike stream with such good fish and fishing requires a journey back to a warm sea south of the equator.

at its base, is part of a massive stack of limestone, sandstone and shale strata that began forming about 600 million years ago in a tropical sea when what would be Minnesota slowly twisted its way north, riding on a tectonic plate. "The Big Spring is from the Galena Group, the Stewartville Formation, I think," said Geologist Jeff Broberg. "Upper/middle Ordovician 430 million years old."

Greg Anderson, Department of Natural Resources assistant chief of the nearby cave, said Canfield is a great stream because of the geology that creates great trout water. Canfield begins at Goliath Cave in Cherry Grove Blind Valley Scientific and Natural Area. Water goes into the cave, wiggles underground and comes out in Big Spring. "Because you have got that cold water coming out there, the whole stream bed is consistently cool water and a great place to catch brook trout, our only native trout species." There are also browns as well as rainbows in the Root. Because of riffles and rocks, the water is well-oxygenated and the stream attracts anglers from many states, he said.

But it's not any old rock, it's trout rock.

John Barry, a DNR hydrogeologist, said water going into the ground is mostly soft water without much in it. But as it goes through the limestone, it picks up calcium, magnesium, maybe more iron or manganese and becomes more alkaline.

Water with good chemicals is critical for trout, said Dr. Neal Mundahl, an emeritus professor in the Department of Geology at Winona State University and an expert on trout streams. "Some aquatic plants have their production enhanced under conditions of high alkalinity," he said. "They have the ability to use bicarbonate ions as a source of inorganic carbon during photosynthesis, so do not have their production limited under conditions of low CO<sub>2</sub>. Higher plant production can lead to greater production of aquatic macroinvertebrates, which can lead to greater production and/or faster growth of fish that eat the bugs."

The DNR's webpage backed him up. "Generally, the best trout streams are hard (plenty of dissolved minerals) and alkaline (dissolved calcium carbonate) and have a pH of 7.5 to 9 (not acidic). The most desirable of these qualities are found in spring-fed limestone creeks."

Vaughn Snook, assistant DNR fisheries supervisor in Lanesboro, added that the bugs need calcium carbonate for their exuviae (exoskeletons).

The DNR website also noted that the best streams need more than the right chemicals. They must have the right gradient, substrate, temperature and food base. Water must not flow too fast or too slow. "Between these extremes, however, trout can flourish, depending on other characteristics of the stream."



A HEALTHY BROWN TROUT IN A JOE ARMSTRONG NET.

Streambeds are best with a mix of boulders, cobble and gravel both for trout and the invertebrates they feed on. Riffles are food factories, and trout often move into them, especially in low light, to actively feed.

Water needs to be just right with cool temperatures, stable flow and plenty of oxygen. They are also colder than warm-water rivers in summer but warmer in winter. And food, trout need a lot of food and those just-right streams have it, but not like lakes and their drifting phyto-

plankton. Instead, trout streams rely on leaves and some of those plants Mundahl mentioned. That vegetation is eaten by the bugs, some shredding it, some eating finer particles.

How long Canfield has flowed is a mystery I'm not even going to try to unravel. But we know something of its human history. As glaciers began receding thousands of years ago, the Driftless area, which wasn't glaciated, began to be used by Native Americans. They began to come to the Root River watershed may-



ORANGE SCUDS ARE AN EXCELLENT CHOICE FOR CANFIELD CREEK.



be around 9500 BC and probably used Canfield for its food and who knows what else. The only archeological study I found of the Canfield area did discover artifacts in the surrounding area such as debris from making stone tools and a stone ax.

According to the DNR, “Some of the earliest investigations on this stream occurred in the early 1920s by Thaddeus Surber. Canfield Creek has had excellent hatches of assorted crane fly species.”

The DNR has stocked Canfield with brown, rainbow and brook trout, most recently the native Minnesota Driftless strain. In 1956, for example, 125 pounds of yearling rainbows and 105 pounds of browns were stocked, then all browns in 1958; the DNR even stocked 700 bull-heads there in 1952 but the water was too cold.

Some stream improvements were done in 1956 and 1957, then in 1987 with 545 feet of riprap and two large rocks. In 1984-88 “Improvement included bank stabilization, and installation of overhead bank cover structures and current deflectors.” Maybe that’s when the big flat limestone rocks were set atop those two poles where I love to fish.

About a half century ago, the DNR found Canfield had good natural reproduction and didn’t need more brown trout stocking. But some brook trout, probably the older Minnesota Wild strain, were stocked in Seven Springs Wildlife Management Area nearby and were soon found in Canfield.

Over the past few decades, DNR fisheries researchers began a serious look at genetics of brook trout in our streams. Because we have no DNA going back a

few centuries, we can’t say we still have native brookies. BUT, researchers found three pods of fish that had no genetics that could be tied to out-of-state hatcheries; they were dubbed heritage fish. Several years ago, some of those fish were shocked, stripped of eggs or milt, and we now have the Minnesota Driftless strain that is being stocked across the region, including Canfield.

When it came to fish in the stream, the data was fascinating. And confusing. For example, In 1987, there were 13 species in Canfield: brookies and browns, as well as slimy sculpins, white suckers, creek chubs, central stonerollers, red belly dace, common shiners, bigmouth shiners, brassy minnows, fathead minnows, Johnny darters, brook sticklebacks and green sunfish. But only five species were found in 1990, one in 1998 and three in 2009: browns, slimy sculpins and white suckers.

That means Canfield was getting better, not worse, because it was apparently getting too cold for the minnows.

Great. Sort of.

Those smaller species were super trout food for big fish. The top fish was 20 inches in 1948, 21.7 inches in 1971 but only 14 inches in 1990. But there were a lot more fish in the low teens. What also struck me was how the fish numbers and size changed, even within a smaller creek.

In May 11, 2009, the average size of fish in the test area at stream mile 0.23 near the Root was 0.34 pounds per fish but 0.45 pounds in mile 1.19 closer to the cave. Then things further puzzled me—pounds per acre were 212.54 in 0.23, with 1,263 adults per mile, but 89.94

pounds at 1.19 with 575 adults per mile. The index of biotic integrity, a way to gauge how healthy a stream is based on its fish and other parameters, was 80 in both stretches, which is good, but not excellent.

I was confused.

“Trout populations (and most things in nature) fluctuate, sometimes more in one watershed than the other,” Snook said. So many factors to consider. Land use (conservation land enrollments, corn to soybeans, hay, alfalfa, grazing, etc.), in-stream habitat changes, flooding quantity, flood timing, and season. So many possible contributing factors that could work in synergy.”

Here’s what he said about how things go right. “There is only so much habitat, some amount that was perfect and they grew really well because there was enough habitat, there was enough food and there was no flooding.”

But then he added some information about how things can go wrong: “One thing about Canfield Creek is that the watershed upslope of the main springs is mostly dry or seasonally wet. This alone could cause some flood timing issues. The bigger the watershed upstream/upslope of point A, the more opportunity you could have for those things to affect the trout population.”

So, that was the stream I stepped into last year. Though I fished solo, I wasn’t alone because I needed the gear and advice of several friends. But for a complete explanation, we need to know about Dr. Joaquin Sanchez-Sotelo, an expert shoulder surgeon at Mayo Clinic.

For decades, I was more of a bass fish-

erman—please, don’t cast aspersions at me for this character flaw—but about 15 years ago, my left shoulder became sore and Sanchez-Sotelo put in a new one. I continued more bass fishing, but also dabbled a bit in trout. Then, on a day about a decade ago, I went in for a routine checkup and the x-ray showed a messed-up left shoulder. You need another new one, he said, a reversal of ball and cup. Okay. But then he said I should forget about solo paddling Mississippi River backwaters in my new canoe. It will mess up your shoulder. A third new one several years ago convinced me to totally forget heavier bass fishing gear. Where should I fish? You know, those little trout streams are easy to walk and I can use lighter gear.

It was love at about fourth or fifth sight. I became enthralled with the joy and beauty of the small streams that I could wade, fish and never have to worry much about messing up a shoulder. When I caught a fish, I could hold the cool, sleek, elegant, almost iridescent brown that is a physical embodiment of the stream, both pulsating with life.

Of course, I soon needed more flies. I have hands of stone and no interest in tying. But I’m pretty good at baking, especially caramel rolls with my mom’s super caramel, or chocolate chip/raisin/pecan cookies. And it happens that Bartz loves those rolls and cookies, and he’s great at fly tying. So we trade—I say that I bake my trout flies. My favorite is the orange scud—when fishing’s a dud, put on an orange scud.

When I had the reversals, I lost some of my strength and movement in the left arm so it was hard for me to handle a regular net. Armstrong told me he loves woodworking and making nets, especially now that he’s retired. He made a long-handled one for me because my left arm isn’t strong enough to easily hold any net, so I have to change hands, putting my rod in the left hand and net in my right. Because the left shoulder won’t allow me to hold the rod high in the usual angler’s pose of rod high, net low, I wanted the longer net.

Stoeckel added that advice about the need for the indicator to move slower and Ray Ricketts corrected one of my multiple casting flaws.

So we have geology, the right water, the right conditions in the stream, a new shoulder and gear or advice from friends.

I’m the final piece of the trout-catching equation and one that is most erratic. I adore the small streams, I love catching trout but I’m still not good at it. I’m kind of okay at nymphing, so-so with streamers and poor with wet and dry flies. But sometimes, everything comes together—the water, the fly, the casting, the shoulder—everything, and I see the indicator dip, set the hook and I’m intimately connected to the stream, I feel the trout fight, run, jump. Time caresses. It’s the fish and I, in the ages-old connection of predator and prey. I feel good, I feel wonderful, I feel total.

*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.*



CANFIELD CREEK FLOWS FROM BIG SPRING IN FORESTVILLE/MYSTERY CAVE STATE PARK.



# PARTNERSHIPS

## FOSTER THE OUTDOORS MENTORSHIP PROGRAM UPDATE

By Kevin Wier

2025 was another great year for the Foster the Outdoors mentorship program. We paired a total of 12 youth with volunteer mentors and three of the youth this year were young ladies. We also had one youth from Big Brothers Big Sisters Twin Cities, which was a result of our partnership with our good friend Will Swanson and his terrific River City Fly Fishing program. Trout Unlimited as a whole is a great example of an organization that benefits from partnering with others and our MNTU mentorship program is no different. River City Fly Fishing is a Minnesota-based nonprofit education program connecting young people to the outdoors. They focus on under-served youth by partnering with organizations like Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Twin Cities. Since we began to partner a few years ago we have been able to share resources, ideas, instructors and both programs have grown stronger as a result. Another valuable partner for us is Laughing Trout Fly Fishing. In addition to hosting a fly tying evening every fall for our mentees, they also supply us with wonderful flies, thanks to Paul Johnson and, more recently, the Bug Bank with Randy Lage and Ron Seipp among others. Local fly shops such as The Fly Angler and Mend Provisions have been kind enough to host tours for our mentees and guardians.

Within MNTU, Amber Taylor and the education team have been wonderfully supportive of this program, as has the leadership of MNTU and TCTU. Of course, our most valuable partners are the incredible mentors that really make this program work. They are a wonder-

ful group of dedicated individuals who generously give the gift of their time and talent to young people seeking knowledge about fly fishing and the outdoors. In return, these mentors get to spend time on the water with mentees and their guardians. They remind us that we were all beginners at some point and their energy and genuine excitement is so refreshing. Here are a few fun examples of the types of memorable experiences that mentors are having.

Lee Stoe was paired with John and his dad Chris, who informed Lee on their first outing that he was actually allergic to fish. John was so eager to learn to fly fish that Chris was willing to risk a reaction in order to be there with his son as he experienced fly fishing for the first time. I'm happy to report that Chris and John both safely caught many fish, including some trout, with Lee's great instruction.

Yves Charron was paired with Johan and his dad Johan (that's not a typo). As it turns out, 12 year old Johan is a natural and was catching trout and posing with them like an old pro even on their first outing together at Hay Creek! Yves has described him as a fly fishing savant.

Going back a little further, there's the story of Steve Merchant who mentored Zander in 2022. Zander was so hooked after learning from Steve that he went on to attend a TU national youth camp in Washington State. This past May, he returned as a high schooler and volunteered to help us out at our mentor/mentee matchup event. Talk about coming full circle!



JOHAN WITH A NICE BROWN TROUT FROM HAY CREEK

There isn't enough space here to recount all of the other stories of great times had by mentors and mentees. It's a win-win relationship. Oftentimes, the mentor benefits just as much as the mentee/guardian pair from their outings together. We are definitely stronger and able to accomplish more when we work together. Please consider joining our wonderful group of mentors and making a difference in the life of a young person. Now more than ever, we need to engage the

next generation in fly fishing and the outdoors so that they will grow to love and protect our valuable natural resources.

*Kevin Wier is Co-Coordinator of the Foster the Outdoors program along with Rich Femling. To learn more about the program and becoming a mentor visit [mntu.org/mentoring](http://mntu.org/mentoring) or reach out to us directly: Kevin Wier 612-867-5768 Rich Femling 763-807-5878 [fostertheoutdoors@hotmail.com](mailto:fostertheoutdoors@hotmail.com)*

## 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](mailto:mark.abner@mntu.org)



# GREAT WATERS FLY FISHING EXPO

MARCH 13-15, 2026



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TO THE TROPICS



# GREAT WATERS FLY FISHING EXPO

## 2026 PROGRAMMING SCHEDULE

### FRIDAY, MARCH 13 • 1 PM - 7 PM



TIME	ROOM A - EXPO LEVEL	ROOM B - 2ND FLOOR USE ELEVATOR	HUTTON ARENA	FLY CASTING AREA EXPO LEVEL	CASTING POOL LOBBY LEVEL
1:30PM	FLY TYING DEMO: DRY FLIES  PAT DORSEY		ST. CROIX AND MISSISSIPPI RIVER SMALLMOUTH BASS FISHING  EVAN GRIGGS	OPEN CASTING WHEN ACCOMPANIED BY AN INSTRUCTOR OR EXHIBITOR	OPEN CASTING WHEN ACCOMPANIED BY AN INSTRUCTOR OR EXHIBITOR
2:30PM	BREAK		BREAK		
2:45PM	FLY FISHING FOR ARGENTINIAN DORADO  MAT WAGNER	TROUT STREAM ENTOMOLOGY  CALEB CORONA	MUSKY FISHING STRATEGIES  JOHN LAGOW	CASTING ACCURATELY  KALYN HOGGARD	
3:45PM	BREAK	BREAK	BREAK	OPEN CASTING WHEN ACCOMPANIED BY AN INSTRUCTOR OR EXHIBITOR	
4:00PM	FLY FISHING MN TROUT LAKES  CARL HAENSEL	STARTING FLY FISHING FOR WOMEN  McKENNA HULSLANDER	FLY FISHING WESTERN TAILWATERS  PAT DORSEY		SPEY CASTING ON THE WATER  PAUL SANDSTROM
5:00PM	BREAK		BREAK		OPEN CASTING WHEN ACCOMPANIED BY AN INSTRUCTOR OR EXHIBITOR
5:15PM	MOUSE MAGIC: MANITOBA TIGER TROUT  MIKE CORRIGAN		GUIDING AND PAINTING BRISTOL BAY, AK SINCE 1984  BOB WHITE		

### SATURDAY, MARCH 14 • 9 AM - 6 PM

TIME	ROOM A - EXPO LEVEL	ROOM B - 2ND FLOOR USE ELEVATOR	HUTTON ARENA	FLY CASTING AREA EXPO LEVEL	CASTING POOL LOBBY LEVEL
9:30AM	FLY TYING DEMO  MITCH ALBERS	FLY FISHING FOR BEGINNERS  EVAN GRIGGS	FISHING DRIES, NYMPHS AND STREAMERS  PAT DORSEY	FREE CASTING INSTRUCTION WITH FLY FISHERS INTERNATIONAL	MENDING THE LINE  KALYN HOGGARD
10:30AM	BREAK	BREAK	BREAK		
10:45AM	FLY FISHING MAINE  PAUL GUERNSEY	YOUTH PROGRAM: GET INTO FLY FISHING!  MONTA HAYNER & PETER GARRETSON	STEELHEAD FISHING THE WI BRULE RIVER  BRENT NOTBOHM		
11:45AM	BREAK	BREAK	BREAK	TRICK CASTING FOR THE DRIFTLESS KALYN HOGGARD	OPEN CASTING WHEN ACCOMPANIED BY AN INSTRUCTOR OR EXHIBITOR
12:00PM	FLY TYING DEMO: TAILWATER FLIES  PAT DORSEY	WI'S LAKE MICHIGAN TRIBUTARIES  CRAIG AMACKER	GUIDE TIPS FOR SMALLMOUTH BASS  KYLE ZEMPEL	FREE CASTING INSTRUCTION WITH FLY FISHERS INTERNATIONAL	SPEY CASTING ON THE WATER  PAUL SANDSTROM
1:00PM	BREAK	BREAK	BREAK		
1:15PM	FISHING MONTANA'S FLATHEAD WATERSHED  McKENNA HULSLANDER	10 THINGS I WISH I KNEW WHEN I STARTED FLY FISHING  SCOTT HARNESS	FISHING MN'S NORTH SHORE STREAMS  CARL HAENSEL	CASTING FROM A BOAT BOB BICKFORD	OPEN CASTING WHEN ACCOMPANIED BY AN INSTRUCTOR OR EXHIBITOR
2:15PM	BREAK	BREAK	BREAK		
2:30PM	INTRO TO TROPICAL SALWATER FISHING  CRAIG AMACKER	IMPLEMENTING EURO NYMPHING METHODS  ROB KIMM	EXPLORING THE DRIFTLESS  JOHN VAN VLIET		
3:30PM	BREAK	BREAK	BREAK	FREE CASTING INSTRUCTION WITH FLY FISHERS INTERNATIONAL	
3:45PM	RIVER SMALLMOUTH STRATEGIES  CALEB CORONA	IOWA TROUT STREAM FLY FISHING AND CONSERVATION  MIKE ROGERS	FLY FISHING THE SOUTH PLATTE RIVER  PAT DORSEY		



SUNDAY, MARCH 15 • 10 AM - 4 PM					
TIME	ROOM A - EXPO LEVEL	ROOM B - 2ND FLOOR USE ELEVATOR	HUTTON ARENA	FLY CASTING AREA EXPO LEVEL	CASTING POOL LOBBY LEVEL
10:30AM	FLY TYING: TIPS AND TRICKS FOR FOAM  SCOTT NORDBY	INTRO TO FLY FISHING  MCKENNA HULSLANDER	FISHING COLORADO'S BEST TROUT STREAMS  PAT DORSEY	FREE CASTING INSTRUCTION WITH FLY FISHERS INTERNATIONAL	SPEY CASTING ON THE WATER  PAUL SANDSTROM
11:30AM	11:30AM	BREAK	BREAK		BREAK
11:45AM	WRITERS PANEL DISCUSSION  HOSTED BY PAUL GUERNSEY	FLY FISHING FOR SMALLMOUTH BASS  JASON SWINGEN	HOW TO APPROACH DRIFTLESS TROUT STREAMS  CRAIG AMACKER		ROLL CASTING DEMO  EVAN GRIGGS
12:45AM	BREAK	BREAK	BREAK		OPEN CASTING WHEN ACCOMPANIED BY AN INSTRUCTOR OR EXHIBITOR
1:00PM	SW WISCONSIN FLY FISHING  KYLE ZEMPEL	BACKCOUNTRY FLY FISHING  TED HANSEN	PADDLING WITH GHOSTS: THE UPPER BRULE RIVER  DAMIAN WILMOT	CASTING ACCURATELY  KALYN HOGGARD	
2:00PM	BREAK		BREAK	FREE CASTING INSTRUCTION WITH FLY FISHERS INTERNATIONAL	
2:15PM	FLY TYING DEMO: SIGNATURE FLIES  PAT DORSEY		BOUNDARY WATERS AND QUETICO FLY FISHING  BRENT NOTBOHM		

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# MNTU CHAPTER NEWS

## Gitche Gumee Chapter

Greetings from the North Shore! It won't be long now until my favorite Minnesota get-together: The Great Waters Fly Expo! Hopefully you were able to get out on the water or, at the very least, stock up your fly boxes. GGTU had a great winter with some great events including Jamie Cotner presenting on trolling Lake Superior and Mitch Albers leading our Holiday Fly Tying Social at the Superior Fly Angler.

We learned about some of the projects and research from our local DNR during our January meeting with the Arrowhead Fly Fishers, and hosted the 2026 International Fly Fishing Film Festival (IF4), GGTU's annual fundraiser event with proceeds going towards our area's coldwater habitat projects and education programs. This is always one of our most attended events and gets everyone excited for some great open water fishing!

There won't be a March meeting since many members will be down at the Expo, but we will again be hosting the State of the Steelhead on April 9 at 7 p.m. at the University of MN Duluth (Montague Hall 70). This is a great time to learn about the current state of our local North Shore steelhead fishery. We hope to see you there!

We have many conservation updates and ongoing projects on Keene Creek, Amity Creek, Sucker River, French River, and Stewart River, primarily planting and maintaining trees. We are planning river maintenance projects throughout the spring and summer.

Paddle the Pads 2026 planning is in progress. If this is an event you have attended or are interested in learning more please email [githegumee.tu@gmail.com](mailto:githegumee.tu@gmail.com), follow us on Facebook and join our email list.

All details about GGTU's activities will be shared on our Facebook page ([facebook.com/GitcheGumeeTU](https://facebook.com/GitcheGumeeTU)) and through email. If you would like to join GGTU's email list please send us an email at [githegumee.tu@gmail.com](mailto:githegumee.tu@gmail.com)

Jason Swingen

## Headwaters Chapter

As the waters freeze over in the Headwaters Chapter region, our focus shifts from the stream to the classroom. While our rods are put away, our work is busier than ever, centered on Trout in the Classroom (TIC) and our thriving community fly tying sessions.

The Great Egg Rescue

The winter season started with a challenge. Our first



THE GITCHE GUMEE CHAPTER HELD A SUCCESSFUL IF4 EVENT RAISING FUNDS FOR CONSERVATION WITH THE ARROWHEAD FLYFISHERS IN DULUTH.

delivery of trout eggs in December faced a shipping delay, resulting in the entire batch freezing. Refusing to let the program stall, Amber quickly coordinated a replacement order. To ensure history didn't repeat itself, our local TIC Coordinator Jim personally drove to Brainerd to intercept the new batch, preventing another overnight stay on a cold delivery truck.

Thanks to that extra mile (literally), we are happy to report that all December and January egg deliveries were successful. Our classrooms are now buzzing with life.

**Fly Tying: A Regional Draw**  
Our community fly tying sessions have taken off with incredible momentum. To meet the high demand from beginners, we've increased our schedule to nearly every week. The draw is significant—we've welcomed participants traveling over two hours from as far as Fargo and International Falls just to tie with us in Bemidji.

**A Massive Reach with a Lean Team**  
The Headwaters Chapter covers the largest geographic area in the state, and we are committed to serving as many communities as possible despite our small membership base. Our recent and upcoming outreach includes:

December: Hands-on tying with students at Trek North School.  
February: Teaching at the Forest History Center in Grand Rapids.  
Year-round: Impactful events in International Falls, Grand Rapids, Alexandria, and the Twin Cities.

**How You Can Help: Our Two Greatest Needs**

To sustain this momentum and continue serving the youth in our region, we are asking for your support in two critical areas:

**1. Local "Point of Contact" Volunteers:**  
Because our territory is so vast, we need members in our outlying major towns to serve as local points of contact. You don't need to do it all—you just need to

be our "eyes and ears" and help us coordinate local events so we can better serve your specific community.

**2. The Transportation Gap:** The biggest barrier to getting kids outside is the cost of the bus. It currently costs roughly \$500 per bus to bring students to a TIC or youth event. In Bemidji alone, we are looking at a need for 10 to 12 buses this year. Neither the schools nor our chapter currently have the budget to cover these \$6,000 in transportation costs. We are looking for donors to help us fill this gap. Interested in volunteering or contributing to the Transportation Fund? Please reach out to me at [kris@tu642.org](mailto:kris@tu642.org). Every dollar stays local and goes directly toward getting a student to the water.

Kris Williams

## Hiawatha Chapter

The big, big news from Hiawatha TU is that Christie and Tom Atwell volunteered to bring the International Fly Fishing Film Festival to Rochester with a date of March 19. It will be held at Pop's Art Theater from 6 to 9 p.m. and feature nearly a dozen short films from

around the world.

We will have a lot more details in a few weeks but we're thinking of trying to get some sponsors too. Mostly, we just want to have a good time and get our name out there more. And see some really good short films.

Hiawatha TU's fall activities began with an October 11 pick up of trash along US 52 south of Chatfield when six members spiffed up two miles of the highway. We also do a bigger clean up in spring when the highway tends to need it more. This time, we didn't fill any of our six bags.

On Nov. 3, we had two authors speak with Bob Luck speaking via Zoom about his book "Woolly Buggers Don't Count: Trout Fishing Adventures in the Driftless Area." He called it a love letter to the Driftless and recounts many of his adventures in the SE. Mike McNeilus of Lanesboro photographed and wrote a coffee table book called "Fish of the Root River" and it has great shots of 100 fish that are common, or uncommon, in the Root. He caught them all, from those 1- to 2-inches long to lake sturgeon. What was fascinating was that he has been lifelisting fish across the country with about 500 thus far out of about 1,000. "The diversity is amazing," he said. He's also into microfishing and has ways to



VAUGHN SNOOK OF THE MN DNR PRESENTED TO THE HIAWATHA CHAPTER IN JANUARY. PICTURED ARE BOOK TROUT AGED ONE, TWO AND THREE YEARS OLD.



# MNTU CHAPTER NEWS



catch those tiny fish with very light line, tiny hooks and long rods. “Each species has very specific feeding methods,” he said. The Root is actually a varied river beginning in the flat farmlands of eastern Mower County and going through the karst into the alluvial plains farther down past Whalan.

The December gathering was the annual holiday party with food, fun and some stories told and retold.

Vaughn Snook, assistant DNR fisheries manager in Lanesboro, spoke about the condition of our fisheries on Jan. 5.

A few highlights from the program: Bear Creek in Winona County had 864.7 pounds of fish per acre and that included some brook trout.

A branch of Rollingstone Creek had 111.27 biomass pounds per acre of brook trout. Another section had 71.97. But some nearby streams had zero brookies.

One neat picture was of what brook trout look like at one, two and three years of age.

He put out 45 temperature loggers on 19 streams and found temperatures don’t vary much at all from year to year because they are mostly spring-fed.

He encouraged us to get the Solocator app on our phones. According to the web, “Solocator is a GPS camera app designed for fieldwork, construction, and inspection, allowing users to overlay, stamp, and export photos with crucial data like GPS location, compass direction, altitude, date, and time.”

He also encouraged us to have the number of the state duty officer on our phones. It’s 1-800-422-0798 and it’s for reporting “a threat to human health or our natural resources.”

Finally, he suggested we use AMA and trout finders on the DNR site.

John Weiss

## Twin Cities Chapter

As a new year begins, it is important to remember what we accomplished as a chapter in 2025. In 2026 we will continue moving ahead and supporting the Trout Unlimited mission: to conserve, protect, and restore coldwater fisheries and their watersheds. The TCTU chapter members accomplished many things in the areas of stream habitat, youth education, advocacy, and engagement.

**Habitat:**  
Volunteers had a HUGE impact on TCTU’s 2025 habitat efforts and had a positive impact on our coldwater streams and the wild places we all love.

Because of your generosity of time, here’s what TCTU volunteers accom-

- plished:
- Donated 826 hours (that’s 103 eight-hour days)!
  - Worked at 29 different habitat events!
  - Positively impacted 11 streams!
  - Partnered with 12 different organizations for habitat work!

**Streamkeepers:**  
The TCTU streamkeepers team monitored water quality indicators such as salt levels, temperature, and water clarity on nine Minnesota streams: Belle Creek, Brown’s Creek, Eagle Creek, Hay Creek, Ike’s/ Mall of America Creek, Little Cannon River, South Branch Vermillion, South Branch Whitewater, and Trout Brook.

**Youth Education:**  
Several members continued their support of the TIC program with volunteering for egg delivery, fly fishing casting lessons, and supporting the various fishing activities around the Twin Cities metro.

TCTU supported an Eagle Scout project consisting of keeping pollutants out of the Vermillion River. The project involved spray-painting stencil messages on storm drains as a reminder that storm drains flow into streams. This raises awareness to community members, students, and to us about the importance of keeping pollutants out of our waterways.

**Advocacy:**  
TCTU continues to monitor and voice our concerns when it comes to regulations or actions that are considered detrimental to our Minnesota streams such as neonic-coated seeds affecting insects in our streams.

**Engagement:**  
We continued to engage our membership through newsletters, chapter meetings, outings, volunteer activities, and various committees.

Thank you to all of our members for your contributions to TCTU! Let’s make the goal in 2026 to meet or exceed our impact from last year!

Yves Charron

## Win-Cres Chapter

Win-Cres reaffirmed its participation with the Goodhue Fishing Club. President Shepard will contact Robbie Ebner, the event organizer, confirming our presence at their school on Saturday, March 21, and our hosting their club in Rushford for a day of fishing on April 6.

President Chuck Shepard has tried on multiple occasions to contact the owners of the uneased section of Garvin Brook where a great deal of Japanese Knotweed has been found. This would be a follow-up to the October, 2024 meeting with the owners. Win-Cres would like additional discussions to confirm plans for dealing



HEADWATERS VOLUNTEERS ASSISTED WITH THE TROUT IN THE CLASSROOM EGG DELIVERY DAY.

with this invasive menace.

Thank you to Paul Girtler for meeting with a Fastenal representative and securing a check for \$1,500 to be used only in support of Trout in the Classroom (TIC). Rushford-Peterson High School and Winona Middle School are currently involved in providing TIC to students in our corner of the state.

Dusty Hoffman will provide a fly tying lesson at Two Fathoms brewery in Winona on Tuesdays.

Thank you to Russell Zweirs and Mark Reisetter

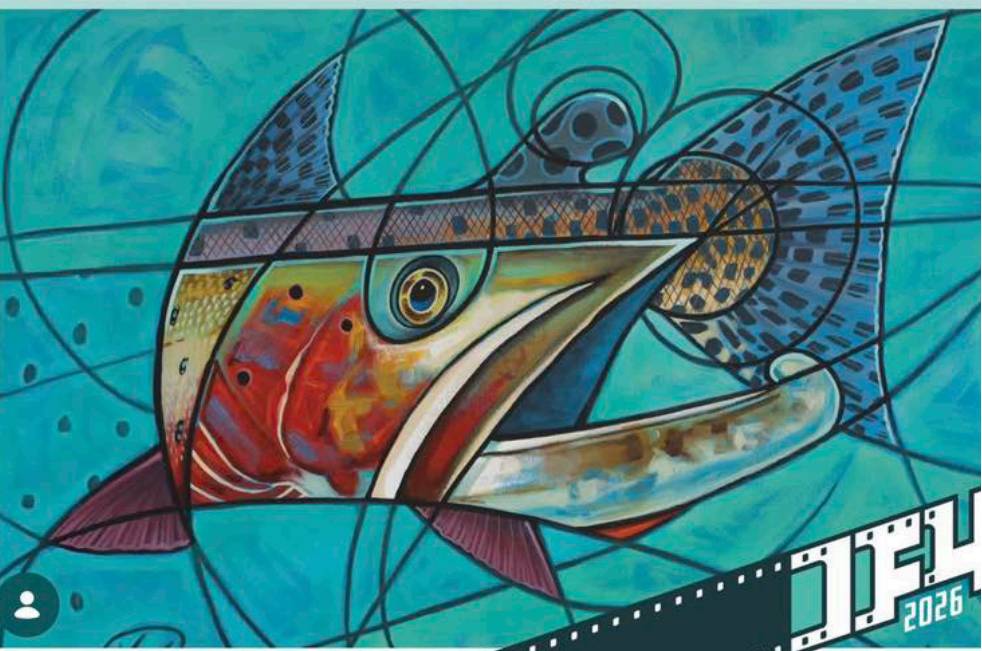
Doug Dieterman for their December 3 membership presentation. There were 29 attendees!

The January meeting featured Christine Johnson, the Whitewater WMA Manager. Upcoming membership meetings will be February 25, and March 25. In February Vaughn Snook, DNR Assistant Fisheries Supervisor, will be our speaker. The March 25 speaker will be Dr. Dylan Blumentritt of WSU. All meetings will be held at Sobieski Lodge with a social hour/meal at 6:00 p.m. and a 7:00 p.m. presentation.

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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.

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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](http://mntu.org) or mail in this form to receive the next issue arriving in February!

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# SELECT POETRY

## Fishing Friends By Larry Gavin

Down through the broken water  
they swarm like they are broken too.  
They know this territory as a second home.  
I run into them in the produce aisle,  
and we recognize each other by the stories  
we have heard. In deep pools, they rest.  
They are getting on in years.  
Their fate's uncertain.

At the tail of that pool, once again,  
they mill about. They are the stars  
we wish we were. Fishing friends.  
I'm joined with them like I'm joined  
with the words flooding down  
this page.

I would not hesitate  
to give them money, let them take my car.  
I would patch their waders, or give  
them a leader or the fly that seemed  
to be working that day.

We never say the word love except  
in connection with the trout we love,  
but not in connection with each  
other. That special, unspoken  
magic that makes them  
fishing friends.

*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](http://www.reddragonflypress.org)*



MITCH ALBERS WAS THE GUEST FLY TYER AT THE GITCHE GUMEE CHAPTER'S WINTER FLY TYING PARTY.