Wild Rivers Tribune

WILD RIVERS CHAPTER TROUT UNLIMITED NOVEMBER 2026

Chapter Report

By John Simonson, WRTU Chapter President

Wild Rivers TU Chapter has been very busy in 2026, and our TU chapter has accomplished many different stream projects across our northwest Wisconsin counties. Please see my article within this newsletter titled: **Wild Rivers TU Chapter 2026 in Review.**



One thing that stands out to me this year is the severity of our drought. I cannot remember ever witnessing a drought as severe as this year across northwest Wisconsin. Some small creeks dried up or were just a trickle and many lakes levels dropped considerably. The upper Namekagon River flows were the lowest levels I have witnessed since I started fishing it in the 1970's. Even the Lake Superior Fall lake run fish seemed to be delayed running up the Lake Superior tributaries due to the lack of rainfall. Let's hope this doesn't continue next year.

As we now turn our attention to 2027, my personal hope for our chapter in 2027 is we get more chapter members involved in our many stream projects and chapter events. There are many ways members can help, from helping create our newsletters, posting on social media, planning future work, helping with educational fishing related events, joining our WRTU Board of Directors, and finally helping us on our trout stream workdays.

If you want to jump in and help us in some way, please feel free to email me at john@wiflyfisher.com, or reach out to any of our WRTU Chapter board members. Your support is needed and can help us do even more work to preserve and enhance our northwestern Wisconsin cold water watersheds for many years to come.

US FWS Brook Trout Electroshocking Survey

By Jason Nelson, WRTU Board Member

During the first two weeks of June the US FWS conducted electro-shocking studies on the Little Brule, Jader Creek & Wilson Creek. The goal of the study is to assess the trout population on these creeks and determine the impact of replacing culverts on these streams. Data is collected before replacement and for the next 2-3 years after replacement to see what the impact is on overall trout populations. The old "tube style" culverts created plunge pools not allowing fish passage; especially during low water periods which can significantly impact migration and where fish spawn. The new culverts are substantially larger in size to aid in high water periods, and the entire bottom is lined with gravel and rock creating an actual stream bed under the roadway. It is too early to understand the impact yet but over the next two years it will be interesting to see the final data. Thank you to the US FWS team (Zach, Ellary, Dalton) for your efforts on this project and allowing members from Wild Rivers Trout Unlimited and Brule River Sportsmen's Club to participate.





Wild Rivers TU Chapter 2026 in Review

By John Simonson, Chapter President

I am very proud of all the things our chapter accomplished this year. Each year we build on previous years and raise the bar. It happens because we have dedicated members who come together and make sure we keep moving ahead on our cold water conservation efforts and our educational fishing outreach programs across northwest Wisconsin.



January & February

- WRTU held a weekly fly-tying class of students at Ashland High School
- Trout in the classroom in Hurley

March

- WRTU held a weekly fly-tying class of students at Ashland High School
- Tie One on Social Fly-Tying Event & Pizza Party at Sawmill Saloon, Seeley

April

- WRTU Chapter's Coldwater Conservation Symposium in Cable
- WRTU taught fly casting to students at Ashland High School

May

- Marengo River - WRTU Chapter funded $1200 tree seedlings and helped plant them.
- Fallen tree removal along the South Fork of the White River trails
- White River State Fishery - WRTU Chapter help purchase 2,500 tree seedlings
- White River State Fishery - WRTU members helped plant the tree seedlings
- Supported Women's Rivers of Recovery with $1,500 donation
- Helped BRSC & DNR with tree planting on the Little Brule River

June

- 26th Annual Kids Fishing Day at the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center
- Two workdays on the Clam River State Fishery Area
- Dismantled three beaver dams on the South Fork of the White River
- Assisted US FWS with brook trout surveys on 4 culvert replacement locations

July

- Two more workdays on the Clam River State Fishery Area
- Along North Fish Creek WRTU cleared Karaba Road fishermen's trail
- Assisted the DNR fish shocking on the Iron River & East Fork

August

- Wild Rivers TU Chapter Member Celebration held at the Sawmill Saloon in Seeley
- Assisted the DNR with electroshocking on the East Fork of the Iron River

September

- Helped Landmark Conservancy clear trail on the new White River public property
- Assisted the DNR with fish shocking on Pine Creek, by Old Hwy 2
- Removed old beaver dam on the East Fork of the White River

October

- Assisted DNR with fallen tree removal in White River State Fishery Area
- Surveyed buckthorn new growth on the South Fork of the White River
- WRTU members doing redd surveys for the DNR

WRTU Chapter 2026 Project Expenses

- $5,000 to Great Lakes TU (National)
- $1,500 to Women's Rivers of Recovery veteran outings
- $5,000 to Burke Center for Ecosystem Research on Fish Creek staff work
- $1,200 for trees to plant along the Marengo River
- $800 for purchasing Reddington fly rod/reel combo kits
- $3,000 to our Adopt the White River State Fishery Area
- $3,000 to our Adopt the Clam River State Fishery Area
- $1,500 for WRTU Coldwater Conservation Symposium
- $5,000 to help Landmark Conservancy purchase White River property from Northland College
- $10,000 to WI TU Watershed Access Fund
- $2,500 to Landmark Conservancy for building bridge across Tyler Creek

New look at State Capitol: *What opportunities for TU lie ahead?*

By John Welter, WRTU Chapter Member

November's midterm election shifted control of both houses of the State Legislature to Democratic majorities for the first time in 17 years, and the new governor, Milwaukee's County Executive David Crowley, is also a Democrat. What might that mean for opportunities to move forward some policies important to Trout Unlimited?

Members have been frustrated for years that governors and legislators have not seen fit to improve funding for the Inland Trout Stamp program. Trout stamp funding has been of crucial importance to TU since 1978, providing essential (and predictable) habitat dollars. The original stamp fee was $2.50, and has been raised twice, the last time in 2006 to $10.00.



Since the last fee hike, costs have risen dramatically for everything and everyone involved in trout habitat work: equipment costs, materials, fuel, labor and fringes for DNR staff. But successive legislatures have declined an increase, while also refusing to increase license fees (except for one hike to the waterfowl stamp some years back).

While Wisconsin TU has lobbied hard these past sessions, it's been unsuccessful. Now is the time to contact legislators and ask them to consider a raise. $17.50 would not be unreasonable, TU has said.

DNR funding has been an issue for a couple of decades, and a lack of legislative support has made it worse. At last spring's Conservation Congress hearings, voters statewide strongly supported license and stamp fee increases and some other major funding overhaul. Favorite choices were a catch-up appropriation or an increase of 1/8 of a penny in state sales tax. The latter has been crucial to agencies in states like Missouri and Minnesota where voters approved the hike. The legislature could make such a move in enacting the state budget, or could start a three-year process toward voter approval of a constitutional amendment, as did Missouri and Minnesota. Those states have solid support after the increase has been in effect for decades.

Wisconsin legislators and Gov. Evers could not agree on how to re-authorize the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program in the last session. As a result, a popular program that's used hundreds of millions of dollars to buy lands, water access, and forestry areas is dead, for now.

For trout anglers, that means DNR has no dollars to spend to buy Fisheries areas or streambank fishing easements. Since the early 1990s, we have benefited from those dollars for our recreation. Until our representatives renew the program, TU's Watershed Access Fund will be the only game in town. Those dollars have been used well, but they're far from enough.

We suggest you watch how legislators get assigned to committees and contact those in your area who will have some say. The new governor's office will also be proposing its budget for the 2027-9 biennium in February, and so contacting them in December and January with your concerns can have some effect.

You can expect Wisconsin TU will also be advancing these issues, but individual anglers are hometown voters, and they can have strong impacts on policy choices being proposed in Madison.

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