



Newsletter #1 2023

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Chairman's Message

It's been a long time since the State Council communicated via newsletter, but we felt that there are too few TUs (and others) that know about the work that is happening in the Commonwealth to improve the health of our coldwater fisheries. The Council's role is to coordinate among the chapters and to help keep our chapters strong. We also look for opportunities to advocate for the resources that are important to us with our state legislature and related agencies.

One of the keys for us in 2023 is developing an operating plan consistent with the recently adopted National TU Strategic Plan. That strategic plan has three key goals: (1) Identify a national network of shared priority waters for native and wild trout and salmon and take strategic action to care for and recover them. (2) Inspire a diverse corps of staff, volunteers, and partners to advocate for and participate in the care and recovery of our lands and waters (3) Invest in systems and people—staff, volunteers, and partners—so we have the tools, technology, training, and resources necessary to achieve our shared goals.

The Council started the year strong with an appearance at the Virginia Fly Fishing & Wine Festival in Doswell the second weekend in January. At this event, we met many new friends (and old) and accomplished our objectives of re-starting the Virginia Capital Chapter (in the Richmond area) and signing up new members to TU regardless of where they live. The momentum from the Festival carried over to our next in-person meeting in Salem VA in February where we heard a presentation on Climate Change and Trout in Virginia, we discussed plans for a Council newsletter, as well as a Council grant funding process.

The Council was well represented at the Southeast Regional Rendezvous in Asheville, NC during the weekend of March 10-12—with 12 Virginia attendees. This is the first regional meeting that TU has held since COVID. The first day of the session allowed us to fish some of the productive western NC trout streams with local TUs as guides. Saturday was the most intensive day of the Rendezvous with informative speakers and trainings starting with breakfast and continuing through dinner. The keynote dinner speaker was Reynolds Wolf with the Weather Channel. I was able to chair a session training state climate change coordinators about effects that we are seeing in Virginia streams, as well as how to communicate climate information with our chapter members.

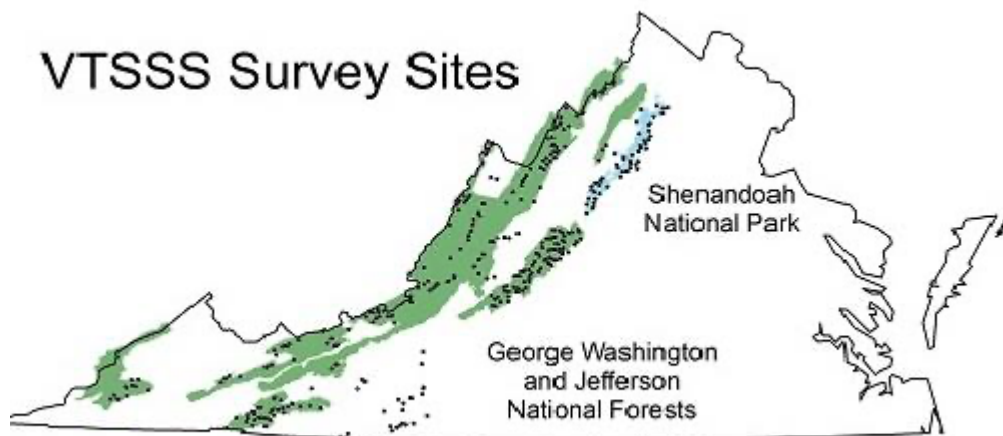
The most recent Council meeting was held May 13th at Bridgewater College. The key discussion items at this meeting were the next steps in planning and implementing our Priority Waters programs (see the separate article on this) and having a Council operating plan for the Commonwealth that is consistent with the new national TU strategic plan.

Our Annual Meeting is scheduled for the morning of September 16th at the Graves Mountain Lodge in Syria, VA. If you are interested in getting involved with your state Council, we would love to see you at this meeting. And you can fish the Rose River afterwards.

[VTSSS](#)

[Overview](#)

The Virginia Trout Stream Sensitivity Study (VTSSS) was designed to track the effects of acidic deposition and other factors that determine water quality and related ecological conditions in Virginia's native trout



streams.

The VTSSS 2021 survey is the fourth regional survey conducted with the assistance of Trout Unlimited and other volunteer organizations. About 450 stream sites were sampled in 34 counties, representing most of the mountain headwater streams in Virginia that support reproducing brook trout. Previous surveys were conducted in 1987, 2000, and 2010. Following the first survey, a geographically distributed subset of streams was selected for long-term monitoring. This component of VTSSS now includes 72 streams that have been sampled on a

seasonal (quarterly) basis for 33 years. Stream water samples collected through the VTSSS program were analyzed for pH, acid neutralizing capacity, acid anions (sulfate, nitrate, and chloride) and base cations (calcium, magnesium, potassium, sodium).

Over the years since the program inception, VTSSS data and findings have proven important to both local resource management and to the development, evaluation, and implementation of national air pollution control policies.

Priority Waters

TU National Plan Overview

More than 1.5 million miles of trout and salmon waters are degraded. Streams that supply drinking water, irrigation, and recreation are at risk. The effects of climate change pose real and immediate threats. On the flip side, huge opportunities have emerged for TU and its partners to protect, reconnect, and restore trout and salmon waters using tried and true strategies. We must scale up our efforts to both avert threats and seize opportunities.

To meet the challenges we face, we will:

- Identify shared Priority Waters for native and wild trout and salmon across the country and take strategic action to care for and recover them.
- Inspire people and communities across the country to care for and recover their waters.
- Invest in our staff, volunteers, and partners so we have the tools, technology, training, and resources necessary to achieve our shared goals.

Virginia Priority Waters Overview

In 2022 a workgroup consisting of members of Virginia Trout Unlimited working with Seth Coffman of National Trout Unlimited identified the following Priority Waters in Virginia

- Grayson Highlands Priority Waters Area
- Upper James River/Upper Shenandoah River Priority Waters Area
- Blue Ridge Priority Waters Area

What was the scientific rationale for choosing these as Priority Waters?

The Virginia PW work group looked at several data sets in determining these priority waters areas. Those included;

- percentage of streams miles that were allopatric brook trout streams vs sympatric streams.
- Future resiliency to climate change from datasets in the Priority waters mapper tool
- Percentage of public vs private lands
- Distribution of stronghold and persistent brook trout populations in the priority waters areas

- Opportunity for reconnecting patches of habitat into larger more contiguous patches

What native trout and salmon portfolio elements are we seeking to preserve, reestablish, or enhance?

- Native eastern brook trout are the primary element for selection of priority water areas in VA.
- Additionally, the southern strain of eastern brook trout are represented in the Grayson Highlands PW area
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What do we know about current or future impacts of climate change to these waters?

- Resiliency to climate change was examined in the priority waters mapper tool and several patches of habitat in each priority waters area show maintenance of coldwater habitat under different modeling scenarios.
- Local knowledge of groundwater influence and springs in the selected areas also contributed to the decision-making process.

What are the conservation and restoration opportunities in these waters? What value will TU add—why is TU needed on these waters?

- Still needs to be completely fleshed out, but in general opportunities for Aquatic Organisms Passage projects are present in all 3 selected areas.
- Habitat enhancement and increasing the percentage of riparian forested areas along brook trout streams is available.
- Reducing the impact of non-native salmonids on native brook trout is also possible in the selected areas.

Who are some of the key partners we are currently working with on PWs in your Virginia and how do our goals align?

- VA DWR. Many of the goals of TU align with the Wild Trout Management plan the state has.
- United States Forest Service has lands within each priority waters area and will be a key partner.
- The National Resources and Conservation Services and Soil and Water Conservation Districts that assist farmers with conservation practices will be key partners.

Virginia Capital Chapter Reestablished

The first two TU chapters to be formed in Virginia were the Shenandoah Valley and Virginia Capital (Richmond area) chapters. While the Shenandoah chapter has stayed strong through the years, the VA Capital chapter has had periods where they have been inactive. This is unfortunate in part because we have about 500 TU members in the Greater Richmond area—

many of whom are avid fishers—plus they live in our State Capital and have first-hand access to our legislators when they are in session. Richmond is also the gateway to eastern Virginia-- where we don't have coldwater fisheries-- but many avid anglers support TU's mission. Given the above, the Council decided to invest its resources in seeing if the VA Capital Chapter could be viable again.

We started by meeting with as many local TUers as we could at the January 2023 Fly Fishing and Wine Festival in Doswell and holding a special meeting with those who indicated an interest in being part of the new leadership group. Soon after, we were able to have a virtual follow-up meeting where we identified a slate of officers and Chapter Board candidates. Then, we had an in-person gathering at the Current Culture Fly Shop in Richmond where we had a presentation by Simone Valencia about trout fishing opportunities in Virginia that can be identified and researched on-line as well as mapping software like ONX maps, which allow users to see where land adjacent to trout streams is privately-owned versus public access. This meeting allowed us to introduce our officer candidates in-person as well as to identify members that were interested in being on the Chapter Board. We also had a special treat at this get together as long-time member Catharine Tucker told us about the Chapter's history, including stories about Joe Brooks-- who lived in Richmond back when he was writing his famous books. A copy of his Trout Fishing book is available to borrow from the library at the Current Culture Fly Shop.

Most recently, the chapter met April 25th at the Department of Wildlife Resources to hear Mike Bedarski (Fisheries Biologist) talk about Virginia Trout Fishing Opportunities. A copy of his presentation can be found on virginiatu.org. There were 21 attendees at this meeting. Chapter leadership plans to meet again May 23rd.

Teen Summit (Alex Koll-Virginia teen representative)

Last year in June I had the wonderful opportunity to attend the 2022 TU teen leadership summit, which for the year was located where the Rivercourse TU Teens camp is held (which had only happened a few weeks prior). We as a group were only to stay for a couple days, I think it was only 4-5 days total in fact that we were actually at the camp location.

On the first night there we had all gathered on the back porch of one of the Lake cabins to discuss ground rules, some simple ice breaking activities (which is unfortunate for me as I will always have a hard time retaining names of people I meet, which I will always feel bad about.), and an item swap for us to learn more about each other in the sense of our personality and where we physically come from. After that we had to discuss a very important matter, what was to happen in the following days as well as the daily schedules. There were one or two main events per day, the first full day was snorkeling and fishing afterwards in a protected area. Day two was to be doing some research work from what I heard was the only remaining Red Spruce forest in NC. That day included seine netting for macro invertebrates and electro-shocking some native brook trout to get a better idea of the population in these upper sections (and the numbers were pretty good for where they were at that high up the mountain). Day three was visiting a fly shop about an hour from camp and fishing a nearby river.

From what I remember from my time at the camp, the main attractions for the onsite activities that were planned, I would have to say that it would be hard to pick which ones I enjoyed the most as I can't really say there was an "unenjoyable" day. However I think the most enjoyable activity had to be the snorkeling segment, although I forgot which day we did that. I can remember the water was not the most ideal for snorkeling, but with decent perception it was pretty easy to spot the life that lives its life daily under the surface. I can remember watching the little darters swim behind me as I stopped at times to clean my goggles. The most interesting part in my eyes would have to have been the hellbender that I got to see, as I don't ever get to see them here in VA and to see one just moving about was a genuinely thrilling experience. The size and some sort of grace that they walk around with was interesting to see how a salamander of such size moves almost freely in these rivers.

What I took from the camp was a few things, the first was that trout really can be a pain no matter where you are when it comes to them biting. The second is probably the more important portion, which is that I really set in stone what I wanted to pursue in life, which was freshwater fish conservation. In fact, right after I had left the summit I had a tour of Virginia Tech already set up where I would tour both the Conservation/wildlife school and also the whole campus. Semi recently I had applied to Virginia Tech because I was impressed with what I saw and I liked the area around there, and as luck would have it I got accepted for this upcoming fall for my major of fish conservation which I was ecstatic about when I first heard about it (at 5 in the morning). So I would say that my time at the recent TU summit had played a major factor in deciding what I was to do in life as I was still on the fence on what I should do (both options were fish related though, so at least that was set in stone).

TU Business Partner Mobile Fly Shop

Mossy Creek shop is going mobile around VA with its new mobile fly shop. They recently did an event in Winchester VA at Escutcheon brewing where the local chapter meets for their tying sessions. The chapter partnered with Mossy Creek in the event and signed up 20 new members. It was a fun event with a good turnout. The mobile fly shop has a full selection of gear. Mossy Creek Fly Shop would like to partner with other TU chapters in helping promote local programs and membership development.

Help Wanted

The TU Virginia Council is looking for individuals who would be willing to work on collecting material, editing and producing a semi-annual newsletter. If you would be interested, please contact;

Burr Tupper – Council Vice Chairman

nhflyangler@gmail.com