



NEWSCAST-

Winter 2021

Bill Watkins, Editor

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Conserving, protecting, and restoring coldwater fisheries and watersheds in northeast Tennessee since 1986.

President's Letter

I hope this newsletter finds you healthy and not much worse for the wear of 2020.

The year 2020 will go down as one of the most, maybe the most, unpleasant years for our members. We were off to a great start early in the year when Covid hit. We had just completed the Tailwater Roundup, our biggest river cleanup of the year. Suddenly everything changed.

We had no events or meetings for months. When we fished we fished alone or met at the water. We missed the fellowship that comes with travel together to the fishing and the meals many of us share before or after fishing.

To add insult to injury, our tailwaters were more crowded. Fishing was something that you can do without a Covid risk. So more people fished and more people came from out of state to fish our waters.

Some events, such as the Women's Clinic were unavoidably cancelled. While Mike Givney was able to save most of the trout, our Trout in the Classroom program collapsed when students could no longer attend school.

Not everything stopped. As discussed on another page, we continued to make progress on our grant program. We were also able to participate in the Todd Burleson Cleanup. Towards the end of the year, we had two outdoor meetings that went well even if they were on the cold side.

Upcoming Events

01/30	Fishing Day
02/09	Board Meeting
02/16	Annual Business Meeting

OMTU Officers

Ryan Turgeon President

Rhett Morris , Vice President

Rick Elliott, Treasurer

Daniel Back , Secretary

TWRA Asks Us to Report Poachers

There seems to be an uptick in poaching. Sally Petre, TWRA Streams and Rivers Biologist, sent us the following email:

Jim Habera and I have been getting a lot of complaints revolving around our Delayed Harvest locations. Here is a quick public service announcement to share with the club.

If you see a violation:

Call the TWRA Poaching hotline for east Tennessee is 1-800-831-1174 or call our Regional office during business hours (8-4:30) at 423-587-7037

Include the following if possible:

The violation (what the person was doing)

Location of violation

Date and time of violation

Vehicle tag number and description of vehicle

Description of person

I have been getting calls about violations that people saw weeks ago with little information, things like “pulling stringers of fish out” or “using bait” in delayed harvest areas, but no vehicle descriptions or dates.

These little bits of information, weeks after the violation does little to help. In fact, talking with our law enforcement officers they had very few complaints this year on violations at our delayed harvest areas even though I have received many recently.

If you see issues and want to help, the pieces of information listed above help us to determine where AND when to target law enforcement operations. For example, if you see someone poaching on a Thursday and call in that day, and someone saw the same violation with the same vehicle description as you reported poaching the previous Thursday, it may be likely the person has off on Thursdays and we can focus our effort at that location on Thursday instead of all week or a random day.

Our law enforcement officers are working hard to make cases and stop poaching. If you see a violation, please call the numbers above with the pertinent information. We want to know about it!

It's probably best if you don't confront the poacher directly. Get the information. Make the call and let the professionals handle it.

A note to some of my friends. Just because they are from out of state doesn't mean that they are poachers.

OMTU Board of Directors

Chris Lennon

Michael Givney

Lori Givney

Stephanie Mann

Sam Henry

Questions? Comments?

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Tennessee Brook Trout Released

Photo and article courtesy of the Tennessee Aquarium



Shell Creek is pretty much a picture-perfect Appalachian mountain stream. From headwaters within a stone's throw of the Tennessee-North Carolina border, it descends through the Cherokee National Forest in a burbling dance over and around boulders coated in carpet-thick layers of green moss.

Shell Creek is an undeniably beautiful waterway rife with stairsteps of terraced falls separated by clear, slower-moving pools. Even more importantly to biologists, however, the creek's upper reaches are largely free of non-native rainbow and brown trout thanks to a natural barrier preventing their movement upstream.

The absence of competition for resources makes this stretch of the Shell an ideal location for the next chapter in the restoration of the Southern Appalachian brook trout to its historic range.

Over the course of three years, brook trout restoration efforts were focused at Little Stony Creek, another cold-water stream about ten miles north of Shell Creek. In the last year, however, biologists were excited to find naturally spawned fish in Little Stony, a clear indication that restocking had been successful.

"The fish we introduced there are now producing enough on their own that we don't have to help them anymore," say Tennessee Aquarium Reintroduction Biologist Meredith Harris. "This year feels like starting a new chapter. Now, it's on to the next location."

The first stocking effort at Shell Creek began before dawn as Harris and Reintroduction Assistant Anna Quintrell collected more than 400 juvenile brook trout from hatchery systems at the Tennessee Aquarium Conservation Institute's freshwater science center near downtown Chattanooga.

After getting the fish ready for a road trip in oxygenated bags cooled by ice packs, Harris and Quintrell drove more than 250 miles to reach a stretch of Shell Creek bordered by a meadow of waist-high grass off a steep, switchback gravel road.

Once on site, Harris and Quintrell joined representatives from Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, U.S. Forest Service, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. While the Brook Trout acclimated to the water of their new home, the reintroduction team discussed where and how best to release their charges into the brisk, 58-degree current.

We're Leveraging Grant Money to Increase our Impact

Our Chapter received an \$8,400 License Plate Grant to purchase supplies to start a local Community Science program. It will allow us and our partners to identify and prioritize cold-water conservation projects.

We know that there are many potential cold-water conservation projects near us, but it is difficult to identify and prioritize them. The Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA) and the US Forest Service (USFS) maintain lists, but those lists are limited because of resource constraints. This is where our Community Science program comes in.

Community Science uses chapter and community volunteers to collect data that can help identify and prioritize projects. With appropriate training, community science has been shown to produce reliable data.

The program will also allow us to re-engage members and recruit new members. It's a great way to help motivate our 2021 post-Covid recovery.

Working with TWRA and the USFS, we identified four areas where we can have a significant impact. Here's what we plan to do:

- Stream Barrier Assessment: After training, teams of two or three volunteers will survey the forest service roads in local Watersheds. At each road-stream crossing, teams will collect data on the crossing structure. Each crossing will receive a score. The data and the score will be added to a database that encompasses all Southeast United States survey points. The data will help managers identify crossings with the highest potential to block passage of trout.
- Stream Habitat Assessment: As stream barriers are identified, volunteers will be trained in stream health assessment protocols. In fish-bearing or potential fish-bearing streams that have a barrier, teams will measure residual pool depth, pool frequency and large wood deposition above and below barriers. Volunteers will also collect macroinvertebrate samples in streams identified as the highest priority for barrier removal or brook trout reintroduction. Samples will be added to a state-wide water quality data set and sent to a partner university for analysis.
- Trout Movement Through Barriers: Our volunteers will work with TWRA, USFS, and TU staff to assist with high-priority projects, helping to improve trout movement through barriers. We'll help evaluate passage through a long-term capture-mark-recapture program. Our volunteers will help staff catch and tag trout below potential barriers. Teams will return from time to time to recapture trout and see if they are moving through the system.
- DNA Sampling: Non-native trout will be monitored using DNA analysis. Volunteers will be trained to collect water samples from streams above high-priority barriers where brook trout have or may be reintroduced. The samples will be sent to the National Genomics Center for Wildlife and Fish Conservation for analysis, helping agencies identify high-potential streams and determine what needs to be done to remove a barrier.

We will develop this program and expect to provide 400 hours of volunteer investment over the coming year. There's more, though. We expect this program to continue for several years, allowing us to cover a number of watersheds. We will incorporate the program into the Student Science Project, allowing students to gain experience and participate in fisheries management in a meaningful way. If the need arises, we will loan our equipment to other TU chapters working on similar programs.

Anyone interested in getting involved in our grant program should contact Ryan Turgeon or Jeff Wright.

Todd Burleson Stream Clean-up

Covid has had a huge impact on OMTU's activity in 2020. We were, however, able to participate in a couple of stream/river cleanups. The 25th Annual Todd Burleson Stream Clean-up on September 19th, 2020 with OMTU support.

From the press release:

Thirty Four people from the Roan Mountain Community and the OverMountain Chapter of Trout Unlimited participated in the 25th Stream Clean-up of the Doe River and its creeks this Saturday. The stream clean-up is held annually in honor of Todd Burleson. An avid angler, conservationist and community leader, Todd started the first clean-up in 1995. The Burleson family and Trout Unlimited have kept his effort alive every September for 25 years. Participants varied from Elementary School to retirees and some participants came from as far away as Charleston S.C.

This year the team concentrated on the Doe River along a 4 mile section of Old Railroad Grade Road and another 4 mile section through the Community Park and following Highway 143 toward the Roan Mountain State Park. The Burleson family treated the volunteers to a lunch of BBQ, Beans and all the fixings.



The sort of trash we find in our streams



It's not all work. Lunch after the Todd Burleson Clean-up

Winter Fishing Options

The past few winters have been very wet with high unfishable tailwater flows. That doesn't mean you can't fish. We're blessed with a bunch of mountain streams that can provide good fishing throughout the winter:



Our mountains have many little jewels like this. Each of those plunge pools could hold a fish. Don't spend a lot of time on each, though. If you haven't caught a fish in a couple of casts, you've spooked them.



Depending on the stream, you might catch Brown Trout, Rainbows, or beautiful little Brook Trout like this one. Photo Ryan Turgeon.



Don't let a little ice stop you from fishing. As long as the water temperature is 40° or more, you're good to go. Some of our spring-fed creeks stay relatively warm all winter.



This spring-fed creek clears quickly after a storm and stays relatively warm all winter. Notice that you don't see anybody fishing. We've never seen another fisher on a mountain stream in the winter.



Mike Givney releasing a trout on February 4, 2019.



High water is always possible, but it is often fishable as are these flows on this stream. Wading is a personal choice. If you aren't comfortable, don't wade. You'll soon learn which streams are easiest to wade and which clear quickest after a storm.



Jeff Mann landing a trout in high flows on January 23, 2020.



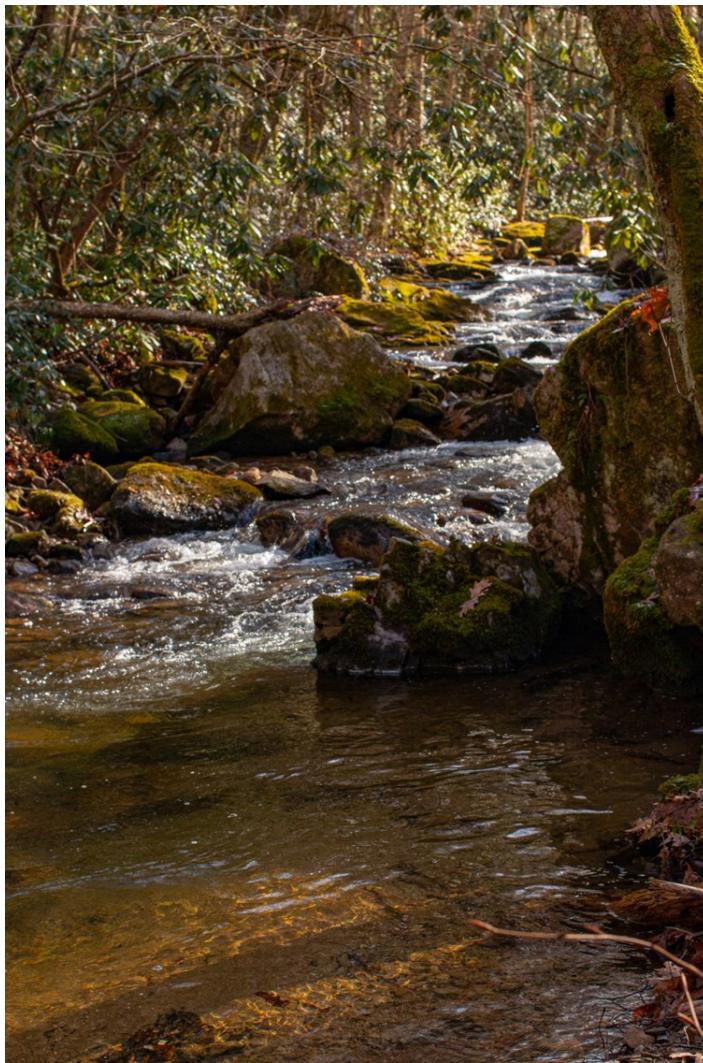
Fish hold in different water in cold weather. In summer when there are lots of bugs, the fish are likely to be anywhere in this picture. In winter, they are more likely to be in the softer water on top.



Be sure to wear plenty of warm clothing when winter fishing. Getting cold is not only uncomfortable, it can be life threatening. Here we have two base-layer weights each for top and bottom.



Mountain stream fishing gear can be simple. Any light-weight rod and reel will do, but for most, the shorter the rod the better. You don't need a cannon rod, and the reel just holds line. Fly selection can be very simple too. A dry-dropper rig works great. A wading staff is mandatory. Wading on some streams can be treacherous, and there might be ice where you are walking.

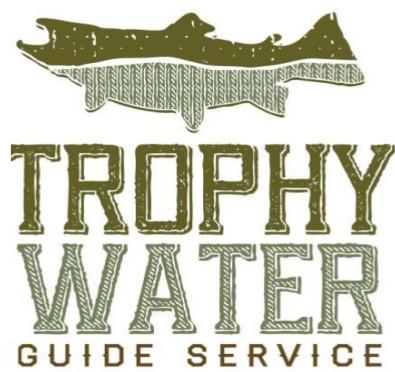


Casting can be a little tight in our mountain creeks. A short rod helps a lot. At a minimum, it makes it easier to retrieve your fly from a tree.



What's not to like? We have mountain streams with solitude and good fishing year round. Go fishing. Have fun. Be safe.

Annual Dinner Sponsors Rainbow and above levels



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