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Saving "No" to Neonicotinoids

Tying the Elk Hair Caddis

Duluth's Tischer Creek Fish Kill

Artist Profile: Taylor Berman

Rethinking Trout Harvest in SE MN

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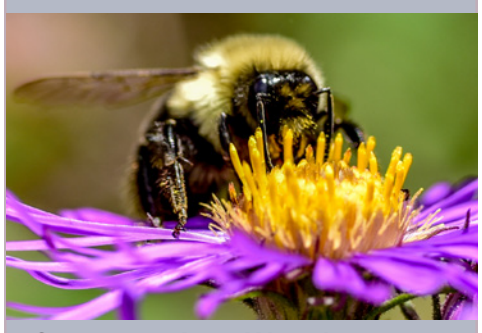

Check out John Weiss' article on the dangers of Neonicotinoids on Page 4.

On The Cover

An angler fishes a habitat-improved section of Winnebago Creek in Houston County near the Iowa border. Carl Haensel photo

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Editor's Angle

Wild Trout

By Jade Thomason, Editor

Spring comes slow to the Northwoods and leaves are new along the North Shore. In mid-May I still find lingering ice chunks in cold north-facing valleys on Lake Superior tributaries and I grow impatient waiting for the warblers. I took a long weekend to the Driftless recently and it felt like skipping forward in time. Hot days, ample blooms, ice cream and glistening wild trout transported me to a summer world.

We fished our favorites, habitat-improved sections of pastoral valleys loaded with healthy brown trout, and some new-to-me streams after a longer hike with quality birding. Native brook trout in good numbers were a surprising and welcome find. Intrepid survivors, Driftless brookies should be treasured wherever they are found. Check out habitat director Jenny Biederman's article on Page 14 for a thoughtful take on brown trout harvest in southeast Minnesota. Catch-and-release ethics run deep in the conservation and fly fishing communities, and it's useful to take a deeper look into this ethos. Most Driftless streams are highly productive and Jenny and the MN DNR explore the complexities of brown trout population dynamics and the effects on native brook trout.

Brook trout on the low-nutrient North Shore are even scrappier, and secrets to their survival may lay in the genetics of individual populations. MNTU's new communications director Andee Erickson wrote a deep-dive into the Tischer Creek fish kill that occurred in August of 2024. She explains what happened and, even more importantly, the distinct actions that the City of Duluth and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency are taking to minimize such events in the future. Beautiful and impressively-sized brook trout ply the waters that run through Duluth, and we must keep them protected from the urban environment surrounding their homes.

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Volunteers from the Hiawatha and Twin Cities Chapters worked together to remove an astonishing 107 tires from Mazeppa Creek in preparation for habitat improvement work.

Minnesota Council Update

Plan to Attend TU's CX3 in Minneapolis

By Mike Madigan, Minnesota Council of TU Chair

April, May, and June are my favorite months to fish in Minnesota and Wisconsin. Superior's steelhead and lake-run browns are entering the tributaries. As the rivers warm, stoneflies, mayflies, and caddis become active and begin to hatch. Trout begin looking up in earnest. And marsh marigolds, trillium, and other flowers color the stream sides and forest floors. As an added plus, your guides don't freeze (at least most days).

The end of May also marks the adjournment of the Minnesota legislature. While there was no action in this closely divided legislature on nitrate or neonicotinoid pollution, MNTU's staff successfully lobbied for passage of the Omnibus Outdoor Heritage Fund, Legacy and Lands Bill. The Legacy Amendment passed by voters in 2008 increased the state sales tax by three-eighths of 1% from July 1, 2009 until 2034. The 2026 Omnibus Outdoor Heritage Fund, Legacy and Lands Bill appropriated $191.1 million from the Outdoor Heritage Fund to numerous projects that will restore, protect, and enhance Minnesota's wetlands, prairies, forests, and habitat for fish, game, and wildlife. Funding for MNTU to continue its statewide program of trout stream restorations is included. Executive Director John Lenczewski has provided more detail in his column.

Finally, from September 23 to 27, 2026 the Twin Cities will host Trout Unlimited National's CX3 event, which is TU's largest annual meeting. The event features renown speakers and presenters, outdoor activities, fishing excursions, a conservation tour, a gear auction, and casting lessons. It provides Minnesotans with the opportunity to share our love of fishing with visiting TU members and to showcase the state's natural beauty and 3,800 miles of trout streams. It is also an opportunity to demonstrate how the engagement of MNTU, chapters, and members have successfully conserved and protected Minnesota's environment and, specifically, coldwater ecosystems.

I encourage all MNTU members to attend, welcome TU members from around

the country to Minnesota, and volunteer at the event. TU needs our support and assistance in many ways. Minnesota is known for its high level of civic engagement and volunteerism. Let's demonstrate at CX3 why we deserve those accolades. The MNTU website contains information on volunteer opportunities. I encourage you to check it out and lend a hand. Many thanks and tight lines!

From the Executive Director

Where's my favorite place to fish? Yep.

By John Lenczewski, MNTU Executive Director

May is a great time to be a trout angler in Minnesota and the Midwest. We are blessed with a diverse mix of great fisheries that are all hitting their stride by mid-May. Wild browns in the Driftless corner are on a tear, bright steelhead are running the run-off-swollen rivers on the North Shore, native brookies across the northern half of the state are truly active at last now that water temperatures have reached the upper 40s, and lake trout are chasing bait in the shallows as season opens on BWCAW lakes. So many options, all of them good.

My fishing time is at a premium in the spring as activities at the State Capitol keep me closer to home more often than I would prefer. But I do my best to take advantage of opportunities when a meeting or stream design walk leaves me in trout country with a few hours before I need to make the long, late drive home. A few weeks ago I found myself wading a favorite North Shore river prospecting for fresh steelhead up from the Lake. It was a beautiful day, with a few fish to hand and lots of conversations with many of the "regulars" I have gotten to know over the years. A DNR creel clerk stopped by and asked if I knew some kid from LeSuer, Minnesota. I did–a good friend's son. Small world. He ran me through the standard questions, such as "How would you rate the fishing on a scale of 1 to 5 . . . ?"

Then as he was leaving, he asked, "So where do you like fishing more, the North Shore or the Driftless?" I did not answer "Yep," but I should have. The fact is, I cannot get enough of either area. Nor of little brookie streams, or BWCAW lakes, or remaining Metro gems, or dozens of other places around the state. They are all my favorite places. I encourage everyone to explore some new water this season.

The 2026 legislative session just wrapped up and few significant bills passed both the House and Senate to become law. But this was expected in our equally divided legislature. While no really good policy was adopted, the flip

side is that no truly bad policy passed either. Among the bright spots were the passage of bills appropriating dollars from two funds dedicated to the environment and natural resources: the Environment & Natural Resources Trust Fund (lottery dollars) and Outdoor Heritage Fund (OHF). The OHF bill provides funding for MNTU to continue stream habitat restoration around the state. The calls of many members helped get that bill passed on the final day of session. Thanks to all who made a call or sent an email.

MINNESOTA TROUT UNLIMITED

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Saying "No" to Neonicotinoids

Risks to Ecosystems and Humans

By John Weiss

Until a year ago, neonicotinoids, the most commonly used insecticide in the world, were something I heard about, read about and wrote about because of its dangers to other insects and people, but it wasn't really personal. Then, while turkey hunting along the North Branch of the Root River last spring, Joe Deden sent me a short video of fruit blossoms without any pollinating bees. The founder and first director of Eagle Bluff Environmental Learning Center near Lanesboro had me wondering more about how neonics affect me directly. I looked at the blossoms next to me and also noticed no bees, no sounds.

Neonics?

Certainly such a tiny thing was no proof of any chemical problems. But I wondered.

And thus began me looking deeper, watching a fascinating 2026 Neonic Forum and, finally, attending a small rally in St. Paul to call on Minnesota legislators to pass a bill that would severely restrict neonics for farming and around our towns.

The five main neonics have tongue-twisting names of imidacloprid, thiamethoxam, clothianidin, acetamiprid and dinotefuran, but, from what I learned, they add up to a lot of trouble. I began looking more under rocks of my favorite trout streams and, if they didn't have a lot of mayflies or caddis, wondered if neonics were to blame? When I didn't find many butterflies in the midsummer count around a Rochester flood-control reservoir, was I seeing more evidence of neonics? When I read that the massive hatches of large mayflies on the Mississippi River have dropped around 50 percent, I wondered if neonics were partly responsible.

Neonics were developed about 35 years ago because they were seen as a much safer alternative to the insecticides being used. They were also seen as less harmful to mammals.

Bayer, a maker of several of them, says: "To this end, comprehensive studies conducted under realistic field conditions have shown that residues of neonicotinoids in the flowers of seed-treated crops are clearly below the levels that could cause adverse effects on honeybee colonies. Neonicotinoids, like all pesticides, are highly regulated, and all Bayer products undergo extensive testing to ensure they don't have unacceptable adverse effects on non-target insects and the environment."

The surprising part of them, to me, is that they don't do much good for farmers, according to many sources. The federal National Library of Medicine's National Center for Biotechnology Information states: "Only approximately 5% of the neonicotinoid active ingredient is taken up by crop plants and most instead disperses into the wider environment. Since the mid-2000s, several studies have raised concerns that neonicotinoids may be having a negative effect on non-target organisms, in particular on honeybees and bumblebees."

Rarely do they pay for themselves with better crops; in fact, farmers can even lose money. But they are applied to nearly every kernel of seed corn and most soybean seeds; because of a federal law, they can't be regulated when they are used that way. But it seems that farmers look at neonics as a form of insurance, a prophylactic.

A growing number of people and groups, however, are saying "no" to neonics.

The Xerces Society which advocates for invertebrate conservation reports: "An emerging threat to our waterways is neonicotinoid contamination. Although introduced with the premise of being less harmful to humans and wildlife than older insecticides, neonicotinoids, which are readily transported to surface water, are putting aquatic invertebrates that form the foundation of thriving rivers and streams at risk."

It adds: "Extremely concerning is the prolific inclusion of these insecticides in home garden products. Home garden products containing neonicotinoids can legally be applied in far greater concentrations in gardens than they can be on farms–sometimes at concentrations as much as 120 times as great which increases the risk to pollinators."

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) also sees potential problems with them. Two of the five kinds of neonics—clothianidin and imidacloprid—are now on the state's list of five surface water pesticides of concern. The five made up 95 to 97 percent of pesticides detected over reference values, according to the MDA's 2022 Water Quality Monitoring Report.

One of them, clothianidin, shows up most in southeast Minnesota—49 percent in one test, 61 percent in another; imidacloroprid shows up most in urban areas because it's used in so many household pest killers. A 2022 study in the Root River watershed found clothianidin in all 19 samples; 18 were above the federal chronic benchmark. They are often found in parts per trillion so they aren't easy to detect.

Experts worry that butterflies are being harmed when they feed off plants treated with neonicotinoids.

That is what worries Deden. He said he had many flowering trees when he lived at Eagle Bluff. "You could be sitting in this house and the tree was out there and you could hear pollinators, it was like almost a chainsaw running, there were so many bees up in those trees, pollinating."

But last spring, he was walking in Lanesboro and there were a few apple and horse chestnut trees. "Normally, you would hear bees everywhere, and there were maybe 10 where there would be thousands in the past. Where were the pollinators?" After all, pollinators help produce about a third of all the food humans eat, he said.

He said it's up to the younger generation to take up this fight. He's concentrating on getting a better pollinator prairie around his home. "I'm tired of fighting those battles. I don't think anyone is going to win against the agriculture lobby," he said.

Deden concluded: "I feel so sorry for our children and grandchildren."

The Jan. 15 Neonic Forum was presented by the University of Minnesota Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships. Speakers emphasized that neonics aren't usually necessary because little is taken up by the plants. One takeaway was "[Treated seeds] have limited effectiveness against major corn and soybean pests, providing limited yield benefits." The Minnesota Department of Agriculture, instead, recommends using integrated pest management, saving treated seeds for "high-risk scenarios," and rotating insecticide classes. Limit spills and use proper disposal.

While many seeds are already treated, it's possible to find seeds without treatments, especially if ordering early, one speaker said.

Potential threats to human health were

Those wanting to greatly reduce use of neonics march to the State Capitol March 9, 2026.

particularly troublesome. Dr. Vicki Mourikes, a veterinarian with a doctorate in reproductive toxicology, said we get neonics from contaminated food, water and contact with pets. Neonics were promoted as being safe for humans because they only affect insects but metabolites neonics, which are produced from neonics, can pass to humans, especially pregnant women and young children, she said. More than 95 percent of women have them, especially Hispanic women, she said. They harm us by disrupting cell-to-cell communications, she said.

Neonics have been associated with problems of the nervous, metabolic and reproductive systems, she said.

On March 9, about three dozen members of several outdoors and environmental groups along with several high school students and teachers marched to the State Capitol so we could push legislation that would severely restrict the use of neonics.

We all agreed that neonics, as they are commonly called, are unnecessary for most farming and are bad overall because of the damage the commonly-used pesticides do to all kinds of wildlife, fish and humans, including pollinators such as bees and butterflies, as well as mayflies and other trout-stream bugs.

We also had to deal with a dose of reality. We found that it often takes years to get such bills into law, that state leaders this year are dealing with mega-issues such as the fraud being found in some programs. Also, the House is divided evenly between Republicans and Democrats, while the Senate is 34-33 with the Democrats in the lead. Because of that, controversial bills such as ours face a nearly impossible hurdle. But similar bills to ours did get a hearing in the Senate last year and ours got a hearing March 11 in the House. So there was at least a bit of hope.

Willa Childress of the Pesticide Action & Agroecology Network said she grew up on farms and said farmers need advocates to speak out against neonics because they are stuck on the treadmill of neonic dependence. “They aren’t actually helping farmers,” she said. “They are overpaying for something that isn't helping them.” The bill would only allow neonics to be used in special circumstances.

From the standpoint of trout and trout streams, Monta Hayner, who guides out of the Driftless Fly Fishing Company in Preston, said “We have seen a decrease in insects hatching for a number of years now. It has been reported by other anglers and myself.” Both mayflies and caddis are decreasing, “they are more sporadic,” she said. “When there is a hatch it’s like here and here and here instead of a bunch.”

Joe Deden in his home on the outskirts of Lanesboro talks about problems with neonics.

Erin Rupp with Pollinate Minnesota said honey bee losses were once around 11 percent but are now around 65 percent. “To be an insect these days is pretty hard,” she said. Neonics get away from the corn or soybean plants and get into the ones that bees and other insects eat, she said.

At a rally in the Capitol, Dr. Dawn Wheeler, a retired University of Minnesota professor in nephrology and internal medicine, said neonics can cross over into humans. “There is a lot of concern about development of the human brain,” she said. Pregnant women who are exposed to neonics had babies with lower birth weights and smaller brains.

“The experiment is on, we are part of it, it’s terrifying,” she said. If you’re pregnant, don’t go near neonics, she said.

A version of this article was published in the Root River Current and is being used with permission of the new online magazine covering much of the SE MN Driftless.

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.

Duluth's Tischer Creek fish kill

Lessons Learned

By Andee Erickson, MNTU Communications Director

A dead brook trout lies in Tischer Creek in Duluth after the release of chloramine-treated drinking water into the stream. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency.

DULUTH - Prior to the July 2024 fish kill in Duluth's Tischer Creek, the release of drinking water into storm sewer systems was generally considered to be not impactful.

That changed after the City of Duluth released 1.7 million gallons of chloramine-treated drinking water from a Woodland neighborhood reservoir. For over 15 hours the water drained into Tischer Creek, killing 1,600 brook trout and hundreds of other fish, while causing extensive harm to other aquatic organisms and the greater ecosystem of the creek.

The city has since reached a settlement agreement with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) in which Duluth is responsible for investing $190,000 in estimated damage into restoration projects chosen by state agencies. City staff have also created and implemented new standard operating procedures to prevent future fish kills.

"Although it's a really unfortunate event, we're trying to turn this into an opportunity to learn from and to do better from," said Ryan Granlund, the City of Duluth's utility programs coordinator and trout angler. "I think that Duluth will definitely do better with these operational changes. We've learned a lot, but also the other water resource professionals around here have learned a lot."

How the Fish Kill Happened

Duluth has used chloramine—a stabilized form of chlorine mixed with ammonia—to treat its drinking water for decades. Chlorine is toxic to trout at 0.038 ppm. The chlorine level in the treated water at the time of the fish kill was 1.6 ppm, a normal level for drinking water and more than lethal to trout.

City staff drained the in-ground reservoir for inspection and maintenance not knowing the threat the water posed to the receiving water's ecosystem. The reservoir was built over 100 years ago and had likely never been drained before 2024, according to the city's knowledge. It was designed to drain into storm sewer systems and then into receiving waters, like Tischer Creek.

"We knew the makeup of the system was connected to the storm sewer. I don't think the vulnerability was on our radar," Granlund said. "This is just potable water. Safe to drink, safe to consume. So a lot of folks were just treating it as that."

To make matters worse, Tischer Creek's water levels were low at the time of the fish kill, though it's unclear if higher stream levels would have diluted the treated drinking water enough to avoid ecological damage. The reservoir drained at a flow rate of 10.7 cubic feet per second, while the stream was flowing at a rate of 0.19 cubic feet per second at the time of release.

Two miles of the stream were impacted by the event.

What's Changed Since the Fish Kill

With 16 designated trout streams running through the city along with aged, in-ground water systems, risks remain when moving chloramine-treated water through the city.

Duluth's new set of standard operating procedures are now part of its Stormwater Pollution Prevention Program (SWPPP) regulated by the MPCA. Minnesota communities that operate separate storm sewer systems are required to follow a SWPPP in order to reduce pollutants from entering lakes, rivers and wetlands through storm sewer systems.

"It's novel because there are no other cities that have this," Granlund said of the city's new operating procedures. "There is no provision in there to have to have some sort of system for potable water draining to a storm sewer."

Duluth's new procedures include:

- A tag-and-lock system on all reservoir drains and valves to ensure staff can't operate one without knowing it needs a discharge plan
- Adding dechlorinating diffusers to all hydrant flushing
- Noting critical valves and watersheds in the city's mapping of the system
- Testing water downstream, upstream and at the site of suspected leaks
- More training for water system operators
- Reporting any unplanned releases, no matter how small, and water main breaks to the MPCA

Reporting unplanned releases and water main breaks to the MPCA is a way for the city to track patterns in its infrastructure in order to identify a larger problem before it happens, said MPCA water ecologist, Jeff Jasperson.

In the fall of 2025, about a year after the Tischer Creek fish kill, a water main break discharged treated drinking water into another one of Duluth's designated trout streams. This time Coffee Creek near Skyline Parkway.

The state documented around 45 dead brook trout and another 45 living brook trout that appeared to be in good condition. "I think those incidents have probably happened more than we've ever known and since Tischer Creek happened. I think the worry is out and the understanding of it is out," Jasperson said. "The important part is now we understand this better and the process is much, much better."

Jasperson said the MPCA and the city have become more aware of drinking-water infrastructure as potential pollution sources to trout streams.

For years, an underground water main leak has been slowly flowing into Tischer Creek that Jasperson said was thought to be a natural groundwater spring. This past winter Granlund found in the city's utility data that a 100-year-old pipe was underground in the same area. The MPCA collected water samples and confirmed that treated drinking water had been leaking from the pipe and into the creek. The city is obtaining permits to repair the water main this summer.

"Those are the types of things we're catching now that we're spending more time looking around downstream,"

Tischer Creek, one of Duluth's 16 designated trout streams, is known for its rocky gorges and waterfalls.

Granlund said. “Now when we have a leak that we can control, we’re jumping on it.”

The fish kill has highlighted the need to do a better job inspecting existing water infrastructure, Jasperson said.

“I think this is a super unique case nationwide. I’ve never heard of anything like this happening,” Jasperson said of the Tischer Creek fish kill.

He’s hopeful that Duluth can leverage what it’s learned to secure grant funding for water system upgrades, though the city and state have yet to develop a grant-application plan.

MNTU did not get a response from the MPCA’s municipal stormwater team about whether the knowledge gained from the Tischer Creek fish kill has informed water management in other municipalities with designated trout streams.

Rebuilding an Ecosystem

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) estimates it will take eight years for brook trout to make a full recovery in Tischer Creek.

Dan Wilfond, DNR Duluth Area Fisheries Supervisor, said there is no plan to restock brook trout.

“The primary reason for that is the lack of a genetic source similar to what we have in Tischer Creek,” Wilfond said. “We didn’t want to disrupt the genetics that may have evolved to this urban environment.”

And since the entire ecosystem was wiped out, including the brook trouts’ food source, Wilfond said they didn’t want to restock the stream before the macroinvertebrates have had a chance to recover.

Brook trout in the west branch of Tischer Creek were not affected and Wilfond is optimistic they will quickly repopulate the rest of the stream as it naturally recovers.

The city’s settlement agreement with the state includes a $12,000 fine and $190,000 for restoration.

Proposed projects include:

- $50,000 for a fishing program at the Hartley Nature Center in Duluth that will teach people about the importance of native fish, particularly brook trout.
- $40,000 for the removal of a low-head dam on Tischer Creek to improve habitat connectivity for fish.
- $80,000 for a project that has yet to be chosen. One potential option is habitat improvement work on a tributary stream of Tischer Creek, near Hartley Nature Center.

Dead brook trout in Tischer Creek in Duluth in 2024.
Photo courtesy of Carson Spohn.

“It's an unfortunate situation for sure, but we're hopeful we’ll be able to turn this into a positive and get some projects done we wouldn't have been able to do,” Wilfond said. “This is quite the resource. It's worth investing our time and resources into this brook trout fishery.”

A Reverence for Rivers

Book Review

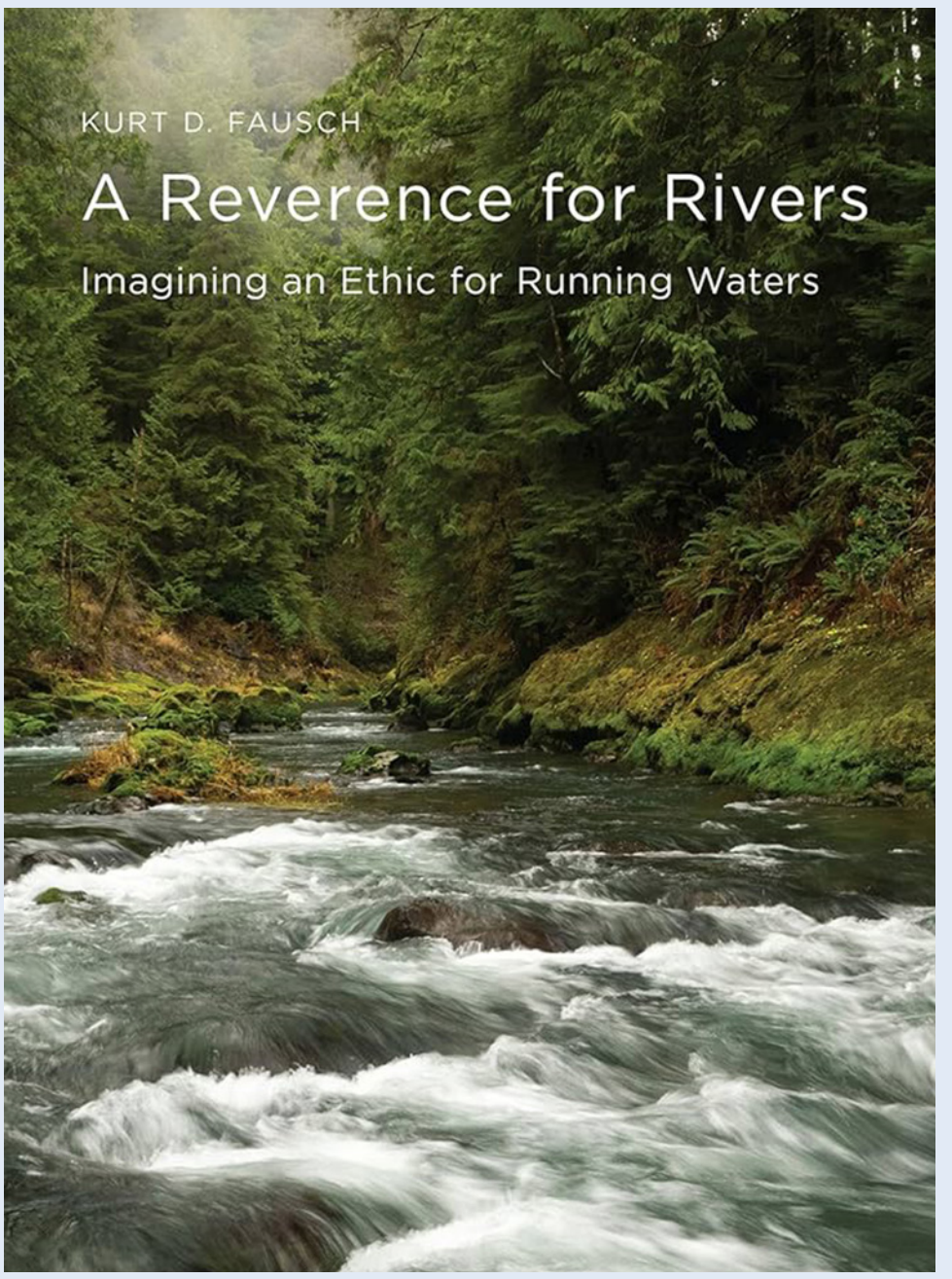
By Carl Haensel

I came to read *A Reverence for Rivers* due to the wandering travels of the author Kurt D. Fausch. He had been connecting with the Minnesota North Shore and one of my favorite personal fish, the coaster brook trout. Deep in the book, Kurt muses over the successful spawning of coaster brook trout on the far upper shore, faced with challenges of geology, weather and climate. As he related it to me, coasters are just one of many imperiled species that we can, through their lives and trials, better understand the rivers they inhabit. Kurt should know. He is a professor emeritus at Colorado State University in the Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Conservation Biology (FWCB) where he taught and conducted research for 35 years. He taught courses on topics including “Conservation of Fish in Aquatic Ecosystems” and researched a wide range of issues such as the effects of non-native trout on native trout and stream-riparian linkages.

This book is a highlight of both his fishing and travels around the world, as well as his deep insight from a career in teasing apart the nuances of aquatic ecosystems. His curiosity and drive to explore–and to try to understand what he is exploring–are clear in this informative and introspective read. For Midwestern anglers, the chapter on the “Speckled Trout” may be the most near and dear to us, but the other sections are equally intriguing. From Colorado cutthroat to taimen in Hokkaido, Japan, Kurt uses key species to illustrate issues and challenges to rivers. These highlighted challenges, along with how they are being addressed, are what separate this book so clearly from a classic fishing travelogue. This book is not a “where-to, how-to” book, of which there are many enjoyable examples. Instead, this book is a complex look at why we care so much for the rivers we interact with, and indeed, as the title states, why we should hold them in reverence. The speckled trout section focuses on Michigan’s Boardman River, and the challenges that brook trout face there, as well as their history of dispersal through Michigan and other locations.

It is a mirror to look in and consider as we address our own Minnesota brook trout issues both on the North Shore and in the Driftless, especially in regards to competition with other fish. The concluding chapters of the book are less about locations or travel and more about the ongoing challenges our rivers face, and Kurt’s exploration of how we are engaging with the issues and how we might be able to proceed. As a TU member, I find this writing inspiring, and I hope that it imbues a sense of urgency in people to step up, get involved and help make a difference. For those excited about exploring the greater world of trout, salmon, and even pike, this book offers ideas on aspects of rivers to consider as we interact with them, wherever we wind up fishing.

For those wanting to learn even more, the book has deep references in the back. As an angler and reader, I am excited to delve more thoroughly into many of the aspects and issues I read about. I found these notes refreshing, since often I’m left only to a Google search to try to understand where information or data came from. I hope that our Minnesota anglers take the opportunity to pick up this title from Oregon State University Press, and spend a few evenings with Kurt at their side as they consider our shared reverence for rivers.



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.

Taylor Berman

An Artist Profile

By Ben Nelson • Photos by Justin Carfagnini

It's 9 a.m., overcast, and 19 degrees Fahrenheit. The weekend's snow has transformed and covered the landscape. Taylor Berman fixes a reel to his rod and pulls line through the guides. He selects a streamer, finishes his knot, closes the tailgate, and steps into the snow. Taylor is a local artist known for his wildlife murals. Today he has blocked his schedule. He's put down his spray cans and respirator. Today, Taylor is fishing.

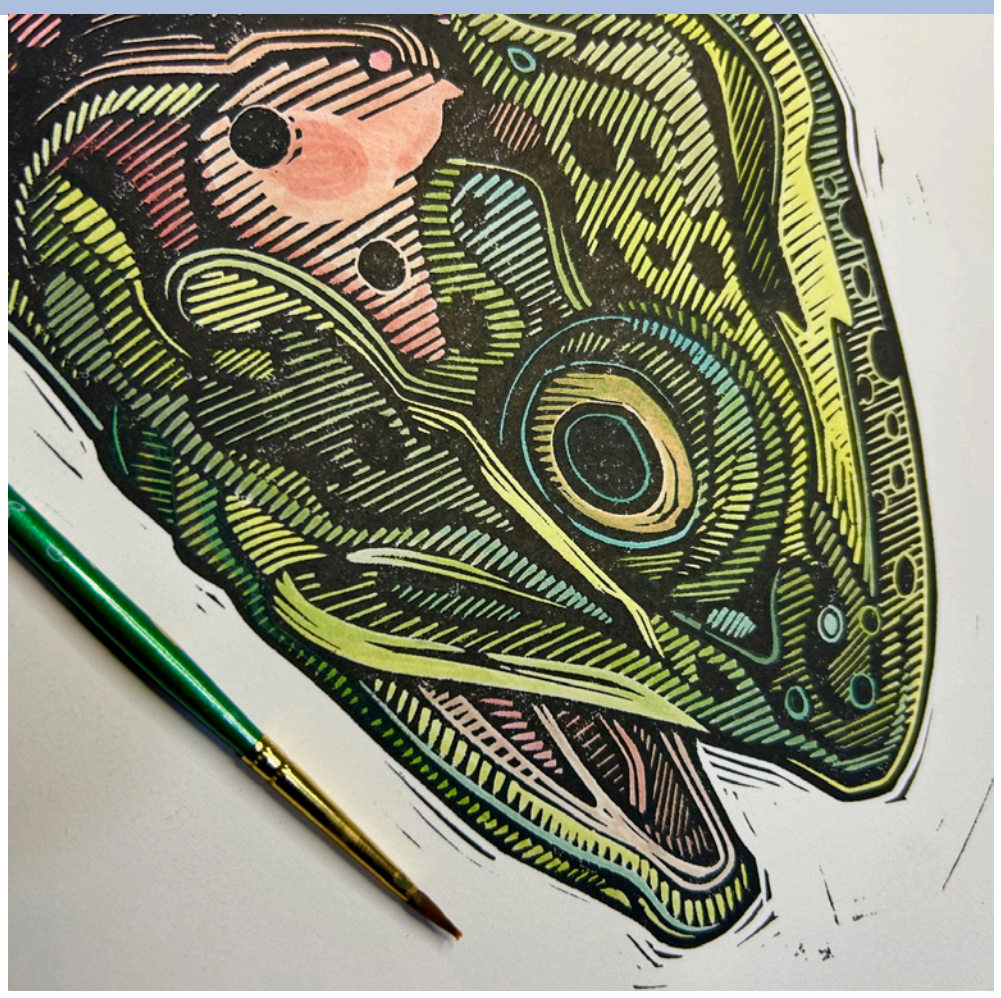
Berman is 34 years old. He is thin and bearded. He wears a fly vest over a fading down jacket. Sunglasses sit below the bill of his ball cap. Taylor moves lightly down the trail. The snow keeps his feet from sliding. A river appears between the trees. Taylor approaches a pool beneath limestone cliffs and a hydroelectric dam. Ducks and geese bathe in the shallows upstream. This dam is scheduled to be removed. The project is a victory for trout and coldwater conservation, years in the making. Today, a deep run emerges from beneath the old industrial structure. Braids of current blend together. Taylor walks onto submerged rocks, unhooks his streamer, and positions himself to cast. Just then, a Canada goose gets up from the bank and splashes into the heart of the run. "No!" Taylor says with a laugh. "Such a goose move!" The goose stares Taylor down as it floats the run. Taylor shakes his head and smiles. He waits a moment, casts into the stream, and slowly strips through it.

Taylor attended college nearby. He studied art education at the University of Wisconsin River Falls. It was there that he fell in love with printmaking and earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in it. "I love the tactile nature of the medium, like the fact that carving is an integral part of creating a 2D piece of art. There's no eraser on the other side of a carving gouge, so each decision and mark I make is very intentional and forces me to be completely present. And when mistakes are made, it demands a certain level of flexibility and learning to adapt." UW River Falls is also where Berman discovered mural painting. A painting instructor suggested that Taylor apply for a science research grant. Taylor pitched the idea of demonstrating fascination with nature through artistic application. He won the grant and brought the Biology and Fine Arts Departments together. Aerosolized spray paint was an exciting new tool for Berman. He learned how to apply it and found so much in common with printmaking. "The opacity. The line quality. You think backwards. It's a reductive mindset. The mental breakdown translates." Taylor's first mural still greets biology students. Wind blows through a barefoot student's hair. She looks through a magnifying glass at the spectrum of life and sees chains of connection. "I loved every second of it." Taylor says. He recalls finishing the project and asking, "Where can I find another wall?"

Taylor's next opportunity came from a local brewery. This project would be five times the size of his first mural. "I spent a month trying to figure it out. How do you scale?" Distortion comes easily when transferring an image from a notepad to a fifty foot wall. Distance and angle change perspective. "I've come a long way from running back and forth to the wall with chalk taped on the end of a broomstick."

Artists have tricks to maintain proportion. Some use projectors. Others divide their image into graphing coordinates. A colleague at a street art festival painted in virtual reality goggles.

Taylor prefers "doodle gridding." He paints a pattern of geometric shapes and hieroglyphics on the wall where the mural will be. Next, he takes a picture of his doodles and lays a digital draft of the mural over it. Taylor now has common reference points on his draft and the wall. The pectoral fin meets the apex of the triangle. The gill plate covers the crescent moon.



Berman, Taylor. Rainbow with Reed. 2024, linocut print and watercolor.

Baby's first grip and grin!

Berman, Taylor. Guardian. 2024, Broadway Ave, Green Bay, WI.

Painting the side of a building is strenuous labor. Taylor climbs ladders and scaffolding. He's in and out of booms and lifts, breathing through a respirator. His arms are elevated, away from the body, swinging spray bottles, unsupported, moving freely in space. "It's a kinesthetic, physical activity. I definitely feel it after big projects. I'm booking a chiropractor."

Taylor paints mostly with aerosol. He'll use 15 to 50 colors per project and go through as many as 100 cans. "It's a stupid amount of paint. You end up with a lot of cans. It's insanity." And inevitably, after finishing a job, Taylor has leftovers. He's got over 1,000 cans shelved. Berman organizes them into his own spray can library. He saves color scheme palates. "I've got a system. I keep inventory. It's a gradient like the rainbow. It sucks when you buy a new color that doesn't fit. I just built a new shelf for pinks and purples."

This is why Taylor pulls out the streamer on a 19-degree day.

The goose stays ahead of Taylor as they move downstream. Berman scans the river bed as he wades. Water washes over rocks and Taylor seems tempted to pick through them. "Look at an agate. Their formation in basalt air pockets creates wavy colors and hues, energy and movements. You're looking at metaphysics. It's inspiring."

Berman is also inspired by history. He'll babble about ancient civilizations. He takes a tangent on The Old Copper culture. He studies flintknapping. "I've got a basement full of flint. So much flint." Taylor has found arrowheads on his adventures. "You can tell by the conchoidal fractures. This stuff is laying around all over if you know how to recognize it."

The stream bounces through a ripple, bends, and drops into a nice, deep pool. The goose swims over the pool. It watches Taylor, rears back, spreads its wings, and hisses at him. From across the river, Taylor takes the en garde stance. Moments later, the sun breaks through the clouds and warms the air. A baetis lands on his sunglasses.

Taylor has painted places from Minneapolis to Milwaukee. His murals cover buildings on busy streets, water towers over urban neighborhoods, and switch sheds at rail stations. Berman's art is public. "To me, public art is all about accessibility and trying to spread some positivity in the world. I believe it's important because it has the ability to impact a wide range of individuals on a daily basis, and transcend the accessibility barriers that can exist with traditional galleries and museums. A lot of the work that I do is on exterior walls in public spaces. My goal has been to use these opportunities to highlight various aspects of the natural world, in hopes of inspiring others to further explore and connect with the incredible array of life that surrounds and sustains us. I try to accomplish this through representing local flora and fauna in a way that hopefully brings attention to species, relationships, and elements of the natural world that may otherwise be taken for granted or overlooked. If my work can inspire others to get outdoors more, or insight curiosity about a local fish or mushroom species, that's a win for me."

Berman scales down and becomes more reflective with his printmaking. "These are my 'me things.' It's when I work out ideas." Taylor explores symbolism and searches for meaning. He keeps files of photos, a book of sketches, and lots and lots of notes. "My work area is covered in sticky notes. Random thoughts and ideas, paying homage to things outside yourself. Piles of sticky notes. I had to put them into bins." Taylor lets the ideas sink in. Concepts emerge.

"Eventually a composition comes, like an inner calling. Whether it's a message or a call to action. OK, that needs to be carved."

"The carving process in printmaking follows innate concentric arches and lines," Taylor says. "The lines come naturally, like they were meant to be there. Like tiered mud lines in a hillside, ripples in water, sand on the bank or in a river, wind blowing through clouds, repeating but evolving, undulating. It's metaphorical for stuff in life, habits distilled down, base-level beautiful. The visual seems significant. Those fractals in nature. A universal language, a common existence. Something profound."

Taylor walks upstream. He returns to his starting point. A place where limestone meets concrete, industry meets conservation, history meets today. Fishing and art come together as if viewed from space. "There are so many layers. A lot of depth. You can keep going deeper and deeper. There are endless things to try. You meet someone. You learn something. It doesn't get old."

To see more of Taylor Berman's art, visit his website: taylorbermanart.com. You can follow him on instagram: @taylorbermanart

Ben Nelson is a physician in Duluth. He lives there with his wife and three children.

Left: "There's no eraser on the other side of a carving gouge."
Right: Taylor collaborated with Tara John, an Anishinaabe Traditional Ecological Knowledge Educator, to create Lake Sturgeon/Nme at the Pleasant Peninsula Mural Festival in 2025.

Old Hatchery, Ancient Stream

Both Receive Modern Care and Attention

By Barry Johnson

The lower reach of the South Branch of the Whitewater River after MNTU's habitat improvement. Dusty Hoffman photo.

Deep in the Driftless region, in the heart of the Whitewater Valley, sits the village of Elba, MN. About 100 people call it home. It boasts two excellent bars. One, dating to 1890, is a "tavern." The other is a "saloon." So, either way you can't go wrong.

Commemorative beer koozies reading "Where the **** is Elba?" are available for purchase. They are collectors' items.

Foul Trout and Herman the Sturgeon

About three miles due southeast of Elba, the Crystal Springs Hatchery is found astride the South Branch of the Whitewater River. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) runs the operation. The site was purchased in 1932 for the equivalent of $350,000 in today's dollars. It was the first parcel of land in what is now Whitewater State Park.

The hatchery has a colorful history. In the 1940s and '50s, many anglers turned up their noses at trout from Crystal Springs. People claimed hatchery fish tasted like liver. Which they did. Prior to the invention of commercial fish food pellets, Crystal Springs trout were fed ground up beef livers, which they "ate heartily." One local newspaper claimed they were also fed "canned seal meat."

For about 20 years, they kept a pet sturgeon in a hatchery holding pond. The big fish was named Herman. It was five feet long and weighed about 50 pounds when it was killed in 1958 "by a rock accidently dropped on its head."

In 1971, to juice up the trout fishing opener, hatchery workers released into the Whitewater and Root Rivers 65 retired brood trout (browns) averaging over six pounds each.

30,000-Year-Old Water

Two natural springs supply water to the hatchery. The springs disgorge groundwater bubbling up from both shallow and deep Paleozoic bedrock aquifers. These huge aquifers lie below large swaths of the Driftless region and deliver cool water to many of its trout streams.

At Crystal Springs, water bubbles up from the shallow Prairie du Chien and Jordan aquifers. That water is about 10 to 40 years old. It mixes with water from the Lone Rock Aquifer, some 1,000 feet underground. Water from that deep aquifer is up to 30,000 years old by some estimates.

The resulting product, gushing from the ground under pressure, is perfect for trout: a consistent 48 degrees Fahrenheit. It feeds the hatchery at about 2,000 gallons per minute. A better way to think about this is to envision 16,000 pints of chilled beer flowing in every minute, all day, every day.

North Shore Eggs and Helicopter Drops

Crystal Springs has raised various species over the years, including grayling, which did not take in Minnesota waters. Today, under the management of the DNR's Luke Jadwin and a staff of three, Crystal Springs annually produces upwards of 35,000 pounds of three species of salmonids.

If you've caught a steelhead on the North Shore of Lake Superior, it might be a Crystal Springs fish. Using fertilized eggs from the French River near Duluth, the hatchery raises steelhead to supplement wild populations in some North Shore streams.

Brook trout from Crystal Springs end up in a variety of Minnesota streams and lakes. Some northern lakes are planted by helicopter drops. On other hard-to-reach wilderness lakes, DNR staff hump in backpacks full of fingerling brookies. At Crystal Springs, Luke and team scientifically mete out natural daylight and the proper amount of feed to raise brook trout to the desired size. The helicopter and backpack fish planted in the fall need to be smaller for easier transport. The hatchery might produce 17,000 of those. In the spring, when they are planted by tanker trucks, Crystal Springs fattens up the trout and produces just 6,000 brookies.

Nice rainbow trout from Crystal Springs are trucked to streams throughout Minnesota. Some are planted very near to the hatchery. When Luke fishes (rarely) and catches a rainbow (rarer still) he jokes, "Hey, I remember you!"

High Water and the Hatchery

The South Branch of the Whitewater River has had its share of bad luck. For as long as people can remember, it's been prone to high water and flooding, especially near Crystal Springs Hatchery.

Major floods inundated the Whitewater Valley over the years; 1969, 1974, 1975 and 1978 were especially bad. The mega-flood in 2007 poured into the Crystal Springs Hatchery and totally swamped the basement fish tanks. It took six months of hard work to drain, clean and sanitize the place. In 2015, a flood and agricultural runoff wiped out thousands of trout along a six-mile stretch of the South Branch. Even normal heavy rainfalls caused the South Branch to rise up and threaten the hatchery.

Across the stream from the hatchery, flood waters had eroded the bank. It was steep, wall-like. On the hatchery side, the bank was a bit flatter. Flood waters, taking the path of least resistance, always climbed up the hatchery side. This threat of flooding–which would result in mounds of dead fish and months of clean-up work–happened with some frequency.

Overall, the stream was much degraded. It held very few twists and turns. There weren't many riffles or runs. It had only a few boulders to aerate the water and provide holding spots for trout. Some banks were barren, packed mud. It lacked a floodplain area to slow down and disperse fast-flowing floodwaters.

Stream Reset and Hatchery Repairs

Both the stream and the hatchery needed work. Stream restoration of the South Branch was spearheaded by Minnesota Trout Unlimited. MNTU successfully advocated for the work and educated the Minnesota Outdoor Heritage Fund to receive funding. They used that funding to manage all aspects of the stream enhancements. And remember, TU spends less than 5% of project funding on administrative costs.

Much prework was done before ground was broken in 2020. This included the review of aerial surveys from the 1940s and '50s to determine the course of the stream decades ago, before flooding caused it to slightly migrate. In total, 7,900 feet of the South Branch were rebuilt. Runs and riffles were created. Subsurface boulders were added to keep water flowing quickly, scouring away sand and sediment. Root balls inserted into the banks now hold trout. Along the shore, invasive plants were pulled and replaced with native greenery, including sweet-smelling mountain mint. For a detailed look at the stream rehab, (including excellent fishing tips!) see "South Branch of the Whitewater River: Fishing Our Habitat" by Dusty Hoffman, in the February, 2021 edition of *Trout Unlimited Minnesota*.

The South Branch has long been a premier fishery. While the stream rehab created a healthier stream environment for trout, a major driver was flood mitigation. On that count, the work receives high scores from Luke at the hatchery. The rebuilt stream and increased floodplain successfully disperse frequent high water that previously crept close (or worse) to the hatchery.

At nearly 100 years of age, the hatchery remains a valuable asset serving the entire state. It is well-deserving of the $19 million the State of Minnesota dedicated for site improvements. The work is scheduled to begin next year. Among other work, the old clay linings of the springs will be repaired and raceways will be replaced.

Great Depression Raceways

Hatcheries depend on raceways to rear trout. These long, narrow culverts with flowing, oxygenated water, provide an excellent environment for raising fish. Crystal Springs has 13 antique raceways, each about 200 feet long and 6 feet wide.

They were built in the late 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). A few hundred CCC members hand-quarried limestone chunks and laid down the raceways. The last major repair to the raceways was in the 1990s. That work was done by crews of friendly, local, low-level criminals. Once the offenders tested negative for drugs and alcohol, a wise judge deferred their sentences in lieu of this valiant service to Minnesota trout anglers.

Now, modern materials (concrete, plastics, steel or fiberglass) will be used to build new raceways. And this time, raceway work will be done by non-criminal professionals.

B.J. Johnson lives in Eagan, MN and fishes elsewhere.

Thank You to All of Our Donors

Protecting Our Streams for Future Generations

Minnesota Trout Unlimited extends heartfelt thanks to each of the record 310 generous donors who supported us during the last fiscal year, from April 1, 2025, to March 31, 2026. Together, you contributed an unprecedented $200,000 to advance this conservation mission! In addition, several donors made future gift commitments through estate plans or contributed to Minnesota TU's endowment. No matter the size or method, every gift powers Minnesota TU's habitat restoration, advocacy, and education efforts.

For another consecutive year, 100% of Minnesota TU Board Members and staff also made financial contributions in fiscal 2026.

We are inspired by our supporters and deeply appreciate the encouraging messages we received throughout the year!

"I have enjoyed the outdoors and fishing for my lifetime. I am no longer fishing but I feel very strongly our obligation to those that follow us to enjoy the same opportunities I so cherished. I am 98 years old." - Harry Kuefler, Chisago City

"Keep up the good work with the conservation efforts for Minnesota's streams!" - Mark Allen, Wayzata

"We love Minnesota Trout Unlimited and all the wonderful efforts to educate children, protect our coldwater resources, and tireless advocacy at the state capitol. Thanks again for all that you do…PS Love the quarterly newsletter." - Fall, Tara, and Daniel Owens, Bloomington

"Keep up the good work. Thank you!" - Bryan Gregor, Fairmont

"Thanks for all MNTU accomplishes." - Lauri Arndt, Duluth

"In these times, every action and dollar matter. Thanks for making a difference." - Anonymous donor

We strive for accuracy and welcome corrections to Giving Coordinator Mark Abner, mark.abner@mntu.org

River Keepers Council

The Riverkeepers Council honors Minnesota TU donors who contribute $1,000 or more each year. Council members enjoy invitations to exclusive fishing trips and project tours, as well as personalized updates about the difference their generosity makes. While we deeply value donors at all levels, we warmly encourage those able to make a larger impact to consider joining the Riverkeepers Council.

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A trout stream: A Place of Many Senses

Exploring the Whitewater River

By John Weiss

First sunshine on the Whitewater River and its banks.

Riffling, rippling, roiling, gliding, the Whitewater River flowed in front of me, at times around me, and my senses rejoiced–at least most of the time.

It was predawn in early May, and I had worked my way down the familiar Whitewater bluffside to let the river nourish those senses.

When referring to the outdoors, it has become fashionable to speak of the need for a sense of place, be it prairie, pine forests or Lake Superior. National Geographic defined it as "the emotions someone attaches to an area based on their experiences." So, yes, I certainly have a sense of place on trout streams but that is because they are places of senses–no limit.

I've fished, hunted, photographed and written about this section of river for decades. I've grown very close to it precisely because of all the senses it enlivens. Last fall, I hunted along it, facing the bluffside in failed hopes of shooting a deer. There was a sense of frustration to be sure because my freezer is bereft of venison. But in the background, maybe 15 feet away, the river was always speaking. I would often sneak over and see what was on that river, it was a sense of curiosity. One time, I saw a large shadow heading my way, turned and marveled at a mature bald eagle cruising maybe 20 feet over the river. They are really big!

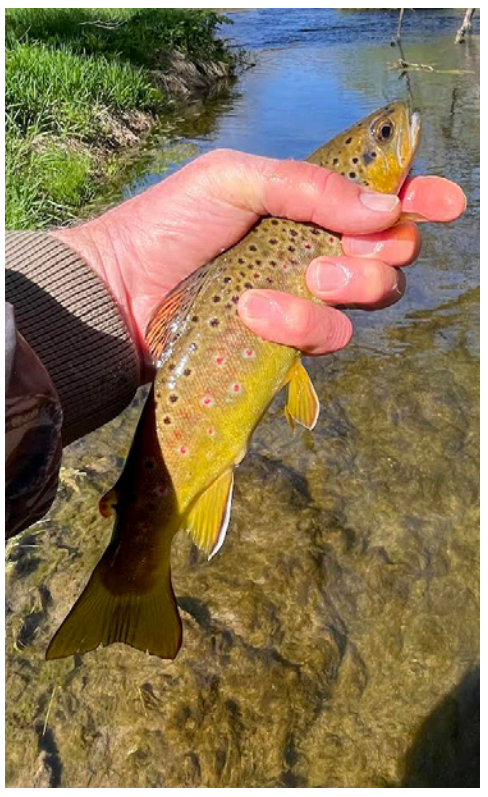
In late April, as I got out of the car atop the river bluff, a sense of adventure tweaked me. I have that feeling every time I park there, knowing full well that some outdoor outing is afoot. How well I will do is up for grabs. If it's only a trophy trout or a deer for the freezer as a measure, I nearly always fail. Instead I sense maybe one of the two big trout I've missed there will finally be mine, maybe I'll shoot another nice fat doe or a turkey. That "maybe" is the key. There is always the unknown.

Before I could even gear up, a turkey gobbled to the south, where I've never heard one before. Ah, the sense of the unexpected. Two trips might begin in the same place, same time of year, yet they will often drift apart or even be cleaved by what happens.

The first time, I carried my regular camera, food and a three-legged chair, but no fishing gear. This was a time to explore senses and take pictures. I set up just upriver of a riffle. By then, I could see the sun pink-orange, tickling the treetops above the opposite bluff. The Whitewater was background music, the sweet sound of a happy river. I sat most of the time, feeling cool, but comfortable, needing gloves and a frumpy-but-warm winter hat. Surely the morning sun would further warm me but clouds cloaked the east in smudgy grayness. Okay, no glorious sunrise, keep on the hat. No sunlight on the water.

The smell? Nothing, and that is perhaps the finest of odors.

My Merlin birding app told me I was hearing an eastern towhee as well as a robin and cardinal, but no warblers. I don't notice them enough when fishing. I did notice my turkey-hunting flower, the bloodroot, was fading; a sense of passing time elbowed into the day. Yet up grew Dutchman's breeches, my second-favorite flower. A close-up lens let me see tiny dew-jewels on its main stem.



Left: A small brown trout caught in the Whitewater River.
Right: Dew adds sparkle to Dutchman's breeches.

I waited for …. I can't easily describe it. I waited for–hoped for–a sense of peace, of freedom to silently slide into me. It's the peace and freedom of being in nature, a part of the outdoors, not a lord.

Potential peace was punctured by the "WHUMP WHUMP WHUMP" of big wings just upriver. A great blue heron dragged its long legs westward.

My hot omelet with extra veggies tasted better than at home and coffee flavored with Almond Joy was an almond-tasting joy. Same with my cream-cheese slathered bagel. As I ate, a red-tailed hawk screeched somewhere in the sky. Tiny white bugs flitted over the river–some were caught in the web of a friendly neighborhood spider and I could see midges looking like mini-mosquitoes. Suddenly, three wood ducks came in fast and low, maybe 10 feet from me. Gasp! The unexpected.

And finally, the sun broke through, showering warmth on me and my spirit.

A few days later, I was back with both camera and fly rod. One gobbler let loose on the bluff behind me, then was joined by two others.

I wanted to see the sunrise over the Whitewater and get a picture of it. In waders, I walked to the middle, set up my camera on a tripod in front of a rock and waited, kneeling, not sure what would happen. Nothing happened for a half hour and I felt cold. Yet I also felt warmed by the feeling of the water flowing around me, I was part of the river. I liked that.

As I waited, three Canada geese flew past. Suddenly, their bellies and wing tips were boldly sun-goldened. A flash of "wow!" I had never seen that before–I could only see it if I was out there.

Then something disturbed the river below me–muskrat, otter? No, a beaver swam toward me, dove under a bank and was gone–it's the first time I've seen a beaver like that. It was a flash of slow "wow."

After getting my picture, I just sat and let the river do its riverine magic. I felt good.

Off I walked upriver, got out my 5-weight and began to fish a favorite place. Dave Kolbert's fuzzy nymph was the right one and I soon lifted a small brown in my wet hand. Cool to the touch, slick, golden, brown-dot-dappled, and an embodiment of the river itself. I caught, or at least felt, fish after fish hitting the nymph but I was miffed that I missed several hook sets. After maybe 15 hits, I walked upriver to a riffle but was thwarted by too much gunk on the nymph with each cast. And the wind, the rising wind, angered me and wobbled too many casts.

But red-winged blackbirds kept up a trill that thrilled me. They and robins are common, and I had hoped waves of warblers would color the woods, but no. I enjoyed what I could hear.

In the end, I said to myself, "I'll just have to come back and try harder." At the car, the wind cooled me: the wind taketh and the wind giveth.

A third trip, later in the morning, fishing only, I walked down the path and was struck by all the green. After a winter of grays and browns, with several days of white, the color was eye-shocking. No gobbling but no heavy camera. I felt more at ease. The Whitewater was cool, fishing was slow. I wandered downriver, seeing no obvious deeper, quieter holes where trout might loaf; I finally found

WATER RIPPLES OVER AND AROUND ROCKS.

a long quiet stretch. I sat on a log and heard only a few birds, not even riffling. That much-sought peace and freedom finally graced me. I just sat, happy. I needed no physical sense to feel it, it was in my heart.

But time was clicking on, surely the Whitewater was warming, obviously fishing would be as fine as it was a few days past. It wasn't. I caught a few, felt their coolness, but the morning was different. Something had changed it, and in me, as I sat on that log. Or maybe the river changed it. I lost much of my urge to fish. I got out and slowly walked back to my car.

Onto the next adventure!

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.

Rethinking Harvest in Southeast Minnesota Trout Streams

Should anglers set aside catch-and-release?

By Jennifer Biederman, PhD, MNTU Habitat Program Director

Large trout are difficult to find in streams experiencing a "bottleneck" of high numbers of small trout. Photo courtesy of Vaughn Snook.

When I first joined Trout Unlimited years ago, it didn't take long to pick up on an expectation I hadn't fully appreciated growing up fishing the Driftless: trout were meant to be released. So, I kept relatively quiet about the fact that one of my favorite breakfasts in the world is a freshly pan-fried brown trout pulled from the stream that runs behind my house. To this day, when my twin sister comes home from Chicago to visit, it's still her most requested meal. The slight tension between catch-and-release ethics and the role harvest can play in healthy fisheries management in a place like the Driftless is something I've thought a lot about over the years as a freshwater biologist.

For many Trout Unlimited members, catch-and-release is less about management regulations and more about an ethos, or a conservation-minded culture (and what draws many of us to this organization). Releasing a trout often reflects a sincere respect for the resource and an admirable desire to protect these often sensitive fisheries for future generations. In many trout waters, especially where populations are limited or fragile, this is the best mindset to sustain a healthy, robust trout population.

However, consider the case that southeast Minnesota's Driftless streams are different, at least when it comes to the harvest of brown trout.

The streams in the Driftless are highly spring-fed systems and many are incredibly productive. In stream after stream, brown trout reproduce naturally in large numbers–and this is supported by long-term monitoring data by the Minnesota DNR. According to Minnesota DNR fisheries staff, despite being a popular destination for fishing, angler harvest has little measurable impact on most southeast Minnesota trout populations because these streams simply produce so many fish and relatively few anglers choose to keep what they catch. In much of southeast Minnesota, keeping a few brown trout is indeed sustainable and may even align with broader fisheries goals.

Why is the Driftless different?

Like most places, many trout anglers bring the mindset of catch-and-release when fishing the Driftless, and many simply are not aware of how these streams function on a different ecological level than those in other parts of the state and regions where trout occur.

In northeast Minnesota, for example, trout populations are often naturally smaller and more vulnerable. Because of food sources and water temperature, trout may grow more slowly. Also, habitat can be more limited and, therefore, harvest can have greater impacts on population size. Up north, catch-and-release of stream-dwelling trout is probably the best approach.

In contrast, Driftless streams are uniquely fertile environments, largely due to the mineral-rich water from the Karst limestone geology that supports a healthy food chain, including aquatic macroinvertebrates. Brown trout grow quickly, reproduce efficiently, and experience relatively short lifespans. But, as DNR fisheries staff would likely remind anglers: releasing every 10-inch brown trout this year does not automatically create a stream full of 16-inch trout next year.

In many southeast Minnesota streams, trout populations are so abundant that the bigger issue becomes competition, especially among brown trout in the 8- to 12-inch range.

The "Too Many Small Fish" Problem

When talking to anglers in the Driftless, they often marvel at observing and catching so many fish, but lament that most of them were under 10 inches. Biologists sometimes describe these situations as "bottlenecks." Streams may contain very high numbers of trout, but comparatively fewer large fish. The fish that are there may be less robust, or skinny, which is noticeable when the head is relatively long compared to the body. There is only so much high-quality habitat, food, and territory available, and trout compete for all three. That's why some fisheries staff encourage anglers to think selectively about harvest.

Keeping a few smaller brown trout from an overcrowded stream may slightly reduce competition among fish in that size class. Meanwhile, releasing larger brown trout, those fish that have already survived several years of competition and predation, can help preserve higher quality angling opportunities.

Importantly, DNR staff are careful not to oversell this concept. As one assistant area fisheries manager Vaughn Snook (Lanesboro DNR Office) put it,

Brown trout (top) have dark spots along with reddish spots haloed in a pale color. They have little to no spotting on their tails. Brook trout (Bottom) have yellow spots among red spots circled in blue, as well as white edges on their lower fins. Images courtesy of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

"It's fantasy to think anglers can be used as a management tool" capable of dramatically reshaping trout populations through harvest alone. But selective harvest can still fit within the biology of these highly productive systems and for the trout anglers that have secretly been yearning to indulge on a freshly grilled, wild-caught trout, there is no shame or guilt to be had!

Brook Trout and Brown Trout

Harvest discussions are even more interesting in streams where brook trout and brown trout overlap. Brook trout are Minnesota's only native stream trout, while brown trout are an introduced species that thrives in Driftless streams. Browns are highly adaptable and often dominate the best habitat. In some waters, they can place pressure on brook trout populations through competition for food and space.

Because of that, anglers sometimes ask: Can harvesting brown trout help out the brook trout?

The answer is: potentially, in certain situations, but probably not at a scale large enough to dramatically alter stream dynamics on its own. And therein lies another challenge: culture.

Many anglers enthusiastically support brook trout conservation in theory, but relatively few consistently harvest brown trout. Assistant Fisheries Supervisor Vaughn Snook joked that after asking anglers how many brown trout they harvested to "help the brook trout," the answer was usually the same: none. The ethic of catch-and-release runs wide and deep in the trout community, and even in streams where harvest is biologically sustainable. But despite this, perhaps local chapters could work with local DNR Fisheries staff to identify such streams where brookies might benefit from brown trout harvest and organize educational campaigns for local anglers or post signs with clear species identification and a call to action to consider harvesting browns.

Conservation Includes Harvest

To me, both as a trout angler and aquatic biologist, this may be the most important takeaway.

Conservation is not defined by whether every fish gets released. Conservation means understanding the resource and making informed decisions based on the ecology of a particular place. In southeast Minnesota, trout streams are resilient and extraordinarily productive. Responsible harvest of brown trout is compatible with that reality.

For anglers interested in trying selective harvest, fisheries staff often recommend a simple approach:

- Consider keeping a few abundant 9- to 12-inch brown trout from productive streams. Be sure you tell brookies from browns! (See figures.)
- Consider releasing larger fish that represent older age classes.
- Follow regulations carefully, especially on streams with protected slots or catch-and-release rules.
- If you want to know if there are particular streams where harvest is more or less recommended, contact your local DNR fisheries office.
- Most importantly, use what you keep.

For an amazing angling community built around conservation, it may feel strange to say it out loud, but perhaps it shouldn't: Sometimes the most "natural" thing an angler can do in a productive Driftless trout stream is bring a couple fish home for dinner!

Special thanks to MN DNR Staff in assisting with this article, especially Lanesboro staff: Vaughn Snook, assistant fisheries supervisor and Melissa Wagner, fisheries supervisor; DNR Stream Habitat Specialist Dusty Hoffman; and DNR Fisheries Specialist Brian Beyerl.

Look Forward to More Content on Selective Harvest

Find a guest trout recipe as well as a demonstration video on how to field dress a trout in an upcoming edition of Minnesota Trout Unlimited's monthly email newsletter, the Monthly Cast. Visit mntu.org to subscribe to the Monthly Cast.

Top: Choosing to harvest brown trout in the 9- to 12-inch size class is a sustainable option in many Driftless trout streams. Photo courtesy of Jade Thomason.
Bottom: Fish in overpopulated streams can develop large heads and skinny bodies. Photo courtesy of Vaughn Snook.

The Most Powerful Way to Leave Your Legacy Is Also the Simplest

By Mark Abner, MNTU Giving Coordinator

Beneficiary forms speak louder than wills.

When most people think about leaving a legacy to heirs and charities, they picture their will deciding who gets what someday. But in reality, for most assets—like retirement accounts, life insurance policies, and bank accounts—the first and more powerful document is the beneficiary form.

Why Beneficiary Designations Matter

That simple form takes precedence over your will entirely and determines who receives your IRA, 401(k), or life insurance proceeds directly—before your will, probate, or legal delays. Naming Minnesota Trout Unlimited as a partial or full beneficiary is an easy, effective way to honor and celebrate your enjoyment of the outdoors and to help deliver this coldwater conservation mission long into the future.

Quick and Easy

Unlike revising a will, updating a beneficiary form is free and takes only a few minutes—usually quickly online through your financial or insurance provider, such as Vanguard, Fidelity, or Schwab. You can adjust your beneficiaries anytime to reflect life changes or to include the charitable organizations that reflect your values.

Listing Minnesota Trout Unlimited As A Beneficiary

You may designate a specific dollar amount or a percentage of each account's balance. Most online forms ask for the following:

Minnesota Trout Unlimited
P.O. Box 845, Chanhassen, MN 55317-0845
EIN: 52-1766036

For any questions, to discuss how to create a permanent, named endowment, or to let Minnesota TU know your intentions, please contact Mark Abner, Giving Coordinator at (202) 573-1832 or mark.abner@mntu.org. Your confidentiality is assured.

MINNESOTA TROUT UNLIMITED

MNTU Education Update

June 2026

By Amber Taylor, MNTU Education Program Supervisor

Of the 72 schools participating in Trout in the Classroom (TIC) this year, 65 were approved by the DNR fisheries lab for release this spring! All schools must keep a mortality log during the year that tracks how many fish are lost each week. The cumulative mortality determines whether a school needs to send in fish for testing or the school is unable to release entirely based on set percentages by the DNR: 60% loss means schools have to send in fish for testing and 85% loss means they are unable to release at all. When planning their releases, teachers must share these logs with me and the lab for final release approval. This, in addition to the stipulations listed on the permits teachers sign at the beginning of the year and assigned release sites, ensures trout being released into Minnesota bodies of water are healthy and disease-free.

We had a busy release season this spring, assisting with 18 spring release events around the state with 1,321 students. Thank you to the volunteers that contributed over 130 hours to support these releases! I had the pleasure of assisting with Winona Middle School's release at Whitewater State Park in mid-May. They are new to the program and one of only two currently participating TIC schools in the SE region of the state. 175 seventh graders explored the park throughout the morning and afternoon on what was a perfect spring day. A huge thank you to all of the Win-Cres chapter members that made it such a special experience for the students by providing equipment and mentors for students that wanted to try fishing the river. In addition to the release and fishing, students went on nature hikes, learned about foraging and even practiced building fires!

There is a lot more to Trout in the Classroom than the release. Students start learning about trout, water quality, and Minnesota watershed ecology starting in September and not only engage in lessons and field trips related to TIC, but also become the trout technicians that monitor and care for the fish throughout the year. Trout techs test water chemistry, remove dead fish, conduct water changes, monitor fish behavior, and ensure the trout stay happy and healthy until their release in the spring. Each teacher is required to submit an end-of-year report to me and the DNR. Part of this report is a write-up reflecting on the school year. See below for a few of these write-ups to learn more about what is happening in TIC classrooms.

Trout in the Classroom: Cultivating the Next Generation of Conservationists – Red Wing High School

Beyond the Release: A Year of Discovery – While the culmination of our year was the successful release of 156 healthy trout into the wild, the true impact of the Trout in the Classroom (TIC) program lies in the hands-on journey of our students. Despite early challenges–including a mid-winter freeze at the egg stage–our students showed incredible resilience, nurturing 178 "swim-up" fry and ensuring a strong survival rate through the fingerling stage.

Where Science Meets the Stream – Our classroom transformed into a living laboratory. Students didn't just read about ecology; they managed it. Highlights included:

The Science of Survival: Deep dives into nutrient cycles and the vital role of biofilter bacteria in maintaining aquatic life. Professional Monitoring: Students mastered water chemistry, utilizing everything from simple tank testers to professional LaMotte kits to monitor nitrites, nitrates, ammonia, pH, alkalinity, and more.

Conservation & Culinary Arts: Beyond stream management and habitat improvement, students gained practical life skills, learning the traditional methods of filleting and preparing fish.

Student-led Stewardship – This program belongs to the students. From the first daily testing and cleaning to the final count, they managed every aspect of the tank's health. We integrated world-class curricula like Project Wild Aquatic and Population Education, using simulations like "Who Polluted the Potomac?" to connect our small tank to the health of our global waterways.

A Hub of School Pride – Our Aquaculture program has become the "crown jewel" of our department. We are a mandatory stop on every school tour, serving as a point of immense pride for our staff and a source of constant curiosity for visiting families. Through social media and local newsletters, our community has watched these students grow alongside their trout.

MNTIC Year End Reflection – Parkers Prairie High School

"My year in MNTIC has once again been a very engaging project in my seventh grade life science class. We started out the year exploring, catching and learning about macroinvertebrates, and how they relate to water quality and fit into a trout ecosystem and food web. We took a field trip to Spruce Hill Park to collect macroinvertebrates in the fall, and released our 226 trout fingerlings on May 6, 2026. Shortly after we released our trout, the students had the opportunity to go fishing and caught multiple rainbow trout juveniles. We also did a scavenger hunt finding things in the park that related to what we have learned through the year (ex. secondary consumer, decomposer, photosynthetic organism, invasive species). Everyone enjoyed being outside. This was posted on our school Facebook page. I have posted a few times throughout the year, both when we went on our fall trip and when we received the trout eggs.

We started preparing our tank for trout

A trout technician holds up a cup of trout she helped raise throughout the year before releasing them into Spruce creek. Students release into DNR-approved bodies of water where rainbow trout are already stocked.

Twin Cities TU volunteer Marie Culhane looks for aquatic insects with fifth grade students during their release event at Browns Creek Park. Marie and her husband Dan partnered with this TIC school, delivering their eggs and assisting with all of their in-class and off-site TIC lessons throughout the year.

shortly after our fall field trip. I gave the students a list of questions to answer as they read through the program guide. This was awesome in helping them understand the "ins and outs" of tank care and the trout environment, including the cycling of matter, as explicit standards in our seventh grade science MN standards. The students were in charge of testing the water and making the water changes and feeding the trout, once needed. They checked the nitrates, nitrites, pH and ammonia daily, and then weekly once the trout were here. I had one student in charge of making sure they were fed every day and even in the last months, took on water changes. We then rounded out the unit dissecting a trout from a field day that needed to be euthanized. I was amazed at how many ways I could connect to our curriculum. While learning about binomial nomenclature, we talk about the scientific names of trout and each level of classification that trout fit into. When we were discussing DNA, we talked about how many pieces of DNA are in a trout cell. During the conversation about natural selection, we discuss what adaptations help trout survive. It just so perfectly fit into our curriculum and helped connect it all.

The kids loved seeing the trout grow and develop. They often commented about how much bigger they were looking, some would just sit and stare at them. This year we had a greater disparity in size of fish, which was an interesting conversation because all students knew they arrived at the same size and stage. I wouldn't mind doing a hydroponics lesson or adding plants to the top of the tank in following years, as I think this would assist in teaching the nutrient cycle and cycling of matter standard even more, when the kids see the plant thriving directly from the tank water.

I thoroughly enjoyed having the opportunity to raise trout as part of my curriculum for the past five years. It has enriched the curriculum and opened my students' eyes to all the life around them and the impact and connection organisms have to one another. It also allowed me to get them outdoors and get into nature! I am excited to continue to have this be a part of my program!"

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

Winona Middle School seventh graders learned how to fly fish along the Whitewater river with the help of some incredible Win-Cres TU chapter members. Numerous members of this chapter stepped up to assist both WMS and Rushford Peterson High School at their releases this spring!

Perfect Conditions

Youth Series

By Jim Emery, MNTU Educator

The fish raised in Trout in the Classroom tanks grow up in a different environment than their natural ecosystem. Students must maintain a tank environment as similar to natural conditions as possible, carefully monitoring the water conditions.

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

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

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

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

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

Your Twin Cities Area Fly Shops

Buy Local!

By Bob Luck

Mike Fischer opened Mend Provisions in 2013 and the shop is now in St. Paul.

Mend Provisions

Mike Fischer was miserable. He was living in Washington DC where he had a job helping to open new Ralph Lauren stores in the eastern US. He traveled too much to make friends, and the closest trout streams were far away. He decided he had to either move to New York and get more involved in the fashion industry, or back to Minnesota where he could reconnect with his friends and go fishing. He chose Minnesota. He picked up where he had left off with his fishing, crossing the I-94 bridge in the early morning fog to hit the Kinni, Rush and Trimbelle, and took some part-time jobs to pay the bills. One of those jobs was helping his friend Josh Klauck open up Angry Catfish Bicycles in South Minneapolis. Josh encouraged Mike to open up a fly shop and offered to make an investment. "We ended up renting an empty space around the corner from the bike shop. I just started ripping it apart and building a fly shop." Mend Provisions opened in 2013. In 2023, Mend purchased a charming brick building in the Mac-Grove neighborhood of St. Paul and moved across the river.

If it weren't for the rack of fly rods in the doorway, a first-time visitor might think they had stumbled into a travel boutique. Luggage and clothing are displayed on wooden tables and shelves, beside a bin of bamboo walking sticks. An assortment of books sits beside a set of leather coasters on top of a vintage pinball machine. Look a little closer, though, and you will see that waders are hung beside the clothing, the walking sticks are wading staffs, the books are about fishing, and the coasters are imprinted with the store's unofficial motto: "Fly Fishing is Hard. Think Twice." A large case of flies stands in front of the register, and the rear wall is stocked with tippet, line and fishing accessories. The back room is packed with fly tying supplies. If Ralph Lauren designed a fly shop, this might be what it would look like, which is not surprising given Mike's background. I asked about the store's name. "We didn't want to be 'Mike's Fly Shop.' I put together a list of fly fishing words, and 'Mend' stuck out…short, bold and slightly insider." Mike has made the store welcoming to beginners as well as true believers. Redington rod-and-reel kits are displayed prominently next to the wading staffs, and Mike runs a popular beginners' fly tying class during the winter months.

Lightning round

What's your favorite way to fish?

Dry fly all the way. I'm not even sure I would be a fly angler if I couldn't fish dries. Though I'll admit it is pretty cool to see a big trout come after a white streamer.

Favorite fly?

CDC Comparadun, matched in size and color to whatever is hatching. For nymphs, it is hard to beat a Pheasant Tail.

Favorite fish species?

That's a tough one. For pure beauty you can't beat a brook trout, but there's nothing like catching a Yellowstone cutthroat on the surface with the way they eat. It's the reason I keep going back west.

Favorite place to fish?

The Kinni and the Rush are the two best streams in the immediate area, no question. But they get crowded, so I like to explore lesser-known waters between the Twin Cities and the Root River. Out west I fish the Madison and the Lamar Valley in Yellowstone Park.

Lund's Fly Shop

It took about three minutes to drive from my fishing spot on the Upper Kinni to Lund's Fly Shop in downtown River Falls. Brian Smolinski was at the table upstairs tying up some tarpon flies while the shop dog Maya supervised his work.

Brian grew up in North St. Paul and spent summers at his grandparents' house in Orr, spin fishing for Northern Pike and Sunfish. He started fly fishing when he moved to River Falls at age 21. His apartment was across the street from Lund's Hardware and Fly Shop, which had started in 1873 as a carriage repair shop by Andrew Lund and then passed on to the Benson family. Brian walked into the store, and asked the current owner Fred Benson if he was hiring.

"Do you have any hardware experience?" Fred asked. "That was my part-time job during college," Brian responded. "How about fishing?" "I grew up fishing."

Brian was hired on the spot and worked at Lund's for a total of 10 years, leaving and returning twice. Several years after he returned for the second time, Fred sold the building and hardware inventory to the Family Fresh supermarket and retired. He sold the Lund's name and fly shop inventory to Brian who rented a small retail space two doors down from the original store and re-opened as "Lund's Fly Shop" in 2011.

In 2023 Brian talked the owner of a historic 1881 building into selling. He enlisted employees, his spouse and friends to spend two solid months of 80-hour weeks tearing up carpet and peeling off veneer to expose the original woodwork, sanding and finishing the floors, and painting the walls. The new shop opened in February 2024 with a little over double the space, meaning that customers no longer had to fear triggering a cascade of fly gear by turning around in the aisles. "Everyone would come in here and say, 'Wow, you added so much stuff,' and we really hadn't. It was just merchandised the way it should be." Lund's did add some more clothing and general outdoor gear that might appeal more to non-anglers. He also added the tying table, and a rotating selection of paintings by local artists such as Jake Keeler, Josh DeSmit and Bob White. A point of pride is the selection of local flies. If you are looking for a Pink Squirrel, a Stop-and-Go, a Cap's Hairwing or a Pass Lake tied by Mike Alwin, Paul Johnson or any of a dozen other local tiers, Lund's is the place to go. Don't forget the B-Smo Micro Leech, designed by you-know-who.

Lightning Round

What do customers spend too much on?

Gadgets. They should go out and fish for a while first, and then the river will tell them what they need.

What should customers spend more on?

Flies. Customers will come in and ask for the "hot fly," and then buy one or two. Any experienced fisherman knows the first one will get stuck in a tree.

Brian Smolinski with shop dog Maya in Lund's Fly Shop in River Falls, WI.

Kinni or Rush?
They're both awesome. They both hold lots of fish, including some big fish. But my heart is with the Kinni, because that is where I caught my first trout.

Favorite way to fish?
I like a variety. For trout, I probably nymph the most, but dries are the most fun. And it's hard to argue with the big fish caught on streamers.

Favorite fly?
The last one I tied.

Favorite fish species?
I grew up fishing for pike, so that will always be at the top.

Favorite places to fish?
I love going to spots where no traces exist of anybody else ever being there. That's the pinnacle of the sport for me.

Thorne Bros.
Ben Olsen grew up fishing with spinning gear on Lake Minnetonka, Deer Lake, and the Mississippi. "We used to get on our bikes with our tackle boxes and our rods and ride to the Coon Rapids Dam and play on that thing like a Jungle Gym with no helmets or life jackets." After surviving his free range youth, Ben became a charter boat captain, first in Minnesota and later in Florida. He bought his first fly rod in 2010. "I came to fly fishing backwards," he said. "First tarpon, then musky, then trout. My wife got me into trout fishing because she wanted a relaxing fishing experience, and she told me, 'There is nothing relaxing about you when you fish Tarpon or Musky.'"

Thorne Bros. was established by Gregg and Paul Thorne in 1983. According to Ben, it was a place to house their passions—tackle making, lure and rod building, musky fishing—and it morphed into a business from there. In the late 80s, they started working with Greg Kaasa, who opened "The Fly Angler" in their shop. Gregg and Paul Thorne sold the business to Kaasa in the early 90s, who later sold it to long-time employee Josh Roundsley. Roundsley ran the business until the arrival of the COVID Pandemic. He sold the business in October 2020 to Ben and his partner Kurt Hansen. Ben had served as a pro staffer/brand ambassador for Thorne Bros. since 2006, and he loved the store and the brand. And… although running a tackle shop during COVID might be tough, it was easier than trying to run a charter business in Florida when airline flights were shut down. Under the leadership of Ben and Kurt, Thorne Bros. has continued to expand both its conventional tackle and fly fishing business, and in 2025, they purchased Bob Mitchell's Fly Shop from Robert Hawkins and combined it with the fly shop. Part of their reason for buying Bob Mitchell's was to preserve the history of the legendary fly shop. They are continuing the tradition of Bob Mitchell's Fly Fishing College, and the "Grander Slam," a month-long challenge to catch as many fish species on a fly as possible.

Thorne Bros. has all of the trout gear and flies that you will find at any well-stocked fly shop, but it definitely has a warmwater vibe. Not surprising since the owners are fanatic musky and smallmouth fly anglers, and one of the biggest conventional tackle shops in Minnesota is just downstairs. "It's fun to see the bass guys downstairs migrate upstairs. Grab a handful of Wampa hair and some feathers and put together a big bass jig."

Lightning Round
How much do you fly fish compared with other methods?

Ben Olsen and Aaron Przybylski of Thorne Bros. in Blaine.

100% fly fishing. If it's on, that's all I do.

How do you think fly fishing is doing compared with other forms of fishing?
It's not as vibrant as I would like. My comparison is ice fishing. Similar access, similar accessibility in terms of you don't need a boat. The cost of entry can be relatively low. But we have really seen young people ice fishing. Our marketing guy says we need another "River Runs Through It" moment.

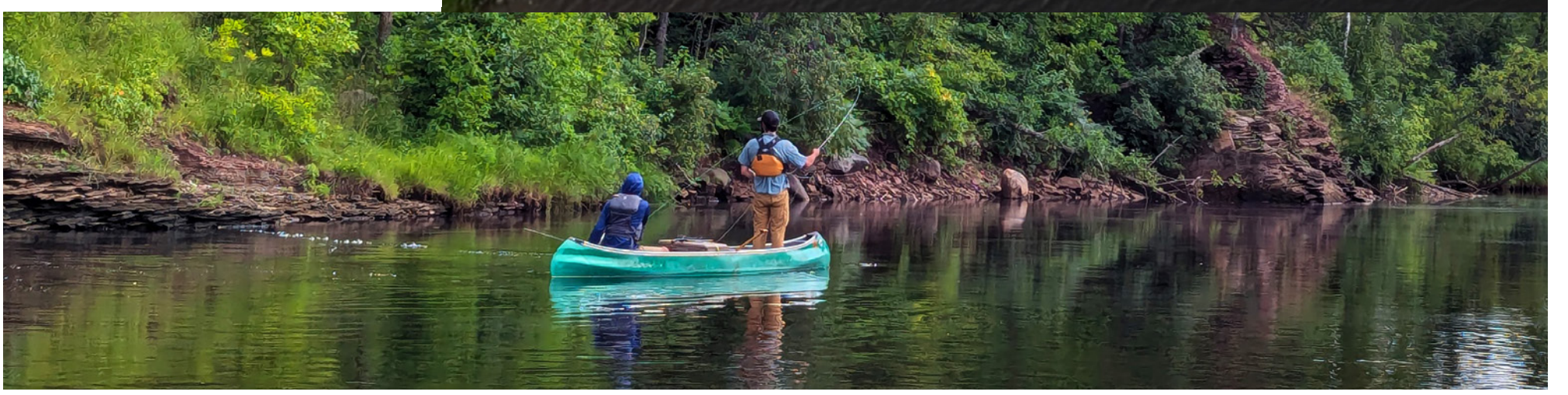
What's your favorite fly?
For smallmouth, it's the Flash Drive. But my favorite is a musky fly I designed that has no name. It's a Bob Popovic-inspired reverse-tied hollow fly. But because we're at Thorne Brothers, I have to break some rules. I put spinner blades on it.

Favorite fish species?
Tarpon.

Favorite Place to Fish?
My favorite place in Minnesota is the St. Louis River. I don't know why, I just love that place. But the Everglades is way up there. When I lived in Florida, I was on the West Coast. So I fished the 10,000 islands in the Everglades.

And you can actually avoid getting lost?
I've spent a few nights getting eaten alive in a bad place because I misjudged the tide and made the wrong turn, for sure.

Bob Luck is a frequent contributor to Trout Unlimited Minnesota. 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



Meet Our New Staff

Welcome to MNTU!

MNTU's new staff: Northeast Riparian Coordinator Jackson Manthey (left) and Communications Director Andee Erickson (right).

Two new faces have joined the staff of Minnesota Trout Unlimited! Jackson Manthey has worked with us since February as the northeast riparian restoration coordinator and Andee Erickson came onboard in March as the communications director. You can learn more about them and what they bring to MNTU in their introductions below.

Northeast Riparian Restoration Coordinator

Hello! My name is Jackson Manthey and I am the northeast riparian restoration coordinator for MNTU. I grew up in Duluth, exploring and fishing the many lakes and streams along the North Shore, which sparked a lifelong passion for the outdoors. I graduated college with an environmental science degree and have experience in designing and inspecting several river restoration projects prior to joining MNTU in February.

In my role as a riparian restoration coordinator, I help lead projects like the riparian forest gap planting effort in the Split Rock River watershed, work that supports healthy streams and sustainable trout habitat for the future.

Last year I partnered with MNTU on another riparian forest gap planting project while working for Beaver River Consulting. Both last year's project in the Duluth area, and this year's project on the Split Rock River involve cutting dead and dying trees along coldwater streams and planting long-lived tree species in those gaps to stabilize steam banks, facilitate groundwater recharge and provide future shade, keeping streams cold and clean for trout.

The need for these projects along trout streams is a result of spruce budworm outbreaks that have killed vast amounts of balsam fir and white spruce in Minnesota forests. The spruce budworm is a native caterpillar that prefers to feed on the needles of balsam fir and white spruce. These outbreaks, along with deforestation and climate change pose risks to the forest ecosystems that our coldwater systems depend on.

That's why replacing trees along trout streams is an important strategy in restoring our coldwater fisheries.

Combining my professional experience with a lifelong passion for fishing, I strive to deliver meaningful restoration work that protects and enhances trout habitat across northeast Minnesota.

Communications Director

Hello, MNTU! My name is Andee Erickson and I just joined as the communications director.

Growing up in southern Minnesota, the time I was lucky to spend on Lake Superior and in the trout streams of the Driftless region inspired my care and respect for the outdoors in a way that–I can see now–continues to inform my life's course.

I come to this organization with backgrounds in both writing and conservation. My career started in newspapers after I graduated from the University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire with degrees in journalism and geography.

I chose the location for my first summer reporting internship–nearly 10 years ago now–based solely on its proximity to so much of our country's protected wilderness in the western U.S. But the grandeur of the West hasn't been able to permanently lure me away from this state I love. Which is why, a year later, I was thrilled to load my car with my portable, reel-less fly rod, a milk crate full of books, some camping gear and a suitcase for an internship at the daily newspaper in Duluth.

After college, I returned as a general assignment reporter to the Duluth News Tribune where I was grateful to work alongside many talented journalists while covering everything from education and elections to wildfires and climate change before making the decision to work my way into a niche field: conservation detection dog work.

While doing video-based communications work for a large dog training company in Missouri, I raised my Labrador retriever Alfred and trained him (and myself) in reliable detection dog work until he was old enough to channel all his drive and hard-wired enthusiasm into conservation with me. We have loved the last few years we've spent walking the wind farms of the Midwest while he used his nose to locate bat fatalities beneath wind turbines. The data we collected supported regulatory monitoring efforts that informed the protection of endangered species.

Now my attention shifts to trout and their coldwater habitats. What stands out to me most about this multi-thousand member organization is that it's centered around a shared joy. Many of you came to MNTU because you're interested in trout fishing and then, like me, it became increasingly apparent that its future depends on our conservation efforts today. Advocacy born out of a passion is what gives this organization muscle and it's what keeps the work sustainable. It's just one of the many reasons I was drawn to communications for MNTU.

My communications philosophy is simple. I believe in keeping the message clear and accessible while leaning into the power of both data and storytelling. Stories will always be one of our greatest defenses against any environmental threat. They can elevate data in memorable narratives we can relate to. They are also what bridge us together. Lucky for me, I know there are plenty of stories to go around within the membership of MNTU so if you have a story to share, I want to hear it. Don't hesitate to send me a line at andee.erickson@mntu.org.

Jackson is helping to lead projects such as the riparian forest gap planting taking place in the Split Rock River watershed.

Fly Tying

Elk Hair Caddis

By Paul Johnson

The Elk Hair Caddis (EHC) has to be considered one of the most popular flies and can be found in just about every fly box. That is because it is so effective at catching fish.

The fly was created in 1957 by Al Troth. At that time, Al was living and working in Pennsylvania and wanted a caddis dry fly to fish some of the broken water on his local trout stream. In the 1970s Al relocated to Montana and started guiding. The fly pattern was "discovered" at that time when Bud Lilly's fly shop in West Yellowstone started to sell the fly.

As good as the EHC is at catching fish, it is somewhat surprising that it is such a simple fly. It really only has three materials: dubbing, hackle and elk hair. You can also add a wire rib, if you want.

Also somewhat surprising is that the EHC is a very quick and easy fly to tie. Well, until you start to tie them anyway. The biggest issue when tying this fly is that you have a big clump of elk hair that you need to keep on top of the hook. When you apply enough thread tension to keep the hair in place, that tension will want to pull the clump of hair around the far side of the hook shank. No amount of glue or head cement will hold that clump of hair in place, so don't try that!

Materials List

Hook:	1xl Dry Fly Hook
	Size 14 to 20
Thread:	8/0 Uni
Abdomen:	Tan Superfine
	Dubbing
Ribbing:	Dry Fly Hackle
Wing:	Elk Hair

Fortunately, your fly tying Sensei (that's me) is here to share his secret EHC tying tips. The number and length of the tips is an indication of how many EHCs I've tied (and screwed up). So here are the keys to attaining EHC perfection. After a few hundred repetitions this will all become second nature.

1. Use the smallest size thread you can make work (yes, it takes some experimentation to figure this out). My go-to thread is 8/0 Uni. I have found that the smaller thread actually helps me to get tighter thread wraps as described in Tip #3.

2. Take care when you are preparing the clump of elk hair and comb or pick out all of the under fur. I also like to remove the really long and short ones so all the hair is about the same length before I stack it.

3. When I have the elk hair wing all set to tie in, I start with two loose thread wraps and then pull tight. I then add four or five additional thread wraps at that same tie-in point. Next, to keep the hair from spinning around the hook, I lift about ¼ of the butt ends of the hair and get a tight thread wrap in that spot. I repeat this three more times before returning my thread to the original tie-in location. From there I will make a couple more tight thread wraps, lift up the butt ends and make several wraps of thread around the hook before I whip finish.

4. For the wing, I like to use cow elk hair. I have found it to be a little softer than bull elk. This allows me to get tighter wraps with my thread.

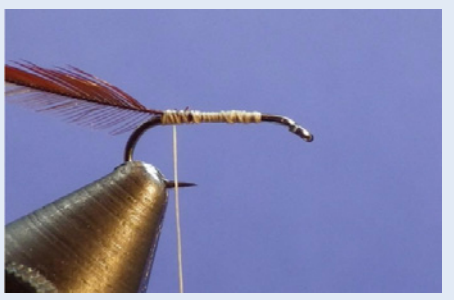
5. When tying hair wing flies during the winter, I keep a dryer sheet available that I will keep on the patch of hair to reduce some of the static.

6. One last tip: I like to undersize my hackle on this fly. For example, if I am tying a size 16 fly, I will size my hackle down to a size 18. I just think it looks better and allows the fly to float more easily.

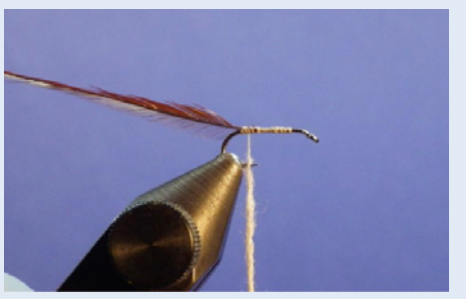
I hope that these tips will help you with your tying. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to me:

Paul Johnson,
Paulwaconia@gmail.com

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



Step 2. Prepare a rooster hackle by closely clipping some barbs off the stem and tie in at the bend of the hook.



Step 3. Form a small dubbing noodle on your tying thread.

Step 4. Dub the body of the fly from the bend of the hook to the 2/3 mark. The body should have an even taper from back to front.

Step 5. Palmer the hackle to the 2/3 mark with evenly spaced wraps.

Step 6. Clean and stack a clump of elk hair. Tie in at the 2/3 mark, starting with two loose wraps, pull tight and further secure with six or seven additional tight wraps of thread.

Step 7. Lift about 1/3 of the butt ends of the elk hair and make a tight thread wrap at the point. Repeat two additional times.

Step 8. Make several tight thread wraps on the bare hook right behind the eye.

Step 9. Make several additional tight thread wraps at the point where you originally tied in the elk hair.

Step 10. Return your thread to the eye of the hook and whip finish or make several half-hitch knots. Clip your tying thread.

Step 11. Clip the butt ends of the elk hair at a slight upwards angle.

Step 12. Go fish!

MNTU Chapter News

The Headwaters Chapter participated in multiple Trout in the Classroom release days.

Gitche Gumee Chapter

Our steelhead season on the North Shore is coming to an end. It was a good season, but the initial rain followed by a lack of rain made for some tricky fishing conditions. The MN DNR is still working on its 10-year management plan with input from local and state TU members. We are advocating for ways to improve our cold-water Lake Superior tributaries to give more anglers an opportunity to catch fish in future years.

Our chapter's former president Brandon Kime was awarded this year's Distinguished Service Award. Brandon was the first person I remember meeting when I showed up at my first Trout Unlimited meeting years ago. He was extremely welcoming and excited to see new members. Once he became president, he did a fantastic job getting people involved and thinking outside the box to raise money to help support our local waters. We truly appreciate all the work Brandon has accomplished.

We held a cage cleanup event on Chester Creek this spring where many of our previously planted trees were growing out of their cages. Volunteers moved cages from established trees to newer growth. Additionally, our chapter is coordinating subsequent maintenance efforts and supplemental tree plantings on our local rivers. These initiatives are a vital component of our ongoing mission to ensure the health and resilience of our local trout streams.

We are excited to host two fly casting clinics this summer in partnership with the City of Duluth. June 16 at Lester Park and June 29 at Chamber's Grove. Both of these events will be from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. Registration is required, but the clinics are free and open for up to 20 participants at each event. If you are interested in learning how to fly fish or know someone who is, this will be a great opportunity to learn!

Our much anticipated Paddle the Pads fly fishing bass tournament is being planned for 2026. We are planning for Saturday August 29 at Chamber's Grove, stay tuned for more details. Visit mntu.org/gitche-gumee to view our upcoming events, sign up for our email newsletter, email us any questions you have, and follow us on social media!

Jason Swingen

Headwaters Chapter

As we transition to summer, we look back on what we have done over the last few months. We had a very successful Youth Fly Fishing Program, with 36 fourth grade students participating. This is our longest running program that teaches the basic fly fishing skills to get kids interested in the sport. Students spend two days learning how to tie some basic flies. The other two days are split between learning how to cast a fly rod and how to tie essential knots. The culmination of the program is to take the kids fishing on the Clearwater River.

Our Community Fly Tying classes ran weekly this year, alternating from advanced tiers to novices. We had several first-time tyers that showed up and continued through most of the year. We tied a variety of flies from trout, panfish, bass, and pike. This year we added an extra month due to demand.

We had a chapter meeting in April, where we received an update from the DNR on streams in our area (Bemidji), the launch of our new funding campaign, and a bit of history on our Trout Opening day tradition. We also had a presentation from Joe Adams and his daughter Gretta on our own Trout in the Classroom program at Gene Dillon and some information about steelhead fishing.

Our Trout in the Classroom program is nearing the end of the year. We had our first release day on May 14. Students from Gene Dillon and Aurora Waasakone participated in the river-side program. Students started off by releasing the trout they spent the year raising in the river and then participated in four volunteer-led stations. Students were able to demonstrate what they learned in the classroom and bring it to the river. The stations teach students about flow of the water and how some of the water doesn't appear to flow downstream and some even moves upstream. Other stations talk about the insects that can be found in the water and which ones indicate a healthy river. One volunteer showed examples of insects and had flies tied to mimic them. Students also learn about those things that are outside of the water and why they are important to the fish. The highlight of my day was using a Woolly Bugger to catch trout at the water flow station, showing the students where the fish actually are in the river.

John Lueth and I also spent a couple of hours down by Osakis and were able to observe Elaina Knott's (TIC teacher) class planting trees around Spruce Creek. The Osakis school is new to the TIC program this year and provided some of their own equipment to get started.

Our chapter has also launched a new fundraising campaign to help our chapter raise funds for our education programs, including Trout in the Classroom. Our goal is to raise $6,420 over the next year. If anyone is interested in contributing, please contact kris@tu642.org for more information.

Looking forward to summer, we have plans to hold monthly fishing events focused on different species. This will culminate in September with our annual Pike Hunt. Check out our website, tu642.org for more information.

Kris Williams

Hiawatha Chapter

About a dozen HTU members chose to eschew the BIG GAME Monday April 6 and were treated to two excellent talks. But the high point, the apex, was MNTU executive director John Lenczewski presenting Ray Ricketts with a much deserved HTU Distinguished Service Award.

Lenczewski was effuse in his praise of Ricketts for all the work he has done over the years, helping to get landowner permission and other necessities for about 20 habitat improvement projects.

"Ray, you were incredible," he said.

Ricketts was his usual humble self. "Without the help of John, without the help of the chapter, it would not have been done," he said.

*****

On April 11, six Trout Unlimited members, a DNR stream habitat specialist and the owner of land along Mazeppa Creek worked in the mud and drizzle to clear tires that had fallen into the creek. But they found more than trees in the woods and ended up taking 107 tires to be recycled. The goal was to get them out before the DNR does more habitat work on the stream.

Members of Hiawatha TU were Paul Krolak, Eric Hanson, Todd Christenson, Zach Washburn and John Weiss; Eli Halvorson from Twin Cities TU; Dusty Hoffman of the DNR and landowner Kyle Mehrkens. Bill Brant and Blake Abdella of HTU helped coordinate the work and Brant drove the UHaul to get the tires to a recycler in Rochester.

Originally, we thought we would move 30 to 40 tires but Brant and Hoffman found more in the nearby woods, not just along the stream. Because it's close to the Twin Cities, Hiawatha and Twin Cities chapters agreed to share expenses.

The work wasn't much fun. Some people had to slowly work their way down the tall, steep, muddy bank and dig some of the tires out of the creek or its bank. Each tire had to be lifted up, passing them up from one to another. Those on top had to rip tires out of thorns and shrubs and shake out dirt. All had to be carried 200 to 300 feet through woods and up another embankment where Mehrkens brought a flatbed that he used to bring them to the UHaul.

There could be more chances to do things like this, Hoffman said because "there are more opportunities" on some streams. Each chapter has a representative on a habitat improvement committee to find more opportunities. They work with the DNR in Lanesboro, Lake City and the metro area. He cautioned that we can't just go out and work on streams without checking with the DNR first.

He suggested that anglers document when they find trees or other problems in places where TU has done habitat work. Take pictures and GPS coordinates and maybe at the end of the year MNTU could hire a contractor to do all of them; it would be too expensive to have a contractor do one stream at a time, he said. But he added "it all has to be tracked if you're doing it through the DNR." In other words, don't just go alone to take things out of stream banks or in streams on your own.

Brant said he's the HTU contact. Give him the information. He's riverbill12@gmail.com.

All in all, a challenging yet fulfilling

two hours. While volunteers were doing that, Sara Strassman, program manager of Driftless Area Restoration Effort (DARE) and Paul Krahn, DARE stream restoration specialist, lopped out willow cuttings that were planted along a part of Mazeppa that had the habitat work done. Jenny Biederman initiated the idea not next to the stream but in a broad floodplain created when the stream was moved from a very tall, sandy embankment that was continually shedding more sand into the stream.

"We estimated we planted about 200 willow stakes," Strassman said. "We left flags out there to assess survival in a month. If anglers would like a reason to go fish down there, we'd love to have a few pics or a short report on how things are looking.

John Weiss

Twin Cities Chapter

What follows is the story of Ike's Creek—not the work of one person alone, but the story of what can happen when people refuse to overlook something small, fragile, and full of possibility.

For years, thousands of people passed through Bloomington, MN every day without ever realizing that a coldwater stream flowed quietly nearby. Across from the Mall of America, tucked into one of the most urbanized landscapes in the Midwest, a narrow creek wound through the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge. It was less than a mile long, unnamed on many maps, and largely forgotten.

But to a few observant conservationists, the creek told a different story.

During preparations for a youth electro-fishing demonstration near the Bass Ponds area, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Wildlife Biologist Vicki Sherry walked along the small stream and noticed something familiar. After years spent studying streams in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, she recognized the signs immediately: cold groundwater, clean gravel, and the subtle characteristics of habitat capable of supporting trout.

At the time, few people considered the creek significant. Initial surveys conducted with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources in 2006 found no trout at all. Yet historical notes uncovered later referenced brook trout living there in the 1940s. The idea began to grow: if trout once survived here, perhaps they could again.

That possibility sparked a partnership that would span nearly two decades.

Vicki reached out to Trout Unlimited and Minnesota DNR fisheries staff to evaluate the stream further. Early collaboration with Twin Cities Trout Unlimited leaders, including John Hunt and Steve Carlton, helped transform curiosity into action. Together, agency staff, volunteers, and conservation partners began imagining what this overlooked urban creek could become.

In June 2007, some wild-strain brook trout were placed into the creek. No fish have been stocked since.

What happened next surprised nearly everyone.

The trout survived and are doing well. Year after year, the population persisted naturally in the shadow of highways, parking lots, and commercial development. Ike's Creek became the only trout stream in Hennepin County and one of the most remarkable urban brook trout restoration stories in Minnesota.

Its success was never about the size of the stream. It was about persistence—both ecological and human.

The creek faced enormous challenges. The fish passage was blocked by an aging water-control structure. Portions of the channel offered poor habitat. Urban runoff, erosion, and invasive species continually threatened the fragile coldwater system. Yet each obstacle brought together more people willing to help.

Over time, an extraordinary coalition formed around Ike's Creek. Trout Unlimited members worked alongside the Minnesota DNR, Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge, Minnesota Valley Trust, Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends, the Lower Minnesota River Watershed District, the City of Bloomington, local businesses, Izaak Walton League chapters, Boy Scouts, contractors, engineers, and countless volunteers. Funding support from Minnesota's Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment helped move the vision from small restoration projects toward large-scale habitat recovery.

The work happened season by season and year by year: removing invasive species, stabilizing stream banks, planting native vegetation, repairing erosion damage, educating nearby landowners, and continually advocating for the creek's protection. Through changing leadership, shifting priorities, and years of incremental progress, the shared vision remained alive.

Eventually, the restoration effort grew into a major reconstruction project. Designed by Inter-Fluve and completed by Geomorphic Restoration of Duluth, the project removed the old water-control structure and restored natural stream connectivity, allowing trout access to significantly more spawning and refuge habitat.

On April 22, 2026, project partners, volunteers, conservation organizations, and community supporters gathered along the creek for a ribbon-cutting ceremony celebrating the restoration. It marked far more than the completion of a construction project. It celebrated years of trust, collaboration, persistence, and belief in a place many people once overlooked.

Today, brook trout continue to thrive in Ike's Creek despite the immense pressures of urbanization. Visitors to the stream are welcome; however, while restoration is in progress, they are asked not to disturb the habitat or sensitive fish population. Continued monitoring will help evaluate how expanded habitat improves the long-term health of the stream.

But numbers alone cannot fully explain the significance of Ike's Creek.

The creek stands as proof that conservation success can happen in unexpected places. It demonstrates what becomes possible when agencies, nonprofits, volunteers, engineers, local communities, and passionate individuals work together over the long term. What began as a quiet observation during a walk beside an unnamed creek became a nationally significant example of urban coldwater restoration.

At the heart of the story is collaboration—people bringing different skills, resources, and persistence together in service of something larger than themselves.

And flowing through it all is a simple but powerful lesson: sometimes the places worth saving are the ones most people never notice at all.

Yves Charron

Ray Ricketts received the Distinguished Service Award for his dedication to the Hiawatha Chapter.

Win-Cres Chapter

On April 6, Win-Cres members helped guide a trout fishing outing with the Goodhue High School Fishing Club. The day, which began at Rushford's Creekside Park, was successful with more trout being caught by students than any previous year. Thank you to all the guides. Thank you to Robbie Ebner, the Goodhue Club leader, for allowing Win-Cres to be a part of this experience.

On the May 9 Scout Day was held at Boers Adventure Camp, in Houston, MN. The Boy Scouts worked through three different skill stations, working towards their Fly Fishing Merit Badge. After lunch, guides assisted them in a fly fishing experience and provided flies and fly boxes to these Merit Badge participants.

On May 13 at Whitewater State Park from 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., Win-Cres helped seventh grade Winona Middle School students with an on-stream fishing experience. This was part of the Trout in the Classroom Trout Release Day led by Winona Middle School science teacher Amblyn Reisetter where students released the trout they had been rearing. Amber Taylor was present to coordinate the release portion, while others offered invertebrate sampling, along with various other nature walks, including bird sightings and foraging.

Win-Cres will have a booth at the Winona County Fair July 8 to 12 from 12 to 9:00 p.m. Roger Berg passed around a sign-up sheet for members to help. Please contact Roger if you are available to work either 12 to 3:00 p.m., 3 to 6 p.m., or 6 to 9:00 p.m. This is an opportunity to connect with potential trout anglers, share information, swap stories, provide handouts and inform people of TU's ongoing work.

Trevor Biederman shared that the owners of the non-leased section of Garvin have signed the release form allowing Win-Cres to treat the invasive Japanese Knotweed.

The next Win-Cres Board and Officers meeting will be June 3, 2026.

Tom Stevens

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Select Poetry

Amity Creek By Larry Gavin

What color was the sky
at sunset? A light breeze
and bird song squeezing
the spring air. The river itself
mirrors in deference to darkness.
Understand that darkness
and the one lone star
soon followed by others,
a "school" of stars? Perhaps.
Measure great distance,
great emptiness.
It is only a matter of time
before emptiness creeps inside
or perhaps it was there all along
and this creek just revealed it.
The creek holds me here
shaking and without
focus. Invite me back some
night until the way home
becomes clear and each fish
knows my name.

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.redragonflypress.org

GGTU volunteers Ben Mechelke and Peder Yurista remove cages from successful trees along Chester Creek in Duluth.