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MINNESOTA TROUT UNLIMITED

The Official Publication of Minnesota Trout Unlimited - November 2026

Nitrate Lawsuit Update

TCTU Receives National Award

20 Years of Trout in the Classroom

The Root River Recovers

The Long Way Home

TROUT UNLIMITED
MINNESOTA
The Voice of MNTU



DOUG MORAN AND OTHER CHAPTER VOLUNTEERS INSTALLED INFORMATIONAL SIGNS AT MNTU HABITAT IMPROVEMENT SITES THIS FALL.

On The Cover

Showing the next generation a section of Pine Creek in the Driftless. Jason Rieke photo.

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Editor's Angle

A Busy Season Around Minnesota

By Jade Thomason, Editor

This November newsletter issue is a celebration of so much that MNTU represents: coldwater advocacy, youth education, carefully nurtured partnerships, stream stewardship, and chapter camaraderie. St. Paul was the host city for the CX3 national meeting of Trout Unlimited, and the fine work of MNTU was heartily celebrated. Read on about our successful habitat tour, TCTU's Golden Trout award and some well-deserved recognition of our conservation partners.

The strong advocacy voice of MNTU is showcased here in an informative piece on the effects of neonicotinoids, an update on our nitrate lawsuit and a guest piece by Monta Hayner on agricultural runoff. A key role of MNTU is standing up for our coldwater resources and MNTU has been busy.

Education is another priority for our organization and Amber Taylor's piece celebrating 20 years of Trout in the Classroom (TIC) is a great reminder of how long TU has been supporting youth. We've always believed that getting kids invested in their natural surroundings and taking them out to touch a trout stream is one of the best ways to build new advocates. The 2026-2027 TIC students will receive this paper along with their trout eggs in December!

Both the Headwaters and Gitche Gumee chapters held wildly successful fly fishing events this season, highlighting another less spoken of tenant of TU: sharing waters with members and building community through fishing. Read more about these events in the chapter updates. I've attended both and couldn't recommend them more!

The Hiawatha chapter holds multiple stream cleanups each year and Win-Cres



members have been tireless stewards of Garvin Brook, meticulously removing Japanese knotweed from its banks. There's so much to share this issue, make sure to take the time to dig deep and learn about what's been happening this season all around Minnesota!

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JOHN LUETH OF THE HEADWATERS CHAPTER VOLUNTEERED TYING FLIES WITH YOUTH AT GLENDALOUGH STATE PARK NEAR FERGUS FALLS THIS SUMMER.

Minnesota Council Update

GREAT PROGRESS THIS YEAR – MANY CHALLENGES AHEAD

By Michael Madigan, Minnesota Council of TU Chair

Throughout the year, MNTU staff and members advocated for the regulation of neonicotinoids, hyperscale data centers, feedlots, applications of manure and nitrogen fertilizer and more.

MNTU also joined TU in lobbying against rescission of the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule. Repealing the protections in the Rule would impact millions of acres of public land and put cold, clean headwaters and healthy habitat for native trout and salmon at risk.

In September, the board approved our advocacy priorities for 2027:

• Preventing fish kills
• Addressing agricultural runoff impacts on trout streams, including pesticides, fungicides and treated seeds
• Addressing nitrate pollution from livestock feedlots, manure applications and excessive applications of nitrogen fertilizer
• Securing more public access to trout streams
• Supporting more oversight in the development of hyperscale data centers
•Supporting partners' work to prevent sulfide mining impacts to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness and Lake Superior

This year's habitat program's accomplishments include restoring habitat for trout and wildlife in and along Eagle Creek in Savage and the South Branch of the Root River in downtown Lanesboro. In response to the widespread spruce budworm infestation, MNTU restored riparian forests along the Split Rock River to shade and cool otherwise good trout habitat.

MNTU submitted three applications for FY2028 Outdoor Heritage Funding to continue our habitat restoration work across the state. In addition to statewide projects, we are seeking separate funding for the Little Cannon River and Beaver Creek (Whitewater Valley). Initial recommendations by the Lessard Council are promising, but the legislative process runs until May 2027.

Our Trout in the Classroom (TIC) program had another successful year. Seventy schools and two nature centers participated in the 2025-26 school year, reaching more than 4,300 students. Our TIC team assisted in numerous fall field trips, winter activities and the spring release of trout fry. The program also sponsored seven fly-tying classes.

Thanks to a small, but exemplary staff and an army of dedicated volunteers, MNTU punches well above its weight. Notwithstanding this great work, serious challenges to trout fisheries lie ahead.

There are many opportunities for MNTU



members to engage and utilize their unique skills and talent. Your advocacy is needed at the legislature as well as before regulatory state agencies and local units of government. Your passion for angling is needed to introduce others, particularly young anglers, to trout fishing and the interconnected web of life in which they live. Your dedication and strong backs are needed in MNTU's work to restore degraded trout habitat. Finally, your time, talent, expertise and donations are needed to help build the organization to better accomplish its mission. I encourage all members to engage and recruit new members.

The threats to these unique ecosystems are plenty. But, so too, is our commitment, engagement and advocacy.

Tight lines and bright waters!

From the Executive Director

Thanks to Our Volunteers

By John Lenczewski, MNTU Executive Director

In November we give thanks for the many good things around us. In that spirit of gratitude, I highlight the good work of six supervolunteers MNTU formally recognized with 2026 Distinguished Service Awards:

Donald Eckenrode moved to Minnesota in 2005 and wasted no time volunteering wherever help was needed. He served as TCTU Treasurer, MNTU Treasurer, TCTU banquet committee workhorse, and was seemingly everywhere–habitat workdays, Great Waters Expo ticket sales, T.U.N.E. camps, youth casting clinics, and more.

Don has donated countless hours helping wounded active military and veterans through the therapeutic effects of fly tying, fly castings, and fishing. For his outstanding contribution to coldwater conservation in Minnesota, Don received MNTU's top honor, the 2026 Dr. Thomas Waters Award for Minnesota Conservation.

Brandon Kime of Duluth embodies the spirit of service that the MNTU Distinguished Service Award honors. Brandon shares his excitement for local trout waters and passion for conservation. As president, he grew the Gitche Gumee chapter, started new partnerships, and led by example on habitat projects, fly tying instruction and casting clinics.

James McCracken of Bemidji is helping the Headwaters Chapter 642 build the future of conservation. Jim coordinates the chapter's Trout in the Classroom (TIC) program by managing the complex logistics of bringing habitat and coldwater education to area students through hands-on learning experiences. He is a tireless volunteer, fly tying teacher and casting instructor who inspires the next generation and ensures the future of coldwater conservation remains bright.

Raymond Ricketts of Rochester has been instrumental in helping the Hiawatha Chapter and MNTU implement habitat restoration projects in southeast Minnesota. Ray spent countless hours scouting potential project sites, meeting landowners, developing budgets, vetting bidders, evaluating bids and leading workdays. Ray did countless other tasks to keep the Hiawatha Chapter vibrant and effective.

Dr. Charles Shepard of Winona has provided decades of leadership, philanthropic support, and commitment to the Win-Cres Chapter and MNTU. In addition to supporting numerous stream habitat projects, removing invasive species, assisting with prairie restorations, and leading litter pickups, Chuck worked tirelessly to plant the seeds of conservation in area youth by assisting with TIC, the Goodhue Youth Fishing Club, the Boy Scouts of America, and classes on fly fishing and fly tying.



Gary Wittrock of Chaska has served as a recruiter for the Twin Cities Chapter board and mentor to many. Gary is an enthusiastic supporter of youth education and served as TCTU's Youth Education Coordinator. He volunteers at T.U.N.E. Camp, makes classroom visits, delivers eggs, and helped develop the chapter's fly-casting program. Like the other supervolunteers he helps where needed–with habitat events, Oktoberfish, and the Silent Auction fundraiser.

I am grateful to these volunteers and to the many other outstanding Trout Unlimited volunteers who help deliver coldwater conservation in Minnesota.

MINNESOTA TROUT UNLIMITED

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New to Neonics? Here's What You Should Know

Neonic's Prevalence in Minnesota Surface Water

By Andee Erickson, MNTU Communications Director

Neonicotinoids, or neonics, are a class of insecticides, most commonly used to treat corn and soybean seeds, that are highly toxic to the aquatic insects that form the base of trout fishery food webs.

They are incredibly pervasive because they were designed to be long-lasting and water soluble in order for the entire crop to efficiently absorb the insecticide. These qualities, and the fact that about 95% of the chemical enters the environment instead of the plant, are what make neonicotinoids such a widespread issue.

At least one neonicotinoid was detected in 97% of Minnesota's stream samples, according to a 2021 study published in "Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry."

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) has reported that its own data shows "elevated" and "concerning" concentrations of neonicotinoids in surface water.

In a 2024 letter to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), MDA wrote that its monitoring of neonicotinoids had detected the insecticide in Minnesota streams at levels exceeding the EPA's benchmark for what's harmful to freshwater invertebrates.

The EPA developed "chronic aquatic life benchmarks" for neonicotinoids based on toxicity to aquatic invertebrates. To formally exceed the chronic benchmark, the water concentration must remain above the threshold for a continuous 21-day period.

Despite these benchmarks, neonicotinoids still affect the survival of invertebrates at low doses, according to a 2017 study published in "Environmental Science and Pollution Research."

"(I)t is the long exposure to much lower levels of insecticide that really affects the survival of the organisms," the study states. "(P)rotective levels for neonicotinoids cannot be achieved by setting a concentration benchmark, because the effects of neonicotinoids increase with exposure time and because of cascade effects within individuals."

Insects exposed to low concentrations of various neonicotinoids experienced delayed mortality, according to numerous studies. The insecticide irreversibly binds to major nerve receptors, disrupting signaling and triggering the death of neurons over time before eventually killing the organism.

The MDA estimates almost all corn seeds and approximately 44% of soybean seeds in Minnesota are treated with at least one neonicotinoid insecticide. The exact numbers are difficult to nail down because the federal government stopped tracking neonicotinoid-treated seed use in 2015 due to data complexity. The state of Minnesota also does not formally track treated-seed use.

Clothianidin and imidacloprid are the two neonicotinoids that often exceed the chronic benchmark in Minnesota streams, most commonly in May through July and correlating with the corn and soy seed planting season.

Prevalence in Trout Streams

A couple trout streams are among the surface water bodies that MDA regularly monitors as part of its pesticide water quality monitoring: South Branch Root River, Middle Fork Whitewater and South Fork Whitewater.

MNTU analyzed 10 years of neonics (clothianidin, imidacloprid and thiamethoxam) data collected from those sites between 2016-2025. The graphic below illustrates how often neonics showed up in monitoring results, with South Branch Root River having the most reported detections of neonicotinoids.

What's being done?

Despite acknowledging that toxic levels of neonicotinoids are persisting in Minnesota's water, MDA has yet to regulate neonic-treated seeds.

The agency is in the process of reviewing whether its current regulations adequately protect Minnesota's water, wildlife and natural resources. The review is the result of a settlement in a lawsuit filed against MDA by the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) and the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy (MCEA) in 2025.



Neonicotinoids harm aquatic macroinvertebrates, the base of the food web in our trout streams.

Prior to the lawsuit, Minnesota Trout Unlimited joined MCEA and NRDC to petition MDA to regulate neonics. MDA denied that petition.

As part of its court-ordered review, MDA held a public comment period over the summer on Minnesota Rules Chapter 1505. MNTU, chapters and members submitted comments concerning the impacts of neonicotinoids on aquatic macroinvertebrates and trout fisheries.

MDA must issue an order in response to its findings by March 1, 2027.

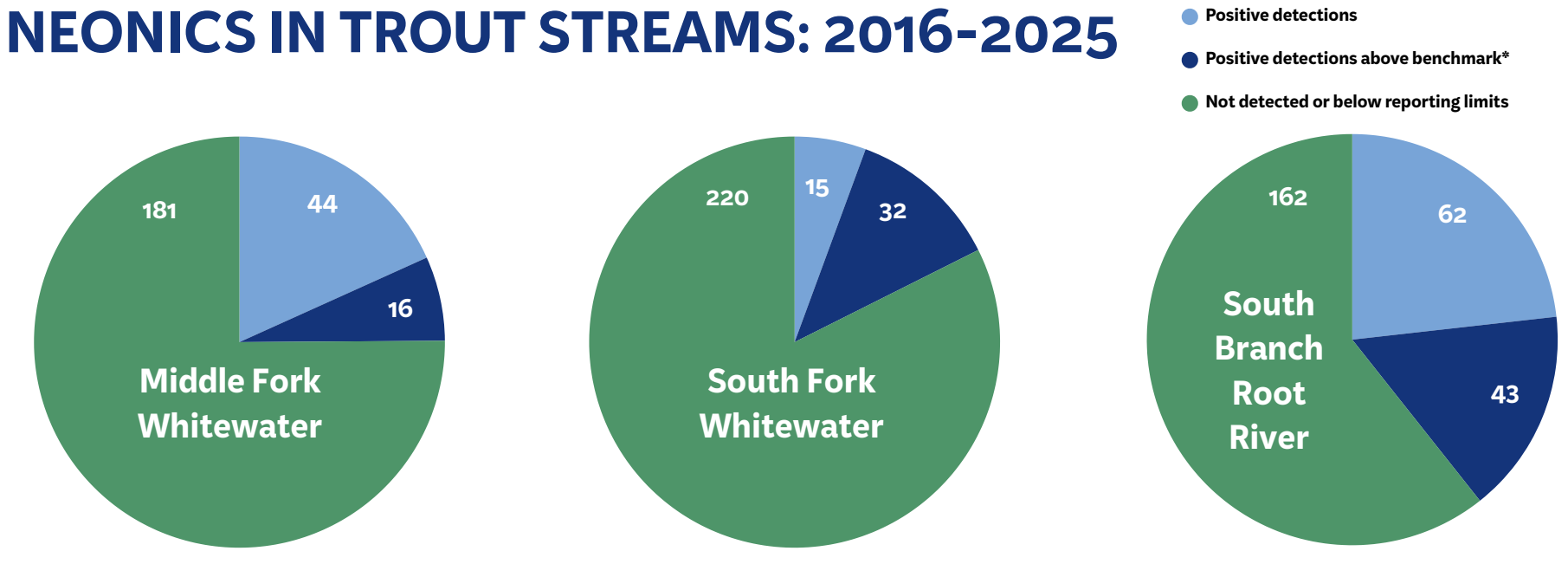
Meanwhile, an active neonic coalition in Minnesota, now called Campaign for Cleaner Seed, is preparing for next year's legislative session, which will include a lobby day on Feb. 8, 2027, at the Minnesota Capitol.

The coalition is made up of anglers, gardeners, farmers, beekeepers, parents, birders and others working to protect people and Minnesota's water and wildlife from pesticide contamination.

During Minnesota's 2026 legislative session, Rep. Kristi Pursell and Sen. Mary Kunesh introduced bills to prohibit seeds coated with neonicotinoids, but the bill failed to pass. Legislation is expected to be reintroduced during next year's session.

Trout cannot thrive without the aquatic insects that sustain them and aquatic insects can't thrive in water contaminated with insecticides designed to kill them. With the MDA's review deadline approaching and neonics legislation expected to be reintroduced in 2027, next year could be critical for how Minnesota protects our coldwater.

NEONICS IN TROUT STREAMS: 2016-2025



Data source: Minnesota Department of Argiculture pesticide water quality monitoring data

* For the EPA's chronic aquatic life benchmark to officially be met, levels must remain above the benchmark for a continuous 21 days. The publicly available data didn't include whether or not the 21-day criteria was met.

Reducing Nitrate Pollution in Trout Streams

Update on MNTU's Campaign

By John Lenczewski, MNTU Executive Director

In January 2025, Minnesota Trout Unlimited joined the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy (MCEA) and the Minnesota Well Owners Association (MNWOO) in a lawsuit against the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) to force them to do a better job protecting trout streams from harm caused by high nitrate levels and fish kills. Nitrates come from several sources, but agricultural runoff and livestock manure are the primary sources. Current state rules governing commercial fertilizer application and manure management are not working well enough to prevent serious harm to trout streams and trout anglers.

Nitrates Harm Trout and Aquatic Insects

Nitrogen is a nutrient that plants use to grow. Farmers apply it through commercial fertilizer and animal manure. Once applied, some of it converts to nitrate and ammonia. Nitrate that is not absorbed by plants leaches downward into groundwater or runs overland into surface waters. When rainfall carries it into trout streams it can have drastic impacts. Ninety percent of nitrate pollution in southeast Minnesota comes from nitrogen fertilizer and manure applications. High nitrate levels kill aquatic insects and harm trout survival and reproduction. Nitrate levels exceeding 5 mg/L–just one-half the drinking water standard–harm trout and aquatic life. For greater detail on how nitrates reach trout waters and harm fisheries see the article "New Litigation Over Nitrate Contamination" in the March 2025 edition of this newsletter.

Goal of Our Lawsuit

The goal of the state lawsuit remains to force MPCA and MDA into rulemaking procedures that will strengthen regulations on manure and commercial fertilizer applications and reduce nitrate contamination in trout waters.

Progress Strengthening Feedlot Rules

The MPCA regulates manure applications on agricultural land through its Animal Feedlot Rule. The MPCA adopted the Feedlot Rule in the 1970s and made only minor updates in 2014. The rule was intended to prevent improper manure use and over-application on fields, but the Feedlot Rule has proven to be ineffective in preventing nitrate pollution.

As a result of our lawsuit, the MPCA opened a public comment period on the Feedlot Rule in March 2025. We issued action alerts, suggested key areas for Rule improvements, and held a webinar to aid comment writing. Many TU members and organizations submitted comments through the late July 2025 deadline. MNTU's written comments suggested twenty changes to the Feedlot Rule that would lessen nitrate and ammonia pollution. The most significant changes include our requests that the Rule be revised to:

1. Require National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permits for animal feedlots with more than 600 animal units.

2. Require all feedlots with 300 or more animal units to prepare a manure management plan, maintain land application records, and submit these to the MPCA and county feedlot pollution control officer.

3. Require all owners and operators of animal feedlots with 300 or more animals to use the online nutrient management tool, including for development of manure management plans.

4. When manure is transferred by a feedlot owner/operator for application to the land by someone else, require that the transferee also follow the requirements in the manure management plan.

5. Prohibit manure application on frozen or saturated ground, or when rainfall is likely.

6. Require greater setback distances for manure applications from water resources in the karst region and other vulnerable groundwater areas, including prohibiting manure applications within:

- 300 feet upslope or 100 feet downslope of a sinkhole or other direct conduit to groundwater
- 300 feet upslope of a public waterway or tributary of a public waterway
- 250 feet from a private well
- 1,000 feet from a community well

7. Prohibit animals of any size animal feedlot from entering any public water, trout stream, trout stream tributary or spring which flows into a trout stream or trout stream tributary.

The MPCA received comments from more than 475 individuals and 7,500 pages of documents. In January 2026 the agency announced that it would begin a formal rulemaking process to revise the Feedlot Rule. Currently several work groups are developing specific changes and a formal written justification for each change. Draft revisions are expected in 2027. This is real progress!

Groundwater Protection Rule Review

The MDA regulates commercial fertilizer applications through the Groundwater Protection Rule. The Groundwater Protection Rule is the only rule that regulates the use of nitrogen fertilizer in Minnesota. To call it a "rule" is generous, since following its collection of "best management practices" (BMPs) is voluntary. Under the BMPs, farmers are left to decide how much nitrogen to apply to their fields, when, and how. Yet they often lack current information about how the applications will impact water quality. The result is farmers often over-applying commercial fertilizer, especially when nitrate-rich manure is also being applied. Excess nitrate that is not absorbed by plants ends up leaching downward into groundwater or running overland into surface waters. Since trout streams are closely connected to groundwater, excess nitrates in groundwater reach trout streams relatively quickly.



Current state rules governing fertilizer application are not strong enough to prevent serious harm to trout streams and trout anglers. Tom Carpenter Photo.

Our lawsuit brought MDA to the negotiating table in summer 2025. We reached a settlement agreement with MDA in September 2025 under which MDA would have one year to review its Groundwater Protection Rule to determine whether it was adequate to prevent nitrate pollution. The agreement was formalized in a Court order in September 2025.

In January 2026 the MDA opened a public comment period on the Groundwater Protection Rule, asking people to help determine whether the Rule is "adequate to protect Minnesota's air, water, land, and other natural resources from nitrate pollution." We issued action alerts and suggested key areas for Rule improvements which members could highlight in their comments. After noting the Rule's failure to reduce harmful nitrate levels in groundwater and surface waters, MNTU requested these three major changes to the rule:

1. Part 1 of the Rule–which applies to all farm operations in Vulnerable Groundwater Areas (including every trout watershed in southeast Minnesota and other agricultural areas)–needs to be expanded to address fertilizer use during the growing season. It should be further revised to require all agricultural producers in vulnerable groundwater areas to follow these additional common-sense practices:

- following the University of Minnesota Extension Service's recommended application rates and best management practices
- keeping records to ensure producers are accounting for all sources of nitrogen in each field and submitting annual Nutrient Management Plans
- observing setbacks from sensitive features including sinkholes and wells

2. Part 2 of the Rule only applies to those 2% of the state's Vulnerable Groundwater Areas located around community wells with high nitrate levels (Drinking Water Supply Management Areas). This fails to protect private wells and aquifers. We requested that Part 2 of the Rule be expanded to apply to the entirety of any township where testing shows nitrate levels above 10 mg/L.

3. Part 2 of the Rule allows the MDA to add further regulations in areas where nitrate pollution is not improving, but it also includes unnecessarily long delays before the agency may act. We requested that MDA remove these self-imposed barriers and accelerate mandatory adoption of the most effective practices such as Alternative Management Practices. We also called for mandatory baseline BMPs and enforcement. We also urged great use of Alternative Management Practices such as cover crops and incorporating perennials in all these vulnerable areas.

MDA Determination

On August 31, 2026 the MDA released its "finding" that the Groundwater Protection Rule is adequate to protect Minnesota's air, water, land, and other natural resources from nitrate pollution. The facts show otherwise. MNTU and its partners are in the process of appealing this erroneous administrative decision of MDA to the District Court. Plenty of work lies ahead. But we will not stop until the MDA adopts rule changes that will strengthen regulations on commercial fertilizer applications and reduce nitrate contamination in Minnesota trout waters.

The Long Way Home

Three Things I'd Tell My 20-Year-Old Self About Fly Fishing and Life

By Jason Rieke





A Minnesota trout above and a Wyoming trout below.

At 20, I had around a year of fly fishing experience under my belt and was beginning to dive deep into the sport. I was a sophomore at Winona State University, and my friend Jack and I had just established the Winona State on the Fly club (RIP). I had no idea that picking up a fly rod had begun to lay the groundwork for a season of life that would influence where I lived, what I did for a living, and ultimately shape the kind of life that I built. If I could talk to that 20-year-old, I wouldn't tell him which fly rod to buy or where to fish. I'd tell him to pay attention and buckle up. The next 10 years will be a journey!

I'm 30 now. I fish less than I have at any point since I started fly fishing. I'm married to the love of my life, have two young sons, and have a career outside of fishing. I live in southeast Minnesota, close to the trout water where I cut my teeth. I still consider it to be among the best trout waters I've ever fished. My younger self desired to settle down eventually, but for a while, my trajectory wasn't pointing toward this destination. I don't think that he would have imagined that this current season would be the one I'd be most grateful for. Here's what I would tell him.

Go For It

"Go west, young man…" Seriously, go! It was worth it. There were fish and places that still seem almost made up: large brown trout eating mice off the surface in broad daylight on a meadow stream, fishing for even bigger browns with musky-sized flies while standing on ice shelves during pre-runoff, a rock arch-waterfall that required miles of bushwhacking in an area so remote that online information is nearly non-existent, native fish in glacial waters and landscapes that will take your breath away. I wouldn't tell my younger self to skip any of it.

I'd tell him to explore more of southern Wyoming, northwest Montana, and the panhandle of Idaho. Start floating rivers earlier if you can. Keep a better journal. When you move back, dive deeper into musky and smallmouth sooner. Pick the brains of the seasoned Trout Unlimited folks. Also, learn to manage money better and pay off college debt more efficiently (better yet, tell my even younger self to pay it off as he goes and not take on the debt).

I'd tell him to keep exploring the unknown, untalked about places. Take the road less traveled, even if he didn't know where it would end up. Take your faith more seriously. At the time I was less interested in asking where God might be leading me. Looking back, I can see God's hand in many of the places I ended up and the people I met.

I'd tell him to go for it. Not because every decision he'll make will be perfect, but because he'll learn a lot from some of those decisions and they will shape who he becomes. At 25, after I'd moved back to Minnesota, I had somewhat of a quarter-life crisis. I took on a big loan to buy a Tacoma, found a used Flycraft raft, and bought a rod rack from a buddy. For a while, I had the ultimate fly fishing rig and leaned hard into fishing and adventure. After a few years, life caught up and eventually I sold both the truck and the raft. I learned a lot about financ-





Left: The ultimate fly fishing rig.
Right: Balancing school, work and fishing at 20.

es during this season. I did keep the rod rack though.

There is Green Grass in the Midwest and the West

While living out West, I often told others that the Midwest was better than the West for fishing. Now that I have lived in and experienced both places, I would put it differently. When I moved back to Minnesota, there were many things that I missed about the West, because the West has many things that Minnesota doesn't: mountains, enormous landscapes, dry air, and more species of native trout. But Minnesota also has things that the West doesn't. Valleys where you can hike upstream for miles and find large brown trout in water you can step across. Wild tiger trout that, in my opinion, rival any stocked tiger trout in the country. Places where trout and enormous apex predators share the same watersheds (you might have a day when you catch trout on dry flies and your PB musky on the same float). Minnesota also has an incredible variety of cold- and warmwater bodies of water packed into a small area. When you're 30 with a career, a wife and two kids, proximity becomes a pretty valuable fishing characteristic.

The saying goes that the grass is always greener somewhere else, but I would tell him that neither the Midwest nor the West has greener grass. The grass is just different, and faith will teach you that being content with where you're at is more important than chasing the next place, or wishing you were back at the last place.

Fishing Less Is OK

The third thing I'd tell my 20-year-old self hits a little differently than the first two: Fishing less is OK. The amount of time I spend fishing now is a fraction of what it was during the peak of my fishing life. The bell curve peaked somewhere in Colorado and has been trending downward ever since. This year I have hit a 10-year low in the number of fishing trips recorded in my log. Of those fewer trips though, I've tossed my two-year-old in the backpack and brought him along for many of them. Those trips don't look much like the fishing trips I used to take–many of them have been for an hour or less, and the fishing itself is almost beside the point–but those trips matter much more to me than fishing more often.

I'd tell myself that it's more about who you fish with than how often you fish. Some fishing buddies become lifelong friends, others will come and go. You won't be able to keep up with everyone, and that's okay. Fish with Dad more often and with both of your grandpas when you have the opportunities.

I'd tell him that life has seasons: There was a season for living out west and chasing fish across the country, a season for moving back and figuring out a more sustainable career, and now a season for building a family. Part of this season has meant re-prioritizing time and learning that my time isn't ultimately my own. And that I wouldn't trade that or this season for anything.

The Long Way Home

If I could sit down with that 20-year-old kid, I wouldn't tell him to fish less. In the season he was in, I would tell him to go for it. Fish five days a week. Go West. But don't be afraid to come home. Realize though that none of the places that you land will be the ultimate destination. When life gets busy and priorities change, realize that it's OK to step back and slow down. A few short fishing trips with your two-year-old mean more than a hundred days on the water by yourself. The path from 20 to 30 will wind you all over; your job is to be faithful, content, and present with the season that you are actually in. I sold the Tacoma. I sold the Flycraft. While I fish far less these days, I am blessed to live near cold, pristine trout streams alongside my beloved wife and two sons, sharing with them a lifelong appreciation for the outdoors. That 20-year-old wouldn't have expected the journey that would unfold but it'll take him the long way home.

Jason Rieke is a former fly fishing guide turned composite materials engineer. After years of nodding through client excuses, he now applies that same patience to the delicate art of pultrusion and persuading fiberglass to behave. Jason works in Chatfield and lives in rural Winona County with his wife and two sons, where he's finding that raising children requires about as much patience as guiding fishermen, just with fewer tips.





Left: Fishing trips don't look the same as they used to, and fishing is often beside the point.
Right: Three generations and one little trout swimming back into the creek.



Unlikely Comebacks

Two Twin Cities Metro Streams Restored

By Bob Luck

In 2015, Dan Callahan wrote an essay in this newspaper about the conservation history of Eagle Creek, 15 miles south of downtown Minneapolis. He described the 1993 plan to create a housing development and industrial park that would have doomed it as a trout stream, and the mobilization and efforts by TU volunteers that ultimately led to protection of the stream through the creation of Minnesota's first Aquatic Management Area.

Eleven years later, the story is just as inspiring as the day it was written, and there is only one sentence that I would change:

"Among metro trout streams, Eagle Creek in Savage, MN is not a great place to fish."

Dan went on to explain that the stream was short, brushy, and hard to access.

No longer. There isn't much we can do about the stream length, but the DNR has conducted several projects over the years to restore the channel, supplemented by support from TCTU volunteers to remove invasive species from the riparian corridor and replace them with native vegetation. These efforts were supercharged in 2026 with a large-scale habitat project funded by the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Fund. Two-thousand feet of the stream have been restored with meanders, riffles and pools surrounded by native prairie plants. It looks like a small pasture stream from the heart of the Driftless Area was picked up by a tornado and dropped into the suburbs.

A great trout stream requires a healthy population of wild trout, ideally natives, and that has been a challenge for Eagle Creek. Although there had been documented populations of wild brown trout since the 1970s, they were always relatively scarce, with electrofishing surveys between 1998 and 2023 showing populations of 10 to 100 trout per mile, compared with 2,000+ trout per mile in the metro area's most productive streams. Erosion, low stream gradient and beaver dams contributed to the silting in of spawning riffles, and periodic floods from the Minnesota River often wiped out the few redds that had been created. Mark Nemeth, DNR metro fisheries coldwater specialist, told me that successful spawning occurred only once every few years, just enough to keep the trout population on life support. Thus, a key goal of the 2026 project was to create spawning habitat: narrow the stream in places to improve fine sediment transport and create riffles with exposed gravel.

Meanwhile, the DNR has begun stocking native brook trout to Eagle Creek in the hope of establishing a self-sustaining population. Brook trout require colder water than browns, and, thanks to the efforts by Dan Callahan and the TCTU crew to protect the headwaters, the springs are still pumping large quantities of water into the stream. According to Mark Nemeth, water temperatures rarely exceed 64F, even on the hottest summer days, making Eagle a candidate for successful brook trout reintroduction. The creek was stocked with the "Minnesota Driftless" strain: fish raised from remnant populations found in southeast Minnesota by DNR researchers in the mid-2010s. They have a different genetic fingerprint from the East Coast fish that were stocked in Minnesota streams until recently, and it is likely that they are descendants of the original brook trout found in the Driftless Area prior to European settlement. It is believed they may be better adapted to southern Minnesota waters than their Eastern cousins. Five-hundred fingerlings each were stocked in Eagle Creek in 2022, 2024, and 2026.



A healthy Eagle Creek brook trout in pre-spawn finery.

The stocked brookies are thriving in their newly remodeled home. In September I joined a crew of DNR employees and TCTU volunteers who sampled the stream using backpack electrofishing equipment. We sampled the newly restored area, plus a stretch upstream. The DNR will spend time over the winter to analyze the data, but it was clear to anybody with eyeballs that the fish in the restored area were larger and more plentiful than those upstream. Brook trout that had been released at 1" to 2" now ranged from 6" to 10" and more…sometimes substantially more. They were fat, spunky and ready for romance, with a lovely splash of pink on their bellies.

Speaking of romance, as of spring 2026, no natural reproduction of brook trout has been detected on Eagle Creek, but hopes are high that these healthy adult fish will take advantage of the newly formed spawning riffles and make lots of babies.

Natural reproduction of Minnesota Driftless Brook Trout is in full swing 30 miles east of Eagle Creek, at Trout Brook. Trout Brook rises in Washington County and wends through the Afton Alps ski area before entering Afton State Park and flowing into the St. Croix River. Although it is farther from the urban core than Eagle Creek, it still experienced degradation from logging and agriculture in the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries. The stream was shallow, wide, clogged with sand, and channelized in sections. Electrofishing surveys in 2001 and 2005 yielded one brown trout each time, and a survey in 2013 yielded one brook trout and four browns. No stocking records exist for Trout Brook—Mark Nemeth suspects that the browns renounced the Packers, and swam across the St. Croix from the Kinnickinnic in Wisconsin. The provenance of that single brook trout is a mystery.

In 2014, the DNR began working on the stream in the upper section of Afton State Park by eliminating barriers to fish passage and replacing invasive plants along the stream corridor. A 2017 survey yielded 31 fish—all browns. Work continued in the lower section of the park in 2019, with a culvert upgrade and a remeandering of the stream in its original flood plain. By 2021 the DNR recorded 320 fish—again, all browns. In 2021 and 2026, the DNR stocked 2,500 and 1,000 yearling brook trout, respectively. They also continued to do habitat work with projects in 2023-24 to improve sediment transport in Afton Alps and extend the remeandering in the state park. Key partners included Great River Greening, the South Washington County Watershed District, the Vail Corporation (owner of Afton Alps), and, of course, Afton State Park.

In September 2026, the DNR conducted an electrofishing survey with help from TCTU volunteers and a guest appearance by Linda Radimecky, a board member of the Kiap-TU-Wish Chapter in Wisconsin, and a long-time naturalist with the DNR at Afton State Park. Linda warned us against publicizing "my personal trout stream," but she was joking. At least I think she was.

I don't blame her for trying to keep it a secret. We captured over 1,100 fish in the same four stations that had been sampled in previous years. Most of the fish, especially the larger ones, were in the lower section of the state park, between the St. Croix River and Afton Alps. This stretch is skinny, but fishable. The upper stretch flows through private land before entering a jungle that would not be out



Electrofishing team moving up Eagle Creek.

of place in *Heart of Darkness*. If you decide to fish it, I recommend a snakebite kit, quinine tablets, and a handline. The most interesting result, apart from the sheer quantity of fish, was the abundance of brook trout, which accounted for over 90% of the fish captured. They are reproducing with gusto and appear to be out-competing the brown trout, a story we don't often hear in southern Minnesota. The reasons for this are not clear, and the DNR, who are real scientists, are not going to speculate, but that won't stop me. Trout Brook, like Eagle Creek, is a primarily sand-bottomed stream with water temps consistently below 64F. The Wisconsin DNR has found that, although browns dominate in the rocky, dolostone streams of the Driftless Area, the brook trout more than hold their own in the sandy, spring-fed streams on the eastern edge of the Driftless. Assuming this is true, it is a positive indicator for the future success of brook trout in Eagle Creek.

We published the results of the Trout Brook survey in TCTU's chapter newsletter and got an inquiry from a curious reader wanting to know if that was really the Trout Brook in Afton State Park that we were talking about. After we assured him that it was, he responded "Wow. That's fantastic." High praise from Dan Callahan.

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

Not all of the news is positive in the Twin Cities.

Minnesota Driftless brook trout were also stocked in the South Branch of the Vermillion, a key coldwater tributary of the Vermillion, the metro area's largest trout stream. While they were able to spawn successfully, the DNR found that smaller trout were skinnier than normal, which is possibly due to thermal stress. Larger trout were in good shape. The DNR plans to review summer temperature data from data loggers installed in the stream and will have a more definitive idea in a few months, but it was a warm, dry summer…

Things could get worse for the South Branch if a planned data center is built on its headwaters in Farmington. For more information on this project, please visit the following website:

www.datacenterresponsibility.com





Left: Linda Radimecky with a Trout Brook beauty.
Right: A bird's eye view of the 2026 restoration project, with a crew from Conservation Corps Minnesota & Iowa removing invasive burdock in the background.

A CX3 Report

By Brad Gustafson

After the state council meeting I called Carl Haensel, who had mentioned a need for more drivers for the CX3 annual meeting's fishing outings. I volunteered to drive two guys from the Seneca Valley Chapter of TU that wanted to fish. I had to look that up, it is west of Baltimore. I met them at the hotel at 8 a.m. on the Wednesday of the convention. They had picked up our lunch so we were off to the Rush and Kinni in Wisconsin. Fishing was good, catching not so good. They both said they enjoyed it.

The next day was a bus tour of habitat-improved waters in MN. My companions thought it was great and asked many questions. In the evening there was a TU film about the Snake River Basin. I met a woman from Napa Valley California who wanted to taste local beers.

Friday was more meeting and greeting people. All were very thankful for us for hosting the convention! In the evening was the awards dinner at the Harriet Island Pavillion. Many current and former TCTU volunteers were present and Yves Charron, current TCTU president, accepted the Golden Trout award along with the current chapter board. All previous TCTU board members were asked to stand and there were around 20 people who stood. Randy Arnold of the Kiap-TU-Wish Chapter also received the Distinguished Service Award, Conservation.

Outside a man with a fly rod was painting a scene using a piece of yarn on the end of his line and tapping it against the canvas for an hour. The finished piece was auctioned off. It was a very nice venue with wonderful weather overlooking the Mississippi and downtown St. Paul.

Saturday was the State of TU annual meeting seven minutes away at the Science Museum. I thought of it as a "pep fest" for TU. On the walk back we saw one of downtown St. Paul's peregrine falcons overhead, along with many waterbirds.

Between the meeting and dinner I hoped to get to some of the Kids Day at Kellen Park. As I got there a couple with two kids were leaving with new fly rod packages. They had been rained on during the day but had shelter. The fly rod artist had been there as well and the kids got to slap paint on another canvas.

That evening back at the hotel was the Embrace a Stream dinner. All the silent auction items were present as well and bidding continued. Steve Carlton suggested the night before that all of us from MN sit together. I also sat with three other people from MN and two from Montana. After some awards were given out by Chris Wood, TU national president, they brought out the artwork created by the kids. It was a bit more abstract than the piece created by the artist and it was also auctioned off. The man who bought it donated it to TCTU, as it would have been difficult to bring the 4x6' canvas on the plane home.



The abstract painting created by children fly casting with paint-covered yarn on fly rods. It was auctioned off and was given to the TCTU Chapter.

There were more events on Sunday but I was unable to attend.

I had been to the national convention in Portland, Maine in 2022 with John Lenczewski and Brent Notbohm, MNTU board chair at the time. I felt this convention in St. Paul was laid out better. If it ever returns to the Twin Cities I suggest more local MNTU members attend!

Brad Gustafson is a longtime MNTU volunteer and is currently on the state council.

TCTU Receives National Award

From Ziggy Stardust to the Golden Trout

By Barry Johnson

Tricky Dick Nixon was president. David Bowie was in his Ziggy Stardust phase. The IDS Center in Minneapolis–the tallest building in Minnesota–was about to be topped off.

It was 1972. That year, the Twin Cities Chapter of Trout Unlimited (TCTU) was born. Now, 54 years later, the chapter has earned the Golden Trout Award, the primo chapter recognition from national Trout Unlimited. The award spotlights the chapter's "innovative and thoughtful approaches to building community and advancing the national mission of Trout Unlimited." The Golden Trout hardware was delivered in September at TU's annual Community, Coldwater, Conservation event, also known as CX3.

While awarding the chapter, TU President and CEO Chris Wood said, "The Twin Cities chapter is one of the most exemplary chapters in the country."

He praised the Foster the Outdoors mentor program, where TCTU mentors help kids gear up, practice casting, read streams, and select flies.

"It took me three or four years to get into fly fishing because I was so bad at it and I had no one to teach me," Wood said. "At TCTU, if you raise your hand, you'll get a mentor."

Chris also called out the many events TCTU stages each year. In 2025, the chapter hosted or promoted 35 events.

TCTU is also one of the largest chapters in the country by membership.

Chapter President Yves Charron noted TCTU has more than 2,000 members and many additional supporters.

"Those folks are quick to participate in our chapter's events, activities and priorities," Charron said. "And they all get our sincere thanks. TCTU also has a history of excellent board members. We could not have built the chapter we have now without their major contributions over the years."

Protecting an Urban Resource

Perhaps the biggest TCTU chapter win came in the 1990s, when suburban sprawl threatened Eagle Creek, a small trout stream in Savage. TCTU fired up hardcore opposition to a plan for major construction near the stream. TCTU board member at the time, Dan Callahan, and his wife Brenda decided if they didn't act, there might not be any fishing left for their kids. They were visible and vocal, editorializing and testifying at the Minnesota Capitol. They inspired many others to do the same.

It got ugly.

A local lawmaker was triggered, saying on the record that people like Brenda Callahan "…would offer her children as burnt sacrifices to Mother Earth" to protect Eagle Creek.

No children were burned at the stake, but the advocacy of TCTU prevailed. The bulldozers and cement trucks withdrew and Eagle Creek was designated as Minnesota's first Aquatic Management Area (see "Unlikely Comebacks" by Bob Luck on Page 8).

TCTU continues its stewardship on Eagle Creek to this day. Earlier this year, Minnesota Trout Unlimited (MNTU) restored 2,000 feet of habitat in and along the stream and in October TCTU hosted a volunteer event to remove invasive burdock from the project area.

Doing the Dirty Work

"In 10 or 20 years," said TCTU board member, Brent Porter, "if our chapter wasn't doing what we do, you might not be able to fish many local trout streams." Hay Creek, he noted, was "almost unfishable" when TCTU undertook a range of clean-up efforts along the stream.

"In the last three years, TCTU has touched 18 streams," said Doug Moran, TCTU's habitat improvement coordinator.

The bulk of TCTU's stream work targets a handful of notable trout streams in or near the Minneapolis-St. Paul area. Gems like Hay Creek, Trout Run, the Vermillion River, Eagle Creek and "Unnamed Creek" near Mall of America.



Trout Unlimited President and CEO Chris Wood (fourth from left) presents the Golden Trout Award to TCTU board members during the CX3 award banquet in September in St. Paul.

From the muck and silt of trout streams, TCTU volunteers have pulled out car batteries, appliances, paint cans, computer monitors and tires.

"So many tires!" Moran said. "The good news is that–so far–we haven't found any human skeletons. Just a few deer bones."

Field work can be dirty work. But TCTU board members and volunteers get at it with many habitat events each year. They hack at buckthorn. They weed spud the dastardly wild parsnip and burdock. They fire up chainsaws and clear fallen trees. They assist with zapping streams to generate valuable electrofishing data. The TCTU Streamkeepers group tests and documents water quality. Sometimes, TCTU folks just pick up trash. When the work is done, they hang out with pizza or barbeque…all good ingredients for long-term stream health.

Garnering Public Access

Obtaining stream easements from landowners is a less visible, but important effort by TCTU, according to Charron. TCTU board and chapter members work behind the scenes to get to know farmers and others who own stream frontage. They listen to landowners' hopes and concerns. They talk through the benefits of easements to both property owners and trout anglers. If they cultivate interest, TCTU brings in the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources to put things on paper and formalize easement agreements. In this way, TCTU extends easily fishable waters in our area.

Giving Back

"At first," Charron said, "I joined TCTU just because I like to fish for trout and I wanted to meet people who share that interest. But then I discovered what TU is all about. So I got involved with the TCTU board to drive the TU mission in the Twin Cities and give back to the community. I'm really proud of the increased number of habitat events we've done in the past few years. That was a big part of winning the Golden Trout Award. The high level of engagement from our chapter members is really delivering results we will all enjoy for years to come."

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





Left: Twin Cities TU volunteers remove invasive burdock from the recently restored area of Eagle Creek in Savage in October.
Right: Tony Nelson of TCTU points to a restored section of Trout Brook, near Cannon Falls, while holding a photo of what that same spot looked like before MN Trout Unlimited restored trout habitat to the stream. Trout Brook receives ongoing stewardship from TCTU.

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Habitat Work Takes the National Stage

Trout Unlimited's CX3 Habitat Tour

By Jennifer Biederman, PhD, MNTU Habitat Program Director

There is really no better way to grab the attention of an angler-oriented conservationist than a wild brook trout in fall spawning colors. On September 24, we had the chance to share those beautiful fish, and the stream restoration work that supports them, with nearly 60 visitors from across the country during a tour of MNTU projects at Trout Brook and Hay Creek.

The tour was part of Trout Unlimited's national CX3 gathering in Saint Paul. Held September 23-27, the event brought TU members, volunteers, staff, and partners to Minnesota for fishing, conservation presentations, and time together. CX3 stands for "Community, Coldwater, Conservation," with discussions covering native trout, climate change, public lands, and getting more people involved in conservation. MNTU was eager to show attendees what the MNTU habitat program has been working on.

As MNTU's Habitat Director, I spend much of my time coordinating all that is behind this restoration work: applying for grant funding, working with experienced engineers and consultants, reviewing designs, working through the many permits, coordinating with partners, helping to oversee construction, and keeping an eye on projects for maintenance over time. Any opportunity to showcase completed projects to like-minded TU folks is not only great for sharing the work we are so proud of, but also learning from the experiences of others who do this work in other parts of the region or country.



Nearly 60 people joined the CX3 Habitat Tour to learn about MNTU stream restoration projects. Here, the group listens as the design work at Trout Brook in Miesville Ravine County Park in Dakota County is explained by MNTU staff and consultants.

We began with a hay wagon ride down to Trout Brook in Miesville Ravine County Park, where MNTU has completed more than a mile of habitat restoration since 2017. Minnesota DNR staff, including Mark Nemeth and Dusty Hoffman, and Win-Cres chapter member Neal Mundahl led an electrofishing demonstration that showed off some of our native brook trout. With their fall spawning colors on full display, these beautiful wild fish make the best possible case for the value of the habitat around us and the restoration work we accomplish.

Along the stream, we looked at the elements of habitat that we strive for in our designs including restored riffles and pools, boulders, toewood, and native vegetation. We discussed how these features provide cover and feeding areas for trout while addressing problems such as bank erosion. Toewood, for example, incorporates woody material along the base of a bank, creating sheltered spaces for fish while helping protect the bank from the erosive forces of high flow events.

We also pointed out the nongame wildlife features we incorporate in our projects including snag trees for birds and bats, wetland scrapes for amphibians and avian fauna, and turtle basking logs. These features can be easy to overlook when fishing the stream, but they are an intentional part of our projects. Restoring a stream gives us unique opportunities to improve habitat for the birds, amphibians, reptiles, and other wildlife that use its corridor.

Mike Majeski of EOR, Inc. joined us to explain the design approach, and contractors from Barth Construction, Inc. offered their perspective on building the project. Having both on hand was particularly useful. Visitors could ask why a feature was placed where it was, how it was built, and what had to be considered during construction. Those details are much easier to explain when everyone is standing beside the finished work!





Left: Jennifer Biederman and tour attendees view aquatic macroinvertebrates collected in the stream during the habitat tour at Hay Creek. TCTU and Win-Cres volunteers explained the value of water quality monitoring on streams.
Right: Dusty Hoffman, Stream Specialist with the MNDNR, shows attendees a wild brown trout caught during the electrofishing demo at the CX3 Habitat Tour at Trout Brook in Miesville Ravine County Park in Dakota County.

After a barbecue and walleye lunch at the Anderson Center in Red Wing, we headed to Hay Creek to walk a recent 3,900-foot restoration project. Twin Cities Trout Unlimited Streamkeeper Jim Sauter demonstrated water quality testing and aquatic macroinvertebrate sampling. His demonstration showed how water chemistry and the insects living in a stream can help us understand its condition, and how volunteers can contribute to that understanding through regular monitoring using citizen or community science programs.

These two stops gave us plenty to discuss, but they represent only a portion of MNTU's habitat program. Since 2009, we have completed more than 160 projects statewide, working in and along more than 125 miles of trout streams and at six trout lakes in northeastern Minnesota. Our record reflects years of work by MNTU staff, local chapters, agency partners, consultants, and contractors. It also reflects a substantial public investment. MNTU has spent more than $25 million in Outdoor Heritage funding on habitat restoration since 2009, secured through a competitive state grant process.

In my role, I see what this funding makes possible before we even start planning. Each project requires surveys, design, permitting, and coordination among the people responsible for the stream and surrounding land. State grants allow us to carry out that work with experienced experts, from design through to construction and allows us to take on projects at a scale we could not otherwise accomplish. All of our projects take place where there is permanent public protection and angling access, so the benefits of that investment remain available to the public for generations to come.

I also wanted our visitors to leave with a sense of the range of work underway in Minnesota. The methods we use on a Driftless stream are only part of what MNTU does to improve trout streams.

On Lake Superior tributaries, we have been working with partners to replace culverts that block fish movement. Since 2021, we and our partners have replaced 16 culverts, restoring access to more than 22 miles of coldwater habitat for native brook trout. We use water temperature data, in partnership with the state, to prioritize projects that reconnect fish to the coldest waters. Access to those areas can be especially important when warmer conditions make other parts of a stream less suitable for native brook trout.

More recently, we have expanded our work in the forests along North Shore trout streams. A spruce budworm outbreak has killed dense stands of spruce and balsam fir, reducing streamside shade and other benefits these trees provide. We are replanting affected areas with a diverse mix of long-lived native trees, including many conifers, selected to be more resilient to pests and a changing climate.

For us, hosting the CX3 tour was a chance to share both the scope of our program and the details of individual projects. We could talk about statewide accomplishments, then walk down to the water and look at a particular pool, a restored bank, a mayfly larvae, or a brook trout. We could also introduce visitors to the incredible partners and professionals whose knowledge and effort make those projects possible.

I was so glad to have a day to spend on these streams with fellow conservationists, and very proud of the work we were able to show them. Thank you to the partners and volunteers who helped us welcome our guests and explain what goes into restoring Minnesota's trout waters.

Special thanks go to Blake Abdella (HTU); Mark Reisetter and Neal Mundahl (Win-Cres); Doug Moran, Tony Nelson, and Jim Sauter (TCTU); Dustan Hoffman and Mark Nemeth (Minnesota DNR); Dakota County Parks; Mike Majeski (EOR, Inc.); Barth Construction; and our hosts at the Anderson Center.



MNDNR Trout Specialist Mark Nemeth discusses the management and trout fishery at Trout Brook during the habitat tour. Mark also received the prestigious TU Trout Conservation Professional award during the conference. MNTU is grateful for the generous contributions and partnership from Mark over many years of MNTU habitat work in Minnesota.

Give to the Max 2026

By Mark Abner, MNTU Giving Coordinator

On Give to the Max Day, please join supporters who help Minnesota Trout Unlimited protect, restore and sustain the state's coldwater fisheries. Thanks to your support, we had an outstanding year. During our most recent fiscal year, donors made contributions totaling $199,000 and 45 of those donors gave at the Riverkeepers Council level of $1,000 or more. With your donations, we:

PROTECTED
We advocated for better water quality that safeguard Minnesota's trout fisheries. Donors like you fund our advocacy work. In the last year, we advocated for state rulemaking that better protects our trout water against agriculture-related contamination, including neonicotinoid-treated seeds and nitrate pollution. We also voiced our concerns on the proposed development of a 1.66 million square foot data center that would sit between premiere trout streams in Hermantown.

RESTORED
Minnesota is blessed with trout streams and we're restoring more every year. In 2026, we restored in-stream habitat to Eagle Creek in Savage and the South Branch of the Root River in Lanesboro. We planted thousands of long-lived native trees along the Split Rock River to provide shade that keeps trout habitat cold and climate resilient. Meanwhile, we have been in the process of designing and permitting 12 more miles of upcoming in-stream habitat restoration work, while also coordinating the upcoming removal of several fish passage barriers that will restore access to more than 11 miles of trout habitat along the North Shore. With your help, this work will continue and expand.

SUSTAINED
Education and engagement are essential to sustaining conservation for future generations. Minnesota Trout Unlimited's Trout in the Classroom program engaged more than 4,000 students directly during the 2025-26 school year, with 86 fish tanks in 70 schools and two nature centers to foster the next generation of trout stewards.



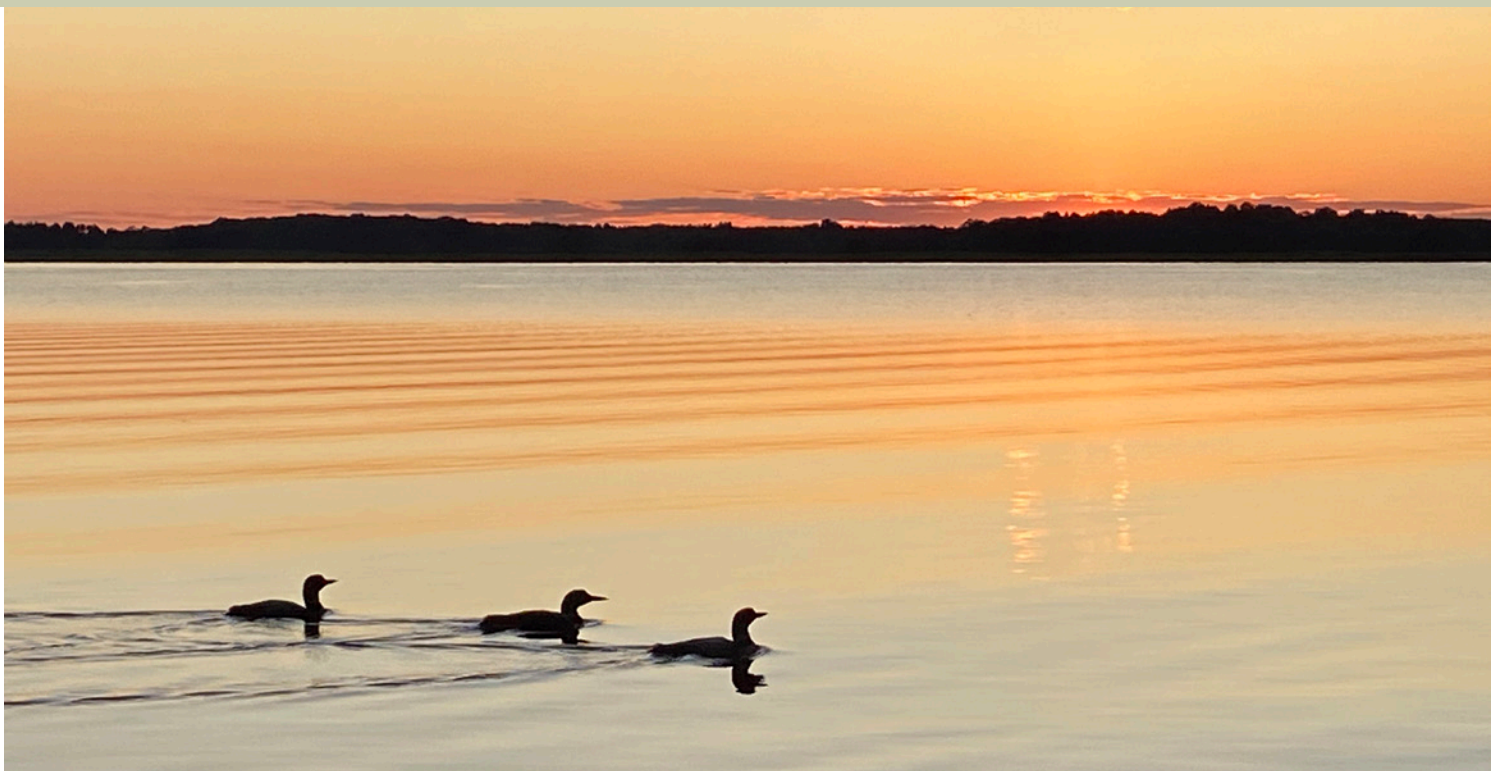
Visit mntu.org/donate to make your contribution!

Head to mntu.org/donate on or before Thursday, Nov. 19 for Give to the Max Day, or you can mail your check to Minnesota Trout Unlimited, Giving Office, 968 Fairmount Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55105-3119. Thank you for your support!

Our lakes are trying to tell us something

Will we listen?

By Monta Hayner



If we want to protect the Land of 10,000 Lakes, we need to address what's happening at the main source of pollution: our farmland.

Earlier this summer, thousands of dead fish washed up on shore at Lake Nokomis in Minneapolis and Como Lake in St. Paul. Officials called it "natural": a heat wave crashed oxygen levels in the water. True enough, but lakes carrying excess nutrients tip into crisis faster because the decaying algae eats up what little oxygen the heat leaves behind.

The toxic blue-green algae caused two Nokomis beaches to close to the public. Nokomis has now been under an algae advisory for three summers running. None of this is a coincidence. The algae might be natural, but the level of toxicity is not.

I live in the Twin Cities, so these advisories hit close to home. I'm also a fly fishing guide and a water tester for Trout Unlimited, and I've fished the Root River system for nearly three decades. Nokomis and Como are the nutrient pollution stories you can see: dead fish, terrible smell, a closed beach. There's a second version, harder to spot, in the rivers where I guide and in the water people drink there.

I'm talking about nitrate pollution, which comes from the fertilizer applied to farmlands across the state. More than half of what's applied isn't taken up by crops. Instead, it runs off into our waterways, shows up in drinking water as toxic nitrate, or enters the atmosphere as nitrous oxide, a powerful greenhouse gas. Minnesota rivers carry roughly 158 million pounds of nitrate out of the state each year in the Mississippi alone, most of it from cropland. Nitrate doesn't always kill the fish outright; it quietly kills off the mayflies, caddisflies and midges trout eat, the insects anglers learn to read a stream by. Years ago, state scientists found concentrations above 5 milligrams per liter harm those insects. Minnesota still hasn't adopted a standard against it.

And that's just the nitrate you can detect in a stream or river. Nitrate in drinking water has no color, taste, or smell. You only find out about it from getting your well tested, and most private well owners never run one. The Root River sits in southeastern Minnesota's karst region, where state testing has found nitrate above the safety limit in roughly 1 in 8 wells across eight counties. Three hundred miles north, in the Pineland Sands, sandy soils create the same vulnerability.

Synthetic nitrogen fertilizer is untracked and unregulated in Minnesota, yet it is the largest source of nitrate pollution. We are trying to address a pollution problem we are not even fully measuring, and the evidence is mounting that Minnesota's current approaches are not working to get a handle on pollution.

So what can we do? Some of the answers start close to home. Keeping grass clippings out of storm drains, reducing fertilizer on lawns, and picking up after pets can make a difference. Cities and watershed districts have a role to play too. But local action won't be enough. If we want to protect the Land of 10,000 Lakes, we need to address what's happening at the source of pollution: our farmland.

Regulation is how we've solved problems like this before. I grew up on the Saginaw River in Michigan, where chemical plant pollution left you with a rash if you tried to swim. My mother-in-law said the Mississippi River smelled so bad in her childhood that people didn't want to live along it. Both rivers are cleaner today, not because industry volunteered to change, but because of regulation. Nitrate pollution is less visible than an oil slick. But it is no less real, and no less treatable.

Earlier this year, the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) opened a public comment period on whether the state's Groundwater Protection Rule is doing enough. Environmental advocates called for stronger, enforceable limits on nitrogen fertilizer application. The MDA is now reviewing what it heard. The agency has the authority to act, the question is whether it will listen.

Whether our state's beautiful lakes, rivers, and streams remain swimmable, fishable, and worth passing on to the next generation depends in part on decisions being made right now. Two lakes sent us a visible message this summer. The invisible one is being written into our waters across the state, and it will show up in our bodies, continue to harm wildlife, and forever change the climate if we are not careful.

A version of this article was published in the Minnesota Star Tribune.

Monta Hayner is a Minneapolis resident, and an Orvis-endorsed fly fishing guide based in Preston.





Whether our state's beautiful lakes, rivers, and streams remain swimmable, fishable, and worth passing on to the next generation depends in part on decisions being made right now.

Recognizing Our Conservation Partners

Trout Unlimited Honors Minnesota DNR's Mark Nemeth With Award

By Andee Erickson, MNTU Communications Director

When Mark Nemeth started in his role as a trout stream habitat specialist for the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources 13 years ago, there weren't many streams in the metro area where he could direct people wanting to trout fish.

That's since changed, and in no small part due to Nemeth's career-long dedication to effective partnerships. His work centers around coordinating trout habitat improvement projects that restore stream stability in degraded environments. This means he's a key partner in Minnesota Trout Unlimited's habitat restoration projects. With a focus on metro-area trout streams, he also works closely with the Twin Cities Chapter of Trout Unlimited (TCTU).

In September, Trout Unlimited recognized Nemeth with its national "conservation professional award," the award that receives the most nominations, for his meaningful contributions to MNTU's habitat restoration work.

"I've been reading the Trout Unlimited magazines for years and years and years," Nemeth said. "I always turned through those pages and wondered, 'Who gets those awards?' And then this happened and I couldn't believe it."

Beverly Smith, vice president for engagement at TU, presented the award to Nemeth during the CX3 awards ceremony on Harriet Island in St. Paul.

"He is an incredible testament to the partnerships across the country between our agency professionals and committed groups of citizens," Smith said during her recognition speech. "We are able to do more because of those partnerships."

Nemeth got hooked on trout nearly 40 years ago as an undergraduate student at the University of Minnesota, where he had the opportunity to research the relationship between trout and beavers in Pine County. He started learning about aquatic insects and aging fish in southeast Minnesota streams. All of this revealed to him the remarkable diversity within trout streams, sparking a curiosity that motivates him to this day, in addition to the reward of protecting a resource that benefits everyone–wildlife and humans alike.

"Seeing people enjoying the habitat is really important," Nemeth said. "Seeing a dad and his daughter or a dad and his son fishing along a trout stream, maybe just catching a rainbow trout and bringing those home, I think that's really exciting. Especially knowing that some of those resources were at risk and now, because of partnerships, people might walk to that stream today, sit down and go fishing and not even think about the risk that was facing the stream, just enjoying it for what it is."

A Champion for Eagle Creek

He's especially passionate about all the work done to protect and restore trout habitat on Eagle Creek in Savage, one of the last naturally-reproducing trout streams in the Minnesota River Valley.

In the early 2000s, while in a different role with the DNR, Nemeth facilitated a grassroots Eagle Creek advisory committee to ensure the community had a voice in how the area was managed. The committee was made up of advocates, developers, city staff, the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community, people from the neighborhood, DNR and U.S. Fish and Wildlife staff.

Advocacy efforts led by TCTU and the DNR in the 1990s led to the establishment of Minnesota's first Aquatic Management Area (AMA), creating a protected corridor along Eagle Creek to preserve public access and buffer the creek from the surrounding urban landscape and development. When Nemeth joined the scene, the focus shifted to working through the details of managing the AMA, from installing boundary signs to considering whether a bike trail should pass through the area and under what conditions.

"I saw this great resource with wonderful water quality," Nemeth said of Eagle Creek. "The Met Council says this is the closest thing to pre-settlement water quality in the metro area. It's really important, important to the tribe, important to serving wildlife. It's a place where there was a cougar not too long ago."

Along Eagle Creek, he's spotted a golden-winged warbler, and once a ruby-crowned kinglet sitting next to a golden-crowned kinglet on a branch in the winter time. He's also identified a number of state-threatened plant species on the project site.

When Nemeth recognizes a place's value, he wants everyone else to have the opportunity to enjoy it.

MNTU habitat director, Jennifer Biederman, said Nemeth was an invaluable champion and advocate in the planning of the 2,000-foot habitat restoration project MNTU did on Eagle Creek this year.

"It's hard to pull off a good project without a strong DNR advocate because it's the resource they manage. His knowledge was critical of making the project successful," Biederman said. "He's been observing that creek for so long. He knows a lot of the nuances and the way it behaves. It really helped in designing that project."

Mike Majeski of Emmons & Olivier Resources, Inc. (EOR), the project's design consultant echoed Biederman. Nemeth's extensive knowledge of the site, from the fishery to the broader watershed, helped inform the design. He recommended the type of spawning material to use in the riffles to give brook trout the best chance of successful spawning.

"He's willing to listen to new ideas and always has valuable input in terms of what can be done," Majeski added. "On top of all that, he volunteers his time or goes out of his way to do things that we don't even ask him to do."



Mark Nemeth holds a brook trout trophy after Trout Unlimited awarded him the "conservation professional award" at its national award ceremony on Sept. 25 in St. Paul.

Doug Moran, who serves as the habitat coordinator on TCTU's board, nominated Nemeth for the national award because he sees in Nemeth someone who's not just doing his job, but someone who wants to ensure that anyone who wants to utilize a resource can. He takes partnership seriously and knows how to engage the chapter's slew of volunteers who are excited to help where needed.

"We need to find the people that we're allies with and work with them," Moran said. "He cares about this and he wants to engage and build a group of people that want to help."

As Nemeth said himself: "There's more benefit for the resource if we're all united in protecting and sharing it."



Mark Nemeth, trout stream habitat specialist for the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, assists a group of Trout in the Classroom students during a field trip to the Credit River in Savage.

20 Years of Trout in the Classroom

Humble Beginnings in the Headwaters

By Amber Taylor, MNTU Education Program Supervisor

Trout in the Classroom (TIC) got its start in Minnesota in fall of 2007. Twenty years later, these tiny trout continue to fascinate and steal the hearts of thousands of students, teachers, and their families each year. They provide a yearlong platform on which teachers can build lessons and curriculum that encompass a vast array of subjects, from science and math, to social studies, art, and history. What is good for trout is ultimately good for us. Life sustaining, in fact. Students participating in this program are future voters, environmental advocates, educators, biologists, researchers, policy makers, and water resource specialists. Programs like TIC help to protect our waters for generations to come.

Minnesota's TIC program got its start 20 years ago, when Bob Frazey, a board member of Headwaters Chapter 642 and passionate advocate for youth education, encouraged the chapter to start a TIC program with a school in their region. Steve Young coordinated the program for 12 years, scheduling guest speakers and visits to Spire Valley hatchery, implementing classroom activities, and planning spring releases. In addition, he helped with tank set up, fish care, and equipment for teachers each year as more teachers joined. In 2019, Steve passed these responsibilities along to Jim McCracken, another passionate volunteer working hard to support TIC teachers in connecting youth with fish, fishing, and their local waters. Jim has continued in Steve's footsteps putting in a lot of time and effort coordinating for schools in the Headwaters chapter area.

The success of TIC in the Bemidji area over the years is due to the dedication and enthusiasm of HWTU members that have stepped up to support teachers both in and outside the classroom. Other HWTU members to note for their steadfast support of youth education are Bob Wagner, John Leuth, and Kris Williams. While these are the HWTU volunteers I have worked most closely with over the years, there are many more that have done their part to support youth education in their region. The chapter is a model for others looking to get members involved in education and provide full circle learning opportunities through programs like TIC. Steve, Jim, and Bob each wrote about their time volunteering with youth education over the last 20 years. Those write ups are below.

Steve Young

TIC in Bemidji was the brainchild of Bob Frazey, who proposed the idea to the rest of our TU chapter board in the winter of 2006-2007. We already had a relationship with Jeff Wade, a fifth grade teacher at Northern Elementary School, and he was on board with hosting a tank. The local DNR Fisheries office was very supportive, as was the administration at Northern Elementary. We submitted a grant application to a local foundation in the spring of 2007 and received funding to the tune of about $1,400, with which we bought a tank and associated supplies. None of us knew anything about aquariums or raising fish, but in the late fall of 2007 we were up and running in Jeff's classroom.

Back then we used a flow-through chiller, which was more complicated than the current drop-in chillers and more prone to problems. Like when someone pulled the discharge hose out of the tank and 55 gallons of water flowed out onto the classroom carpet overnight. In the morning we found all of our trout trying to survive in an inch of water at the bottom of the tank! We had to pull water off the supply before it went through the school's water softener as this made keeping a tank difficult. That meant going down into the bowels of the school's mechanical area and hauling water up a long flight of metal stairs in buckets. It was noisy, hot, and rather creepy down there, but it was never a problem finding kids who wanted that experience.

In trying to get the program off the ground that first year we were unable to obtain stream trout eggs, so we got lake trout eggs from Mountain Lake in the BWCA. Because we were not allowed to release them locally that spring, the DNR hatchery in Lanesboro sent up rainbow fingerlings in a special container on their truck that was already bringing yearling trout for stocking local lakes and streams. It was one of many ways the DNR supported our program. Fisheries Stream Specialist Tony Standera came into the classrooms regularly to give presentations to the kids on a variety of issues like trout biology, watersheds, aquatic invertebrates, and more. Tony was a key addition to our program, and the kids loved him. After a couple years and a couple more grant applications, additional tanks were added to classrooms at Northern to expand the learning opportunities to more students.



Bob Wagner assists students as they wade into the lake behind their school to set leaf pack traps, also known as "bug hotels." The Headwaters volunteers returned to the school a few weeks later to help students pull in their packs and sort through all of the insects that had moved in.

We were able to bring in a number of local experts to talk with the kids, but the favorite was phenologist John Latimer from Grand Rapids. He would regale the kids several times a year with his encyclopedic knowledge of the natural world and his fun stories of outdoor adventures. John led nature walks around the school yard and encouraged the kids to take notes on their nature observations, which were then submitted in a recorded message to be played on his radio program. His talks were always entertaining and informative.

Mr. Wade was famous for interrupting whatever lesson he was teaching to take advantage of someone coming into his classroom. So, when I would stop by to check the tank he would have me tell the kids about something I had been up to recently, like fishing, a trip to New Zealand, or ice boating. One funny memory was the day we invited both the area and regional DNR fisheries managers to Jeff's classroom to see what TIC was all about. They hadn't been prepared to speak to a group of fifth graders. It felt a little awkward so after a few brief



Headwaters Chapter's TIC Coordinator Jim McCracken, assists a student as she looks for aquatic insects on a log in the Clearwater river. Headwaters Chapter volunteers coordinate and lead two full days on the Clearwater, running outdoor, hands-on lessons with over 100 students from three different schools in the Bemidji area as they celebrate the release of their trout.

comments they asked for questions. At which point a young boy raised his hand and asked, "Yeah, what's the biggest deer you've ever shot?" Fisheries guys weren't expecting that kind of question, and it caught both of them completely off guard!

Bob Wagner

One of the reasons I joined the Headwaters TU chapter over 20 years ago was their interest in both stream restoration work and educational programs. When I requested support from the chapter in 2001 to start the 5th grade Fly Fishing program (5FFP) at Northern starting spring of 2002, they approved it. 5FFP started in April 2002 and ran 18 consecutive years, involving over 750 students. It is comprehensive in design covering fly tying, fly casting, knots, ethics, and "live action" fly fishing on the banks of the Clearwater river. 5FFP is possibly the longest running comprehensive youth fly fishing program in Minnesota. TIC has expanded in the Headwaters region from 1 to 17 tanks and is in 12 schools and 1 nature center. It has, without a doubt, all been worth the time and money invested over the last 20 plus years.

I believe significant success of both programs is measured by the repeated pictures, life stories and the success of students. Both programs can legitimately say we have come "full circle." The majority of students in the 5FFP also have TIC happening in their respective classrooms. TIC and 5FFP work together to provide the best of both worlds by encouraging students to learn, explore and enjoy all aspects of fish and fishing.

As a teacher, coordinator and volunteer it's both heartwarming and professionally fulfilling to hear stories from students (some 30 years old) from Colorado to Montana. Pictures and stories that express pride in their skills learned, knowledge about trout and their environment, but also respect and appreciation for natural resources. Some students also have made career choices from these experiences. The mission of TU is all about building advocates for the "future of fishing."

Jim McCracken

TIC is a powerful classroom learning tool, offering a perfect combination of hands-on, heads-on, hearts-on learning. I am amazed at how classroom teachers creatively used the tank for complementing their classroom learning across the entire spectrum of the curriculum, from science and mathematics to language and the visual arts. I admire teachers who have recognized the trout tank as a valuable management tool to assist with reducing student classroom anxiety or addressing behavior issues. Student stress visibly melts away as they sit next to the tank, mesmerized by the trout.

Consistently, the two most memorable events of the year for both TU volunteers and students are egg delivery day and release day. When delivering the eggs, you walk into the classroom greeted by smiles and cheers. You can't help but get goosebumps. On Release Day the students have obviously grown attached to their trout, and based on some of their unique physical appearances, identify some of them with names. Their faces beam with pride knowing that they have successfully raised their trout for release into the wild. They are also excited about the field activities that day!



Bemidji area DNR Fisheries Manager Tony Standera was heavily involved with TIC at Gene Dillon Elementary (previously Northern Elementary) for many years before he recently retired. Here, he is pouring trout eggs into the tank of a fifth grade classroom.

There have been two less positive events over the years. Once after an egg shipment had been delayed a day, I needed to race to the local FedEx transfer center at 5 a.m. and, with the help of a FedEx employee, search the delivery trucks for the package of eggs. We managed to rescue the eggs from the truck before it left for its full day of deliveries, and the still-viable eggs were soon delivered to anxious students and teachers. A second time we were not so fortunate. After an unexplained two day delay in Memphis, the eggs arrived in Bemidji. Again tracking them down to the Bemidji FedEx Office, I drove the box over to the Bemidji DNR Fisheries Office for dissemination. Unfortunately, as we unpacked the box it was quickly apparent that the eggs had suffered irreversible damage.

I would like to give a big shout out to the classroom teachers. They have volunteered a ton of extra time on top of their already overloaded work schedules to take on the challenge of operating a trout tank in their classroom for the benefit of all those students.

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

Our Riverkeepers Council Fishes Restored Trout Streams

By Mark Abner, MNTU Giving Coordinator

Brilliant fall colors, clear water and hungry trout made for a memorable day in southeast Minnesota as members of Minnesota Trout Unlimited's Riverkeepers Council, which recognizes donors who contribute $1,000 or more annually, gathered for a special day of fishing.

The group spent the day exploring and fishing two remarkable trout streams in Wabasha County: Mazeppa Creek and Cold Spring Brook. The outing gave donors a firsthand look at how philanthropic support and Minnesota's Legacy Amendment funding are working together to improve coldwater habitats across the state.

Together, private support from Minnesota Trout Unlimited donors and public conservation investments have helped make possible about 150 miles of habitat restoration on trout streams throughout Minnesota. Both streams visited during the outing showcase the long-term value of that partnership.

Mazeppa Creek

After four years of planning, Minnesota Trout Unlimited completed a major habitat restoration project on Mazeppa Creek in 2024. The project rebuilt riffles, stabilized eroding banks, restored native vegetation and improved habitat throughout an important reach of this Driftless Area trout stream.

Just two years later, the results are already becoming visible. Native plants are thriving, stream functions are improving and high-quality habitat is taking shape throughout the restored section.

Riverkeepers Council anglers connected with brown trout, up to 16 inches, along with plenty of hungry creek chubs. Some elected to experience Tenkara fishing under the guidance of co-host Bob Luck of the Twin Cities Chapter of Trout Unlimited.

Cold Spring Brook

Just a few miles away, Cold Spring Brook tells another important conservation story.

Minnesota Trout Unlimited partnered with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources to restore Cold Spring Brook beginning in 2013. The project included streambank stabilization, installation of habitat structures and extensive native vegetation plantings designed to improve both brook and brown trout habitat.

When severe flooding struck the region in 2019, portions of the project sustained damage, demonstrating both the challenges and the long-term commitment required to restore and maintain healthy trout streams. Continued monitoring and stewardship have helped ensure that this stream remains a productive fishery today.

Although warm afternoon temperatures made fishing more challenging during our visit, trout were clearly abundant in the cool, clear waters of this spring-fed stream.

The Power of Philanthropy

The day served as a powerful reminder that successful conservation is a long-term investment. Restoring trout streams requires planning, partnerships, skilled habitat professionals, committed volunteers and financial support from people who care about the future of Minnesota's coldwater resources.

Riverkeepers Council members play an essential role in helping make this work possible.

Last year, 45 Riverkeepers Council households contributed more than $170,000 to advance conservation, education and advocacy efforts across Minnesota. Their generosity strengthened our organization in numerous ways, including making it possible to hire our first communications director, Andee Erickson, whose work expands the communication of our conservation and restoration efforts, helping us to ensure we can continue our mission well into the future.

To every Riverkeepers Council donor: Thank you for your leadership, generosity and commitment to Minnesota's trout streams.

And if you are looking for a meaningful way to deepen your impact on conservation, we invite you to consider becoming a Riverkeepers Council member yourself.

Coldwater conservation happens because people like you make it possible.

Root River Recovers From Mega-Rain

Climate Change Brings More Extreme Events

By John Weiss



The Root River flooded large parts of low-lying Lanesboro in the July 1-2 flood. Photo by Lance Prado.

Heavy rainfall began falling late July 1 on the western edge of the Root River Valley and bulled its way east. By 7 a.m. July 2, 7.3 inches were recorded at Grand Meadow, 5.71 inches at Wykoff, 4.87 in Harmony, 4.07 inches in La Crescent and 4 inches at Whitewater State Park.

Then, the radar of the National Weather Service in La Crosse, Wis., showed a second wallop of rain sweeping down the valley.

When it was over, the state had its first mega-rain since 2020, said Kenny Blumenfeld, senior climatologist with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. The DNR defines such rare rainfalls as "events in which six inches of rain covers more than 1,000 square miles in 24 hours or less, with at least eight inches falling somewhere in that area. Rainfalls of this magnitude and geographic extent can become catastrophic floods, although other factors like soil moisture and topography help determine flood severity."

In the case of the July 1-2 event, flooding was not catastrophic but a part of Interstate 90 had to be closed, Mystery Cave in Forestville/Mystery Cave State Park was flooded and had to be cleaned, Niagara Cave south of Harmony was also flooded, state park trails were inundated and damaged and many streams and rivers pushed out of their banks. Much of low-lying Lanesboro was flooded and the dam was pouring dirty water.

About a week later, Austin was deluged with at least 7 inches of rain, flooding local streets and again closing a part of the interstate but it wasn't widespread enough to be a mega-rain.

But here's the long-term side of all the rains—we can expect more such storms, possibly ones with much worse damage. For trout streams, they can be a mix of bane and blessing.

While they are rare, mega-rains are becoming more common, the DNR reports. "From 1973-2026, Minnesota has seen 17 mega-rains, but 12 of these 17 events have been in the most recent 26+ years (2000 into 2026), compared to five confirmed events in the 27 years from 1973 through 1999. Although it is difficult to assess the statistical significance of that increase, we do know that these observations are consistent with observed increases in the frequency and intensity of heavy rainfall events at historical observing stations."

Many future ones could again hit the blufflands, Blumenfeld said. The southeast "part of the state has been getting wetter faster than any other part of the state," he said. The heart of that is most of Fillmore County, southern Houston and eastern Mower counties, he said.

Furthermore, the Driftless Area of SE Minnesota, SW Wisconsin, NE Iowa and a bit of NW Illinois, is experiencing the greatest average precipitation increases in the country, he said.

A federal report backed him up. "Climate change is intensifying rainfall and floods, deepening droughts, and shifting weather patterns across the globe," according to the Fifth National Climate Assessment, a federally-mandated report.

"Climate change is forcing a reexamination of our concepts of rare events," it adds. "Extreme precipitation incidents are more intense and more frequent."

Floods are often designated as five-, 10- or 100-year floods but that doesn't mean they will only happen once every five, 10 to 100 years, Blumenfeld said. It means there is a statistical chance of 20, 10 or 1 percent of one happening in any given year. If an area gets more than one in a century, "it doesn't mean something is off the rails," he said. They could happen two years in a row.

Because of the heavier rains, the statistics for rainfall to equal a 100-year flood have changed in the Southeast, he said. In 1961, 6 inches in 24 hours was needed around the Root River but in 2012-14, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration upped that to 7.5 inches, he said. Data are being analyzed now to set the new norm and "it's an extraordinarily complex study," Blumenfeld said. They can't be extrapolated from one region to another, so what's happening around Chicago can't be used for Minnesota's blufflands.

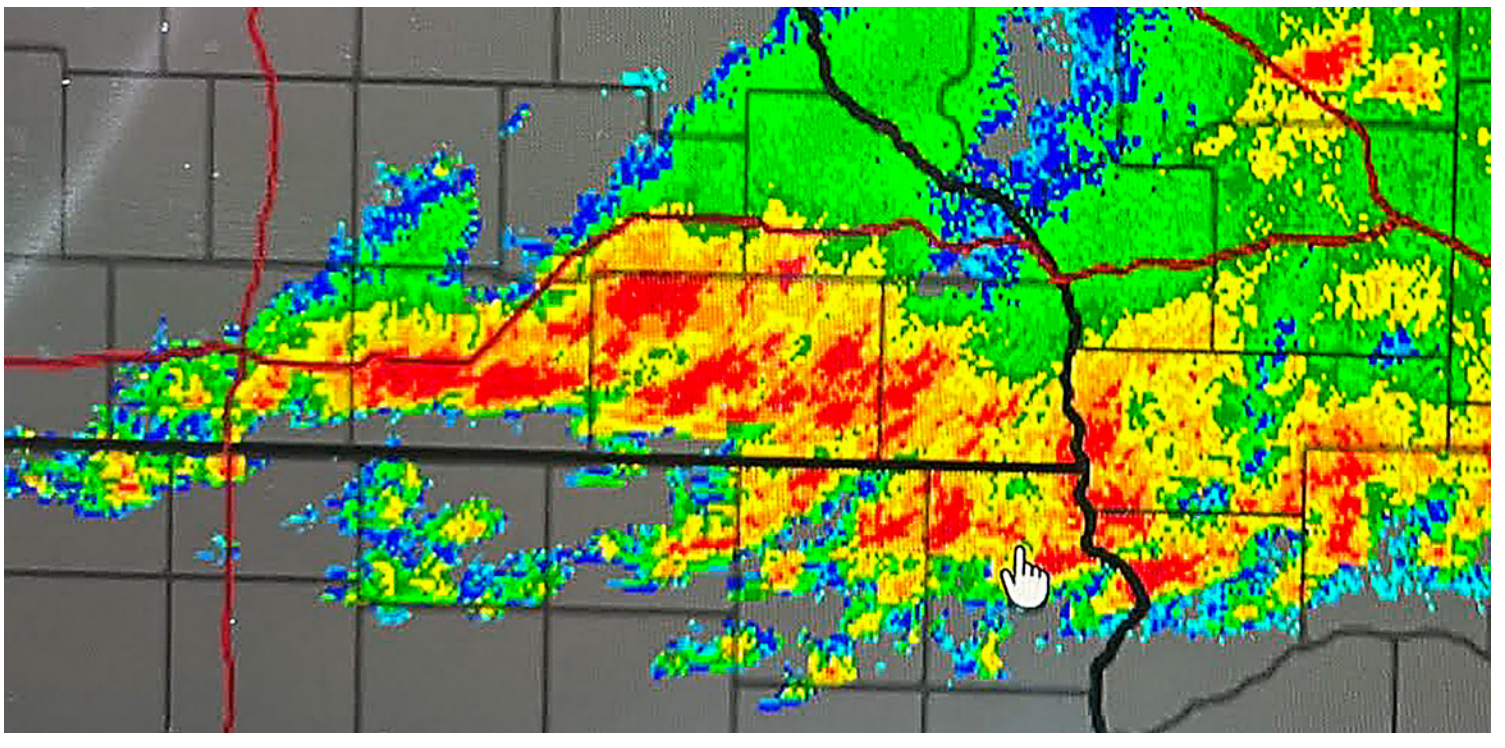
The flood earlier this month sent the Root in Rushford to 22.46 feet, 1.5 feet over flood stage (that is preliminary data), making it the 23rd highest crest yet recorded, said Jordan Wendt, hydrologist with the National Weather Service in La Crosse, Wis. That made it a five-year flood, with a flow of about 16,000 cfs, he said. The last time it was that high was June, 2024, he said. A 100-year-flood would have a flow of about 45,000 cfs, he said. That is much more than the typical flow of the Mississippi River.

The flood didn't cause a lot of heavy damage, perhaps because soils were dry, he said. Also, flooding was heavier to the west, he said. The Root in Lanesboro had a reading of 12 feet, making it maybe the 11th or 12th highest on record, he said.

When heavy rains hit, location is critical in determining what areas get deluged and which don't, especially in the bluff country, Wendt said. "This hill and that hill is the difference," he said. Preliminary data from the new federal study is due late summer with the final report in about a year. It will give more scenarios for more or less rainfall, changes in temperature and other factors, he said.

Just because it wasn't a deluge like 2007 doesn't mean it didn't cause some damage to roads, bridges and our trout streams. It did. But it also helped some trout streams.

Trout streams also don't seem to be getting hit harder by rains, said Vaughn Snook, DNR fisheries biologist in Lanesboro. But then, the DNR hasn't



A National Weather Service radar picture of one of two big storms that hit the Root River July 1-2.

kept track of flooding events and people do tend to forget past floods. “We forget, we forget, we forget,” he said.

Yes, some streams were flooded badly and had a lot of debris washed into them. Trout streams, however, have been putting up with floods for millennia, they rebound and trout survive, adjust. In fact, high water can wash silt off gravel needed for spawning and open new deep pools that are great habitat for big trout, he said. “I think that’s kind of neat,” he said. “There are millions of trout down here, trout are tougher than people give them credit for.”

Beaver Creek Valley State Park near Caledonia did have a lot of damage and had to be closed for at least a week, said Park Manager John Holger. Some trails were damaged, especially Beaver Creek Valley Trail, he said. Rocks in the bed of the trout stream were scoured clean and the “the stream bed was the brightest I’ve ever seen it,” he said. Some gravel had its mud washed away and he saw some sculpins, a small fish indicating great water quality, as well as bugs like mayflies and scuds, he said.

The park has had floods historically, so his staff was adept at quickly repairing damage, Holger said.

Brent Kohn, Fillmore County highway maintenance supervisor, said his crews didn’t need to do a lot of work to repair flooding problems, in part because they’re used to it. “We’ve always had problems with rain,” he said. He’s been there 27 years and every year or two, they get a heavy rain somewhere. “I haven’t noticed anything different” in the number or intensity of storms, he said.

What he has noted is that the county is replacing more old bridges with new culverts and they can get clogged with debris easier than bridges. It would help if more landowners removed dead trees from along streams because “they just end up in our bridges and culverts,” Kohn said.



A Minnesota Department of Transportation crew removes debris from below the US 52 bridge in Preston.

Within three months, the Southeast nearly had its second mega-rain Sept. 18-19. Here is what the DNR reported:

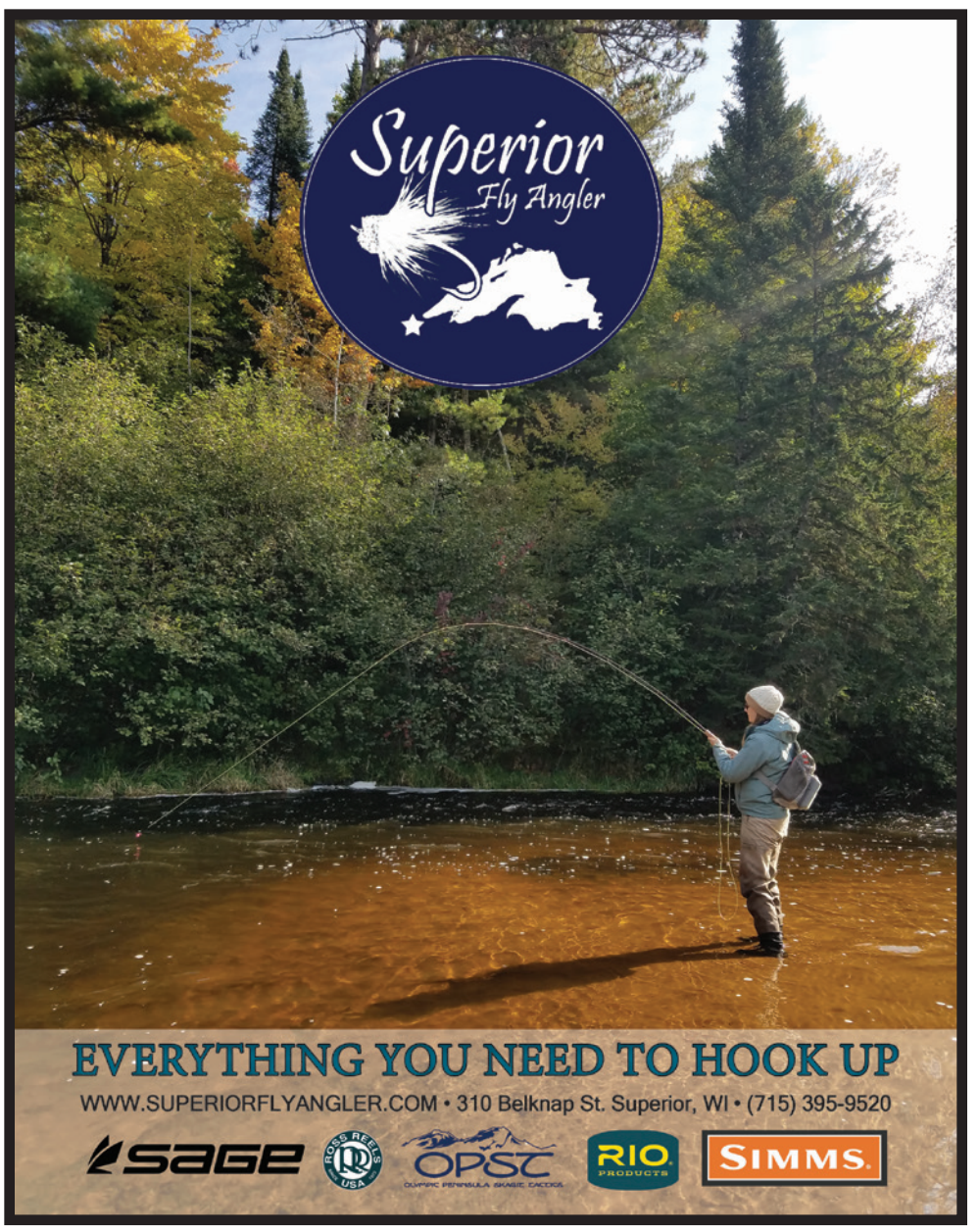
“After dark, thunderstorms formed in an almost perfectly west-to-east line near the interstate, and then paraded eastward, with many storms passing directly over areas just hit by other ones. This process is called "training," named for the way train cars pass over the same section of track. Training thunderstorms can lead to excessive rainfall totals, and this case was no exception. The band of storms persisted for several hours with little north or south movement, and with rainfall rates of over two inches per hour at times.

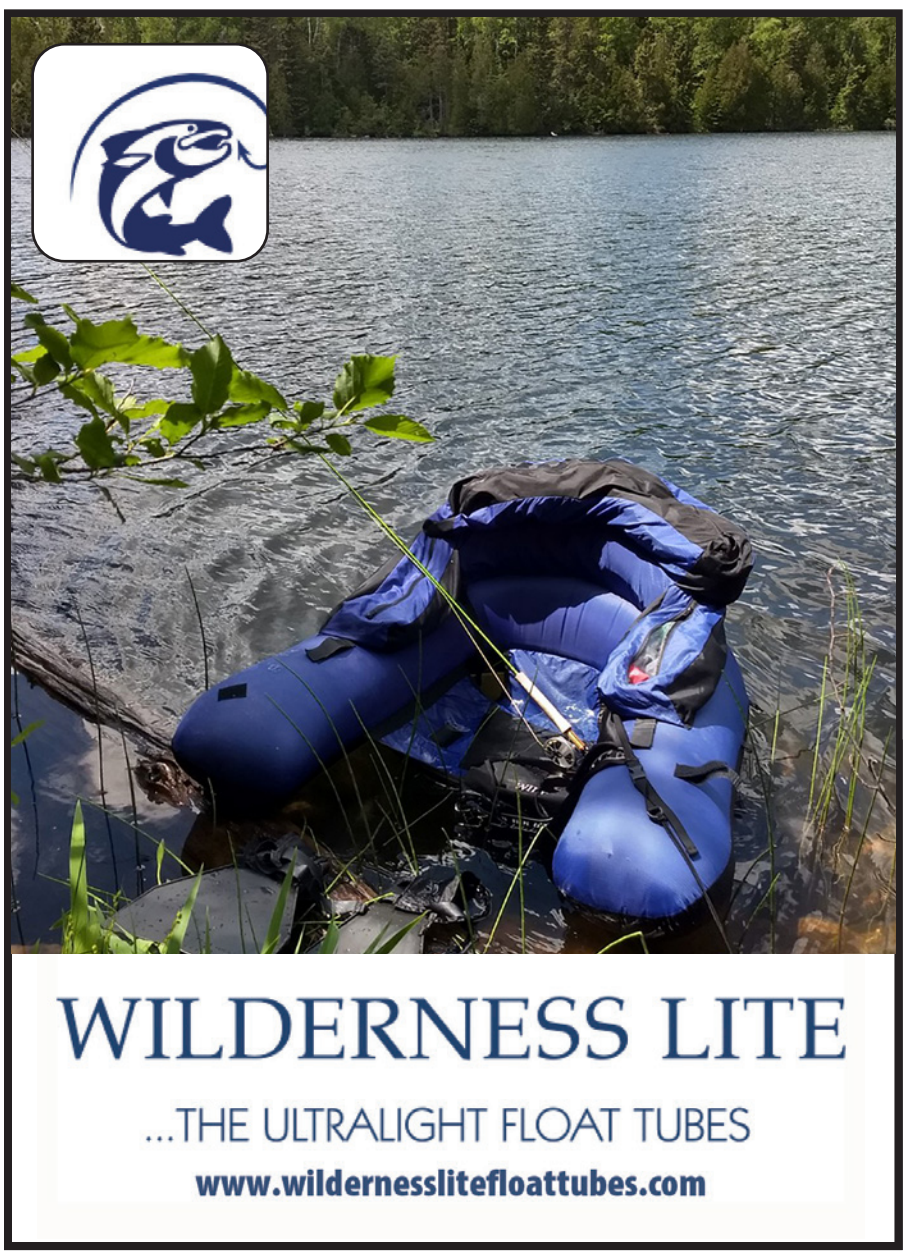
“The hardest-hit areas included far southern Waseca and Steele counties, and much of Mower, Fillmore, and Houston counties. Rainfall totals in these areas were generally five inches or more, with pockets of 6 to 8 inches, and even slightly more. An observer near Houston recorded 8.29 inches and one at Spring Valley recorded 8.17. Both of these reports exceed the 100-year return period for 24-hour rains. The deluge resulted in widespread flooding, which triggered mudslides and forced some roads to close.

“The DNR State Climatology Office estimates that the area receiving six inches of rain or more in 24 hours was about 700 square miles, which is short of the 1,000 square mile minimum required to count as a "mega-rain." This was a damaging storm event in any case, and seems to have been at least as destructive as the actual mega-rain on July 1-2 that affected many of the same areas. We remind users that mega-rains are defined strictly by their dimensions (the total area receiving six inches or more) and not by their impacts.”

A version of this story ran in July in the Root River Current, a free online magazine.

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.





All About Trout

Youth Series

By Evan Griggs • Photos by Jade Thomason

We are pretty lucky here in Minnesota. Not only do we have 10,000 lakes, we also have thousands of miles of rivers and streams. Living in some of those lakes and streams are special natural treasures: trout! It's important to know about trout. Trout need very clean and cold water to live. Many lakes and rivers in Minnesota do not have trout. You can find most of our trout streams along the North Shore of Lake Superior and the southeastern corner called the Driftless Region. If you go fishing for trout, you are going to a special place! Trout are predators and they love to eat bugs, small fish, and even mice! Trout are good predators because they are fast, have very good eyesight, and even have teeth on their tongue! Trout have small, smooth scales and are very slimy. Their slime helps them stay healthy and protects their scales. You can catch four different species of trout in Minnesota: lake trout, brook trout, brown trout, and rainbow trout.



A lake trout caught in Lake Superior.

Lake trout have always lived in, or are native to, Minnesota. You can only catch them in the deepest, coldest, and cleanest lakes in northern Minnesota. They can grow really big! They love to eat other fish. Their favorite fish to eat are called cisco. Lake trout have a dark green body with lots of white squiggles and spots.

Brook trout are also native to Minnesota. Today you will find them in the start, or headwaters, of many trout streams on the North Shore and Driftless Region. Some of the smallest, coldest, and cleanest streams are full of them! They usually don't grow very big. They typically stay between 8 and 10 inches long, but some giants can be over 20 inches. Even though they are small, they are fun to catch and are very beautiful fish! Brook trout have a dark green body with a bright red stomach and fins. Their bodies are covered in bright yellow, red, and blue spots. On their backs they have yellow squiggles called "vermiculation."



A brook trout caught in a stream on the North Shore of Lake Superior.



A wild brown trout from a southeast Minnesota stream in the Driftless Area.

Brown trout are not native to Minnesota. Settlers from Europe brought them here in the late 1800's to catch and eat. They live mostly in streams in the Driftless region. They can get bigger than brook trout and can live in slightly less cold and clean streams. Brown trout love to eat bugs and small fish. The biggest ones will even eat mice and other small trout! They have golden brown bodies, with dark spots and a few red or blue spots mixed in.

Rainbow trout are also not native to Minnesota. They originally came from the Rocky Mountains and the Pacific Coast. In the Driftless region, rainbow trout are put in a few streams by the DNR for you to catch! These fish are raised in a farm called a hatchery. The rainbow trout on the North Shore are special. These are called steelhead. They grow up in a river, then swim out to Lake Superior to eat a lot and get big, then they swim back to the same river to spawn. Steelhead can do this migration multiple times. Rainbow trout have light green and silvery bodies with lots of dark spots. Down the middle of their sides is a bright pink stripe.



A wild steelhead (rainbow trout) caught in a stream on the North Shore of Lake Superior.

Going trout fishing is like going on a treasure hunt! I hope you find all four species we have in Minnesota some day. Your trout fishing adventures may not always be easy, but the reward will be worth it.

Fly Tying

Caddis Klinkhammer

By Paul Johnson

All of the votes are now in and counted, so with that, I would like to introduce you to the 2026 Fly of the Year, the Caddis Klinkhammer.

You might be asking yourself, when did this voting take place and who actually voted? The simple answer to that is that it was all me! This is what happens when you spend as much time as I do sitting by myself tying flies, my mind tends to wander.

The Caddis Klinkhammer consistently caught fish throughout the spring and summer months, even when there did not appear to be any fish that were looking up to eat. The traditional Klinkhammers are tied on Klinkhammer-style hooks, however, I have found that a simple emerger hook works just as well. With either of these hooks, the abdomen of the fly sits a little lower in the water with the hackle collar actually floating the fly. I like to use white poly yarn such as Congo Hair or Widows Web for the post which I think is easy to see on the water.

Materials List

Hook:	Size 14 Emerger Hook
Thread:	14/0 Dark Brown
Abdomen:	Tan Superfine Dubbing
Post:	White Congo Hair Fly Tyers Dungeon
Thorax:	Peacock Superbright Dubbing
Collar:	Brown Rooster Hackle

As a side note, I have some friends that really like this fly tied with a bright orange parachute post. They also like to fish a small Zebra Midge as a dropper behind this dry fly, but don't tell anyone else.

Paul Johnson,
Paulwaconia@gmail.com





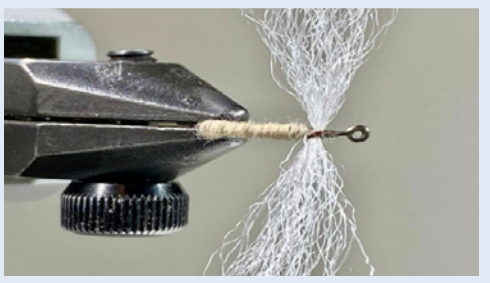
Step 1. Insert the hook in the vise and start your tying thread directly behind the hook eye. Wrap a smooth thread base down around the bend of the hook.



Step 2. Form a very slim dubbing noodle with the Tan Superfine Dubbing.



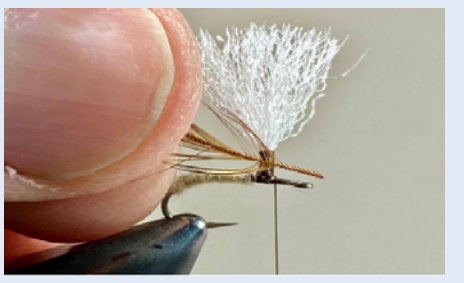
Step 3. Wrap the dubbing noodle forward to the 60% mark on your hook, forming a slender and smooth abdomen.



Step 4. With a series of "X" thread wraps, secure the post material to the top of the hook at the 60% mark on hook shank.



Step 5. With your tying thread, make thread wraps up the post to form a secure base.



Step 6. Prep your rooster hackle by closely trimming the barbs off by the base of the feather.



Step 7. Tie the feather in just behind the hook eye and secure the feather to the post with the dull side of the feather facing the post.



Step 8. Form a slender dubbing noodle with the Peacock Superbright Dubbing. Form the thorax with the dubbing noodle.



Step 9. Make five or six turns of hackle working from the top down to the hook shank.



Step 10. Secure the hackle with several thread wraps around the post. Whip finish behind the eye or to the post. Trim the post to about a hook shank in length.



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MNTU Chapter News



The Gitche Gumee Chapter held another successful Paddle the Pads fly fishing tournament with record turnout.

Gitche Gumee Chapter

Jason Swingen

Summer has flown by, and we're heading into another great fall in northern Minnesota. We hosted two fly casting clinics this summer in partnership with the City of Duluth at Lester Park and Chamber's Grove. Many people picked up a fly rod for the first time and got excited about heading out to our local rivers.

We held habitat projects at Keene Creek and Chester Creek to maintain the trees planted in previous TU projects. Thanks to everyone that came out to help with these projects. There is always work to be done improving new rivers, but maintaining past projects also needs to be a priority.

We also had another successful Paddle the Pads fly fishing tournament at Chamber's Grove. It was a fun day out on the water and our biggest turnout yet! Thanks to everyone who came out to paddle, fish, and help put the event together. We are planning on having PTP again next year, so stay tuned for details!

Looking ahead, we have two upcoming chapter meetings. I'll be giving a presentation on fall migratory fishing strategies, covering tactics and timing for targeting Lake Superior migratory fish. Jenny Biederman has been so busy with many great projects across the state, but we are working to have her join us for a meeting to update us on local habitat restoration work in our area. These include gap planting projects, culvert replacements, and future restoration projects on Amity Creek and the Us-kab-wan-ka River.

Many threats and issues need our attention. In the Northland, we are concerned with keeping our rivers as cold, clean, and accessible as possible. One big issue our chapter is following closely right now is the proposed AI data center in Hermantown. A project of this scale raises real concerns for our local watersheds, especially when it comes to water usage, stormwater runoff, and potential thermal impacts on nearby coldwater trout streams. We're keeping a close watch on the details and advocating to make sure our coldwater resources and native fish aren't put at risk.

Visit mntu.org/gitche-gumee to check meeting dates and details, sign up for our email newsletter, and follow what our chapter is up to!

Headwaters Chapter

As autumn settles in, Chapter 642 is looking back on a full, productive stretch of summer youth outreach, our signature fall fishing tradition, and hands-on conservation education in local schools. From regional fairs to classroom streamsides, here is what our chapter has been up to over the past few months.

Summer Youth Outreach & Community Events

Our team stayed active across northern Minnesota this summer, introducing fly tying and casting fundamentals to local families and the next generation of anglers:

• Everything Outdoor Youth Expo (Brainerd): We launched the season teaching hands-on fly tying and introductory casting techniques to visiting youth.

• Loons and Lakes Festival (Crosslake): Marking our first time at the festival, chapter volunteers ran an informational booth alongside live tying demonstrations.

• Beltrami County Fair: A staple on our summer calendar, where we spent several days sharing pattern techniques and giving fairgoers time on the water with a fly rod.

• Glendalough State Park: Volunteers spent a day and a half discussing coldwater conservation, tying with park visitors, and building local connections for an expanded event next year.

• Youth Outdoor Activity Day (Alexandria): Running the same weekend, our team staffed an instructional station at an event that drew nearly 3,000 youth. Several hundred stopped by our booth to tie their first fly or take practice casts on the grass.

Annual Pike Hunt & Fish Fry

October brought the return of our most anticipated member gathering of the season: the annual Pike Hunt.

Twenty anglers took to the water under decent fall skies. Catch totals varied across the group, highlighted by two participants landing their very first northern pike on a fly rod. (A cautionary tip for next year: keep the handling brief—attempting gag photos before getting a measurement is an easy way to watch your catch swim away early.)

Attendance more than doubled for the post-hunt fish fry, drawing over 40 local members and out-of-town guests. Beyond the fishing, the gathering remains our premier event for chapter fellowship and fun on the water.

Special thanks to Advanced Printing 3D (advanced-printing-3d-llc.square.site) for creating the custom 3D-printed pike keychains for this year's participants.

Trout in the Classroom (TIC) & Youth Science

With the school year in full swing, our focus shifted back to water ecology education with regional students:

• Gene Dillon Elementary (Oct. 9): 320 fifth-grade students took part in our fall activity day.

• Schoolcraft Learning Community (Oct. 14): 20 students participated in an in-depth outdoor session.

Each program paired classroom instruction on aquatic macroinvertebrates—the foundation of coldwater ecosystems—with field application. Students built insect sampling traps and waded into the water to secure them in place. The traps will soak for three weeks before students retrieve and analyze their contents to evaluate stream biodiversity and water quality.

Volunteer Appreciation & Getting Involved

None of these events, educational programs, or conservation projects happen without our volunteer base.

A sincere thank-you to Jim, John, Bob, Val, Steve, Charlie, Rory, Hadley, Adrian, Brian, Emmet, Jill, Bob, Jeff, Rita, Rose, Mike, David, Alexis, Mike, and the many others who consistently show up across multiple events each year. While most of our volunteers come from the Bemidji area, we did have some from outlying areas in International Falls, Cross Lake, Alexandria, and Fergus Falls. Our chapter covers 40% of the state, so volunteers are extremely important to our success.

TU642 operates entirely on the time, skills, and energy of our community. If you would like to help teach kids to cast, assist with stream days, or support future chapter events, reach out and consider volunteering today!

Kris Williams

Hiawatha Chapter

On Oct. 5, more than 15 Hiawatha TU members heard from Marty Walsh, head of the Minnesota Driftless Hiking Trail, about his vision for the trail as well as how his group and TU could cooperate.

The trail is a relatively new idea but Walsh's dream is to eventually be able to hike or backpack from the Chatfield area to the Mississippi River, probably closer to Reno but the exact route is not set. Most will be in the Root River Watershed. There are three areas where they have some decent ideas where the trail might go but there are also big gaps where little is known, he said.

"There is all this great biking (in the region) but no hiking trails," Walsh said. The only route known now is the Lost Creek Hiking Trail along Lost Creek near Chatfield. It would start to the southwest and enter Chatfield.

Camping on the trail would be on state parks or private land, he said. They have a grant from the state Environment and Nature Resources Trust Fund to help get things going.

The trail would be 40-50 percent on state parks and forestland, about half on private land about 5 percent of right-of-way. The idea is to connect people, land-



The Headwaters Chapter had a blast at their annual pike hunt event and attendance more than doubled this year!

scapes and communities. Many of the stream crossings will be wet but there might be alternatives for those who want to stay dry. The trail won't be overly obvious: "Easy to follow but easy to ignore."

His group has volunteers from the Twin Cities, SE Minnesota, NE Iowa and even Wisconsin: in all, about 6 million people live in the area.

Owners actually see a 3-10 percent bump in land value, he said, and better access to their own land, as well as less trespassing.

Here is where TU could cooperate with them: It's possible we could help pay for parts of trails that would also give us better access to trout streams. They want to make sure the wet crossings won't be in places where trout spawn.

Another Outing:
On Sept. 28, five HTU members did a quick fall clean up along US. 52 between Chatfield and Fountain. The spring clean up is bigger because there's more trash from the winter while the fall one tends to get a lot less trash. In all, we filled five bags with no unusual items found, plenty of the usual beer cans. After, we enjoyed pop and chips left over from the midsummer feast.

John Weiss

Twin Cities Chapter

Greetings, everyone!

First of all, a big thank you to all the volunteers who helped make CX3 a success in the Twin Cities this year.

Thank you to all of our volunteers, board members, TU members, and partner organizations throughout Minnesota for your support in 2026. Your efforts helped us earn the prestigious Trout Unlimited Gold Chapter Award at the recent CX3 event in Minneapolis. This is Trout Unlimited's highest award recognizing chapters, and it is a tremendous honor for TCTU and everyone who contributed to our success.

I also want to congratulate the other local award recipients recognized at the CX3 award ceremony. Mark Nemeth of the Minnesota DNR was nominated for the Trout Conservation Award - Professional and Randy Arnold from the Kiap-TU-wish Chapter was recognized with the Distinguished Service Award – Leadership. Congratulations to Mark and Randy on these well-deserved recognitions and for their contributions to trout conservation and Trout Unlimited.

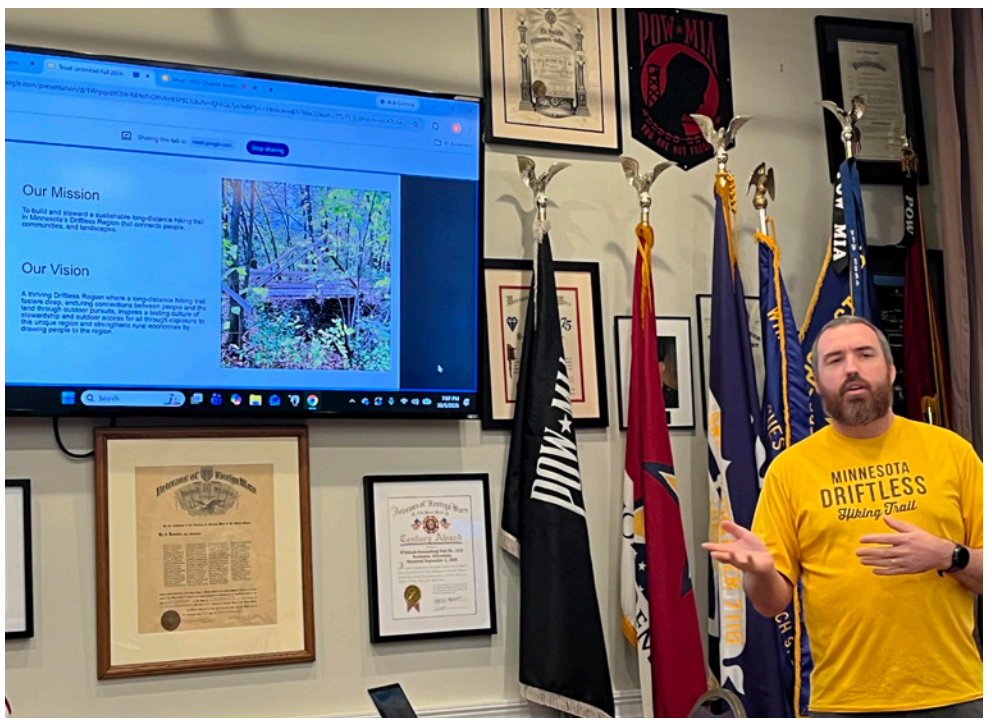
I also want to recognize the work of our past board members. They built the foundation that has allowed us to continue growing and becoming a stronger chapter. None of what we accomplished this year would have been possible without the contributions of so many people.

The TCTU board met on September 12, 2026, for a strategic planning session to review what we accomplished as a chapter in 2026 and establish our goals for 2027.

We accomplished a lot this year. We held more than 20 habitat events on trout streams, monitored 10 trout streams around the Twin Cities through our Streamkeepers team, and continued to engage members through events focused on education. Several TCTU volunteers also gave their time to support Minnesota Trout in the Classroom (TIC), T.U.N.E. Camp, and Foster the Outdoors programs led by our valued partners.

On the advocacy side, our team of dedicated volunteers continued to work relentlessly to move the needle on regulating neonicotinoids (neonics). The battle is not over yet, but good progress has been made.

We want to continue this momentum in 2027 in the areas of Habitat, Education, Engagement, and Advocacy, while also supporting other organizations that are aligned with the Trout Unlimited mission.



The Hiawatha Chapter heard a presentation from Marty Walsh, head of the MN Driftless Hiking Trail group.

Speaking of engagement, thank you to everyone who responded to the recent TCTU survey. You provided valuable input and ideas that we will incorporate into our 2027 strategic plan. In particular, we heard your interest in more events and opportunities to connect with other members, build relationships, and get out on the water together.

We will need the support of our volunteers more than ever as we move into 2027. There are many opportunities ahead, and every volunteer contribution makes a difference.

Stay tuned for upcoming newsletters highlighting opportunities to get involved and volunteer.

Thank you again for everything you do to support Twin Cities Trout Unlimited and our coldwater resources.

See you on the trout streams or at one of our upcoming events.

Now time for one last piece of business: The Annual Elections for TCTU.

Twin Cities Trout Unlimited Elections: The Twin Cities Chapter of Trout Unlimited (TCTU) will hold its Annual Meeting and Elections for its Board of Directors on Monday January 25, 2027 at 7 p.m. The meeting will be held in-person at Big Wood Brewery in Vadnais Heights, MN and online via Zoom. All members of TCTU in good standing with dues paid are eligible to vote. Five of our fifteen board seats are open for election each year. Please consider submitting your nomination for election to the board. Serving on the board is a great way to make a difference in coldwater conservation with a fun and engaging group of colleagues. Sometimes we even fish together. If you are interested in joining the board, please email to Yves Charron at yves.charron@twincitiestu.org

Nominations are due Dec. 31, 2026.

Yves Charron



The Win-Cres Chapter continues their fight against Japanese Knotweed in the Garvin Brook watershed.

Win-Cres Chapter

Japanese knotweed has been a focus for Win-Cres through the summer and fall. A major habitat improvement is scheduled for Garvin Brook next summer. In a planning walk-through, three large colonies were found this spring. We know from experience that heavy equipment would move this highly invasive plant throughout the project area.

Volunteers answered the call, injecting around 300 stems with Polaris over the summer. In September we returned to spray the stems that were too small to inject. We have high hopes that we have eradicated it from the project area.

In early September Win-Cres was granted access to a non-eased property on Garvin, from a family we have been negotiating with for nearly two years. On short notice we were able to treat most of their property and hope to finish either this fall or next summer.

Six colonies of knotweed were also found on another eased section of Garvin. The five colonies near the stream have been treated. For the season, we have injected 750 to 800 stems, the most ever. I am grateful to Dave Shaffer, Trevor Biederman, Neal Mundahl, Dusty Hoffman, Klaus Friedli, and Mark Reisetter for their efforts.

Outreach: Win-Cres volunteers spent several days interacting with the public at the Winona County Fair. We talked about TU's work in the area, and the benefits for the community. We also handed out a bunch of colorful flies and deer-hair cat toys. Thanks to Roger Berg for leading this effort.

Membership Meetings: Our next public meeting will be on December 9. Social hour and a meal will be at 6 p.m. At 7 p.m. a guide from the Driftless Area in Wisconsin will talk about trout and smallmouth fishing in his area. There will be meetings on the fourth Wednesday evenings in January, February, and March.

Chuck Shepard

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

Visit www.tu.org today to sign up.

Or Subscribe!

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

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Select Poetry

Flood Stage By Larry Gavin

The sky will speak in the tongue
trees use. Dripping in syllables
to earth. The hours pass and streams
awaken rising like a breath,
and those waters command dirt
to flow with them. A kind of geophagy,
the urge to consume, to devour.
The rise that grows like the story
of rain grows back in town.

Fish, the inhabitants of the world
of run-off, rise slowly feeling
the new breaks in current that offer
slack water.

The fisher knows this inside, but the soul
of fishing is endless hope. Fishers stare
off bridges. They search for a signal.
The sky uninterested in anything
but reflection. The surface and what is
beneath the surface, what is visible
and what is beneath vision, made entirely
of rising water at flood stage.

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



MNTU Riverkeepers Council members on their way to fish a restored reach of Mazeppa Creek in Wabasha County.
Read more on Page 17.