

WINCHESTER
TROUT UNLIMITED



CHAPTER #638

WTU January
meeting date
has changed.
See info below.

Monthly Magazine of Winchester Trout Unlimited
Chapter #638

“God Bless Us, Every One!” --Tiny Tim in Dickens’ *A CHRISTMAS CAROL*

December 2025

Volume 30, Number 12

Winchester TU Meeting (note different room)

Thursday, 8 January 2026, 7:00 PM

Arts and Exploration Studio

Shenandoah Lodge, Lake Frederick, VA

Winchester TU Priority Waters Meeting
(note different room)

Thursday, 8 January 2026, 6:00 PM

Arts and Exploration Studio,

Shenandoah Lodge, Lake Frederick, VA

Project Healing Waters Monthly meeting

No PHW monthly meeting in December

BarFly

The next Winchester TU BarFly

Wednesday, 17 December 2025

7:00 PM at Escutcheon Brewing Co.

142 W. Commercial Street, Winchester

For complete calendars, please see

The Winchester Priority Waters calendar was
under development at press time

Page 9 for Winchester Project Healing Waters

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Bill Prokopchak, Newsletter Editor
wilpro@comcast.net

Change in the Winchester TU Meeting Date: Now 8 January 2026

Please note the change of date for our next Winchester Trout Unlimited monthly meeting.
The meeting date is Thursday, 8 January 2026, at Lake Frederick and the meeting room has changed.

We will **NOT** meet in Rachel's Kitchen on 8 January.

We **WILL** meet in the room next to our usual room –
the next door down that same hallway. The room is called
The Arts and Exploration Studio.



Help Wanted

Database Manager for Winchester Trout Unlimited

Winchester TU is seeking a member to take on the responsibility for managing the WTU database of subscribers to its monthly news magazine that we call LATERAL LINES. With the number of subscribers well over 700, it is time to find a volunteer other than the newsletter editor to take over this vital role.

Responsibilities

- ✓ Maintain multiple WTU databases
- ✓ Control security of the WTU databases
- ✓ Maintain accurate and complete databases
- ✓ Provide secure backup for the databases
- ✓ Collaborate with the officers and board of WTU
- ✓ Troubleshoot database performance

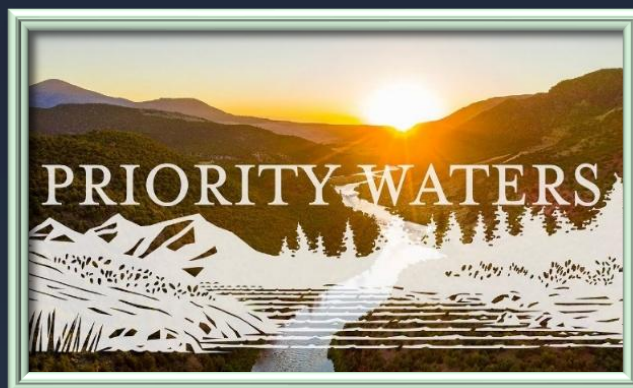
Requirements

- ✓ Paid-up membership in TU and WTU
- ✓ General skill with MS Excel
- ✓ Knowledge of TU data policies
- ✓ Communication with database users
- ✓ Time each month to maintain the data
- ✓ Access to TU “home office” records

Please note: This is a volunteer position. Time commitment 2-3 hours per month.
Submit your interest to Bill Prokopchak, LATERAL LINES Editor, wilpro@comcast.net



Winchester Priority Waters: Glance at the Past, Question about the Future



Prepared by the Winchester Priority Waters Team
Photos by Michael Lawler Smith

The Priority Waters Team convened its final meeting of 2025 immediately before the chapter's regular gathering on 6 November 2025. Team members participating included Ben Coffman, Bob Fish, Tedd Gimber, Stan Ikonen, John Prescott, and Luke Robins, with team leader Mike Makufka presiding.

Mike opened the meeting with a review of the agenda and a synopsis of the last meeting's minutes. He also shared copies of the recent data sheets reflecting field efforts this fall. The team next addressed questions that had been evolving over recent months. While 2025 had been a productive year for collecting field data and for greatly enhancing the team's collective knowledge about both stream basins, pertinent questions emerged. The group raised the overall query "Is there more we *should* be doing?" Mike noted that data gathered had not indicated anything direly amiss -- but all acknowledge summer flows remain an ongoing concern. Mike encouraged the group to discuss possible next steps the project could pursue.



Photo: In late September, the team was able to groundtruth the one manmade barrier on upper Mill Run, an old USGS gauging station. This one was apparently abandoned (by budget cuts?) in the 1980's. The Priority Waters Teams may seek its removal.

Tedd Gimber noted that the group had previously discussed a project that would remove the most significant man-made barrier on Mill Run, the old USGS gauging station. The group's earlier assessment had been that the task could be accomplished by a relatively small crew of field volunteers, provided the National Forest could grant approval and guidance.

Luke Robins raised a point that resonated with the team: we know there are minnow populations in both project streams, yet the group has no direct evidence (save for personal anecdotes and presumed brief sightings) that brook trout currently reside in these waters.

Luke further suggested that embarking on significant instream habitat efforts should await confirmation of actual brook trout populations [Aside: both waters are "restoration" streams made possible via joint Forest Service/VA Department of Wildlife Resources efforts with active past TU support.] Early monitoring efforts in the years post-stocking, late 1990's through early 2000's, demonstrated naturally sustaining populations in both streams. Climatic shifts over the past two decades, however, have effected dramatic changes within both basins: evidence of scouring, and perhaps even devastating floods and downcutting, as well as several protracted droughts. Luke and another team member will explore the feasibility of getting FS and/or DWR to conduct some electroshocking stream sampling to confirm brook trout presence and to provide professional assessment of the populations' current status.

For the immediate winter months ahead, the team decided to forego data gathering in January and perhaps February; but the group agreed to convene in January to draft a tentative field schedule for 2026.

Mike Makufka shared with the group a copy of the official National Forest project description, which has guided the team's ongoing field efforts. Mike noted that because of the then still in effect government shut down, he had been unable to contact Dawn Kirk, the forest's fisheries biologist, regarding the team's hopes to design and place signage at trailheads along the project streams explaining the conservation endeavors currently underway and the value of native trout restoration.

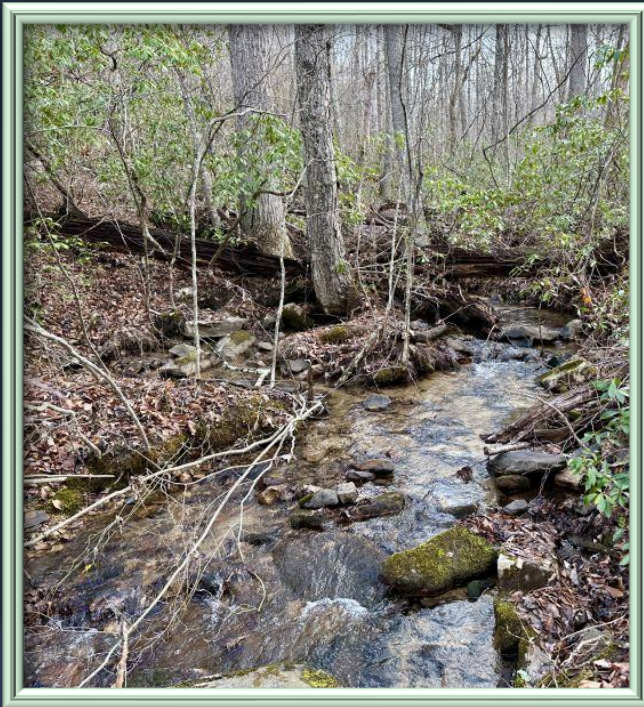
In another ongoing work update, Tedd Gimber noted that he was in the process of following up with Peter Dalke of Friends of the North Fork regarding partnerships that could assist the team in outreach to local private landowners with riparian ownership along both streams.

Mike Makufka wrapped up the meeting with his commitment to make a detailed presentation about the team's efforts to date with the general chapter membership at its January 2026 meeting.

"Priority Waters" continues on the next page.

Winchester Priority Waters – continues

A Glance at the Past: 2025 in Review



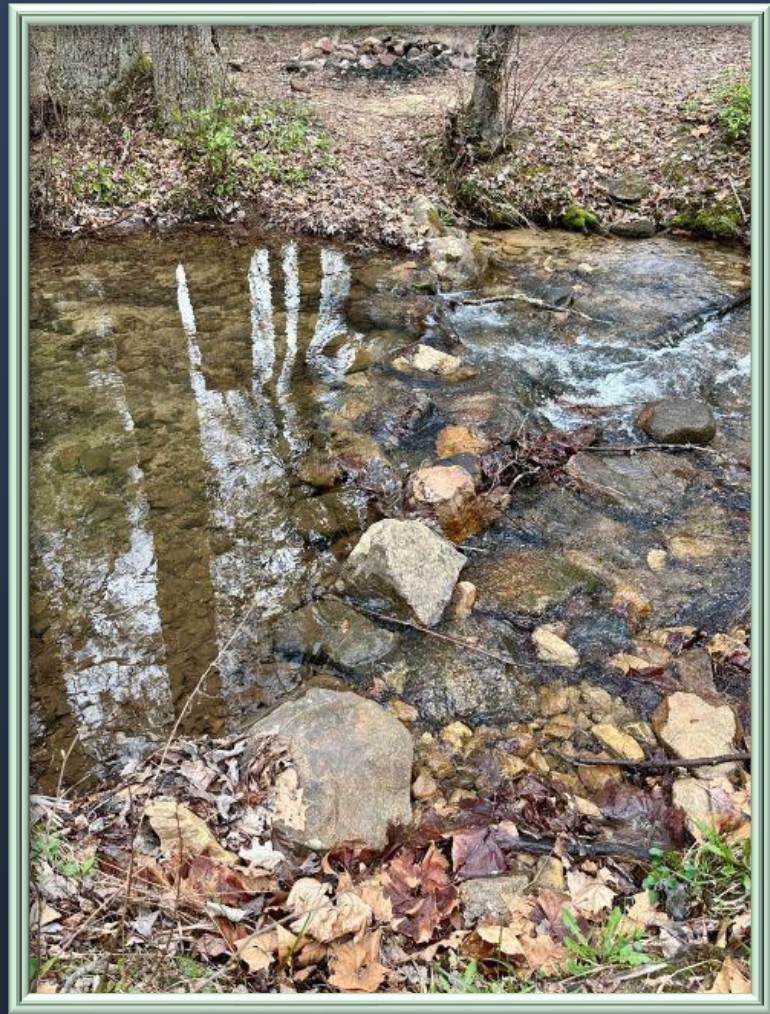
Clockwise from top left: Data loggers were one of the key pieces of equipment for the 2025 field season. Late spring and early summer rains helped brace stream flows and temperatures for the inevitable test August represents. The data indicated only a few days when stream temperatures were approaching the critical zone of 22 degrees Celsius.

The headwaters reach of Little Passage Creek above Strasburg Reservoir appear to be excellent brook trout habitat in April, but by midsummer its flow was critically low.

Future decisions about the use of century-old Strasburg Reservoir might impact fish populations downstream in Little Passage Creek. Above the reservoir, low pH readings lead to liming efforts in recent decades.

During the April 8 outing, Tedd Gimber (left) measures anchor chain to secure a data logger in a deep run where Drew Patterson has located an ideal placement site.

Amateur dams do more harm than good. This one on Little Passage seemed designed to accommodate foot travel to a “campsite” on the far bank. But such ad hoc structures can impede fish movement.



“Priority Waters” continues on the next page.

Winchester Priority Waters 2025 in Review– continues



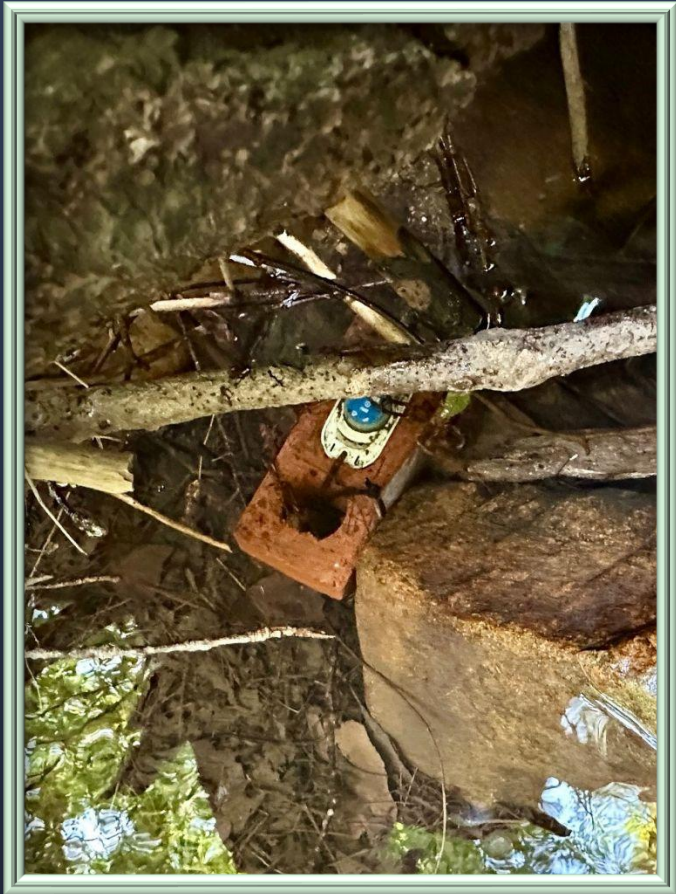
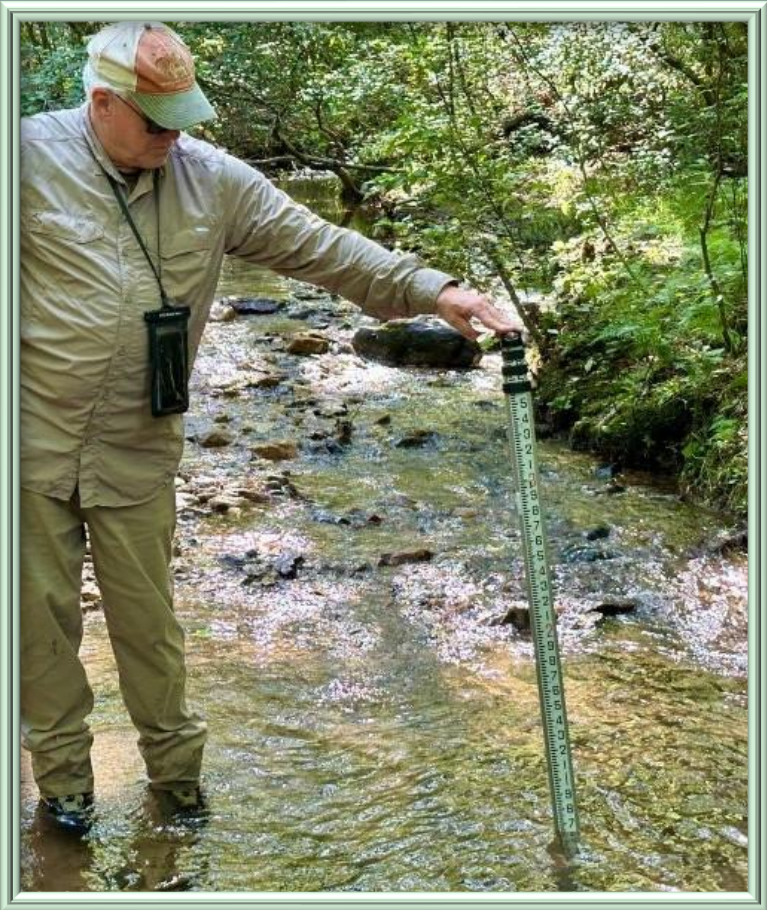
Clockwise from top left: Mill Run, a very small stream, provided the team with a serious challenge: to find a pool sufficiently deep to assure the data logger would remain submerged all summer.

GPS maps were indispensable during the June 25 field work to assess stream barriers that might impact brook trout movement.

Luke Robins places a stadia rod in a stream ford in the upper reaches of Little Passage in June.

On the June day afield, Luke and Tedd pause to watch and try to identify minnows in the shallows of upper Little Passage. Unfortunately, brook trout observations were less than successful throughout the field season.

The Mill Run upper data logger eluded the whole crew on September 9. Tedd Gimber and Mike Smith returned the following week and rediscovered it, right where it had been all along. Fortunately, it had remained submerged throughout.



“Priority Waters”
continues on the next page.

Winchester Priority Waters 2025 in Review — continues

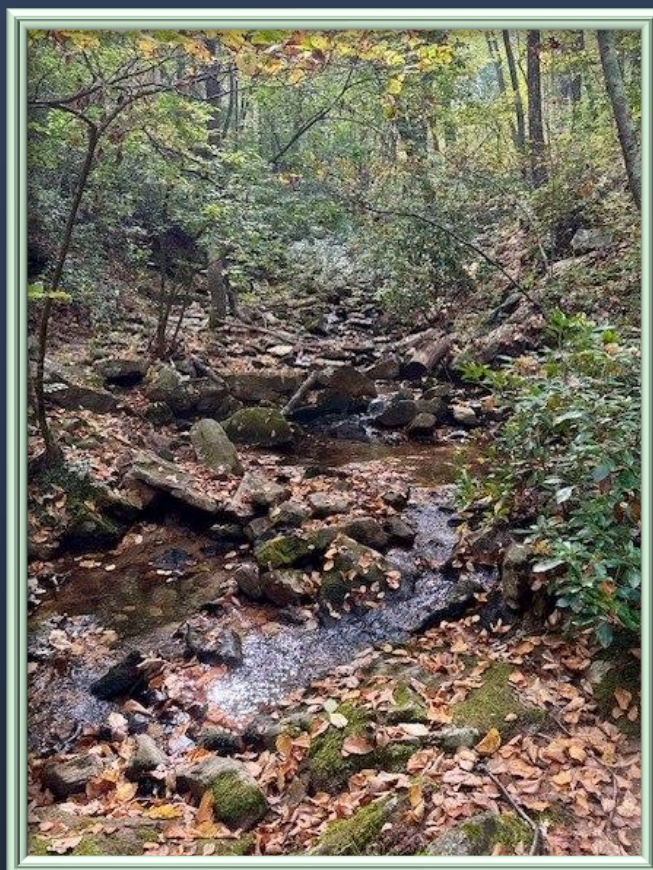
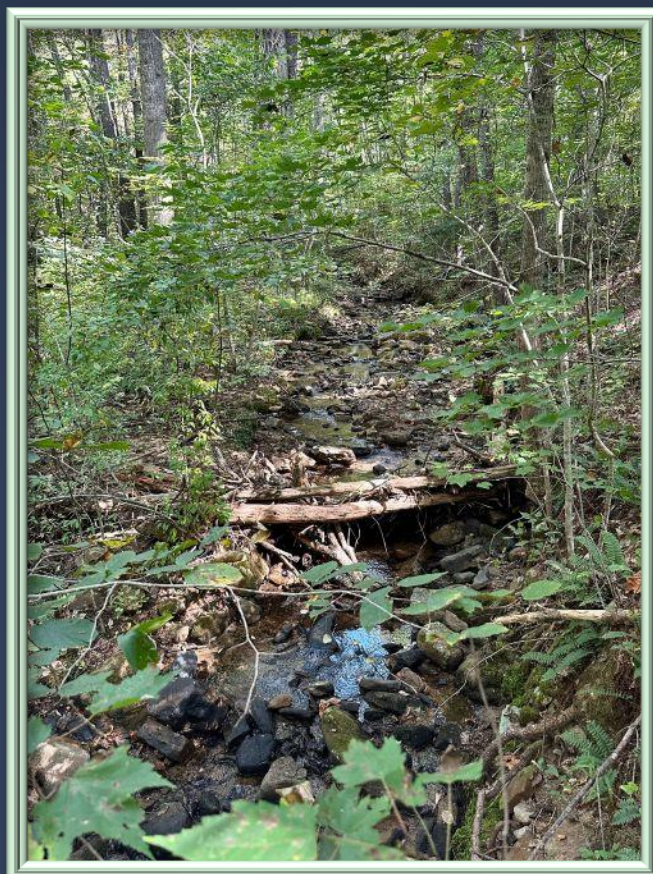
Clockwise from top right: Luke and Tedd prepare to measure a barrier, in this case a wide shallow ford across Little Passage. Such areas, exposed to lengthy periods of direct sunlight each day, can have a negative impact on stream temperatures in summer.

Near the upper station on Mill Run. Stream flow had been ample to abundant through late July. Then came an August drought and the “tap” was turned off. Mill Run’s most vexing issue over recent summers has been the insufficiency of its riparian groundwater sources.

The upper Mill Run gorge is a jewel. But does it harbor any brook trout? The team hopes some 2026 electroshocking session may yield answers.

During the last field tests of the year, Tedd Gimber (l) checks the GPS on the upper Mill Run site, while Mike Makufka records pH readings that Nick Skorup (r) shares.

September field work focused on water quality. Here, team leader Mike Makufka (l) assesses the small beaker of water John Prescott is holding. This part of the test is just one stage used in the Modified Winkler method to determine dissolved oxygen in the stream. Satisfactory readings were obtained at every station that day.



WINCHESTER HEALING WATERS END OF YEAR EVENTS

by Wayne White

November provided Winchester Healing Waters Veterans and Volunteers with a chance to wrap up another successful year of activities and events, offering unique opportunities to learn and develop as fly anglers.

The Sweetwater Travel Company Guide School Challenges Fishing Guides in the Making

At the November monthly meeting, Volunteer Brian Peeler gave an insightful presentation about his experience at the Sweetwater Travel Company Guide School in Montana, where he had just completed his second week of the school's advanced fly-fishing guide school training.

Brian is an Army veteran who has been a Healing Waters volunteer with the Winchester program for the past two years.

When he's not working his day job as a maintenance tech for a property owner in Front Royal, he runs Rivergoat Outfitters, a guide service on the Shenandoah, where he guides clients in fishing for a variety of fish native to the local rivers. He admits his knowledge of trout fishing is limited, and guiding trout fishermen is another opportunity for him to broaden his business.



Top: It was cold and damp on Armstrong Lake near Livingston, MT, when Brian caught this large Brookie. It was one of many different trout species that he and his crew landed that day during the guide training on the lake.

photo provided by Sweetwater Travel Co

Left: Brian Peeler reviews the history of the Sweetwater Travel Company guide school during a presentation at the Winchester Healing Waters monthly meeting on 12 November at the Shenandoah Lodge.

photo by Wayne White

Founded in 1995, the Sweetwater Travel Company Guide School has over 2000 successful graduates who guide fly-fishing outings all over the world. Sweetwater Travel has fishing lodges in Alaska, British Columbia, the Bahamas, Brazil, Mongolia, and services in Russia.

Sweetwater offers the Fly-fishing Guide Course (FFGC) in week one for fly anglers of all levels at the Royal Big Horn Lodge, Saint Xavier, MT. The course covers basic fly-fishing knowledge and includes wade fishing and angling from drift boats, as well as instruction in fly casting, knot tying, fly tying, and reading the water on streams, lakes, and rivers. CPR and first-aid training were also part of the guide certification.

Brian decided to attend both of the one-week courses at the Sweetwater Guide School in Montana to further develop his professional fishing-guide skills after discovering he could use his G.I. Bill educational benefits to cover the school's costs.

Fly-fishing Guide Instructor Training is the advanced course Brian attended at the Sweetwater school during his second week out West. The Vermillion Ranch is the headquarters for this instruction, located in Greycliff, MT, about 80 miles east of Bozeman and roughly 100 miles north of Yellowstone National Park. The ranch features the Harrison House, a historical homestead, and is nestled in the beautiful setting of the confluence of Sweetgrass Creek and the Yellowstone River.

During the week, the Yellowstone, Boulder, and Clearwater Rivers served as the classroom for Brian and his fellow students. There, they fished but received explicit instruction on how to guide others as they learned the technical aspects of controlling the Clackamax drift boats, as well as handling Lowe flat-bottom jet boats while taking care of "clients" – the other students in the boat.

“Winchester Healing Waters” continues on the next page.

WINCHESTER HEALING WATERS

The Sweetwater Travel Company Guide School
-- continued



Brian Peeler (l) answers questions about the Sweetwater guide school curriculum from participants and volunteers at Winchester Healing Waters.

photo by Wayne White

The fishing guides in training also fished DePuy Spring Creek and Armstrong Lake to gain additional experience. Because of the low water levels out west this year, the group spent time traveling up and down the smaller rivers, fishing the “deep” pockets and transitions to maximize their efforts.

Brian admitted the training was challenging, even if it was a chance to fish in one of America’s beautiful areas. But he added the lessons were invaluable, and he’s looking forward to putting his new skills to use on the water in Virginia.

You can contact Brian for more information about his trip and his application to Sweetwater using the G.I. Bill at rivergoatoutfitters@gmail.com.

Learn more about Brian’s guide services at www.rivergoatoutfitters.com or Follow him on facebook.com/rivergoatoutfitters and Instagram.com/rivergoatoutfitters

“Winchester Healing Waters” continues on the next page.

WINCHESTER HEALING WATERS

END OF YEAR EVENTS

by Wayne White

The Great Smoky Mountains National Park / Healing Waters Fishing Outing



Winchester’s Steve Weik and Jeb Stewart were two of four Virginia Healing Waters participants and volunteer guides to attend the National Park Trust fishing outing at the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, 14-16 November.

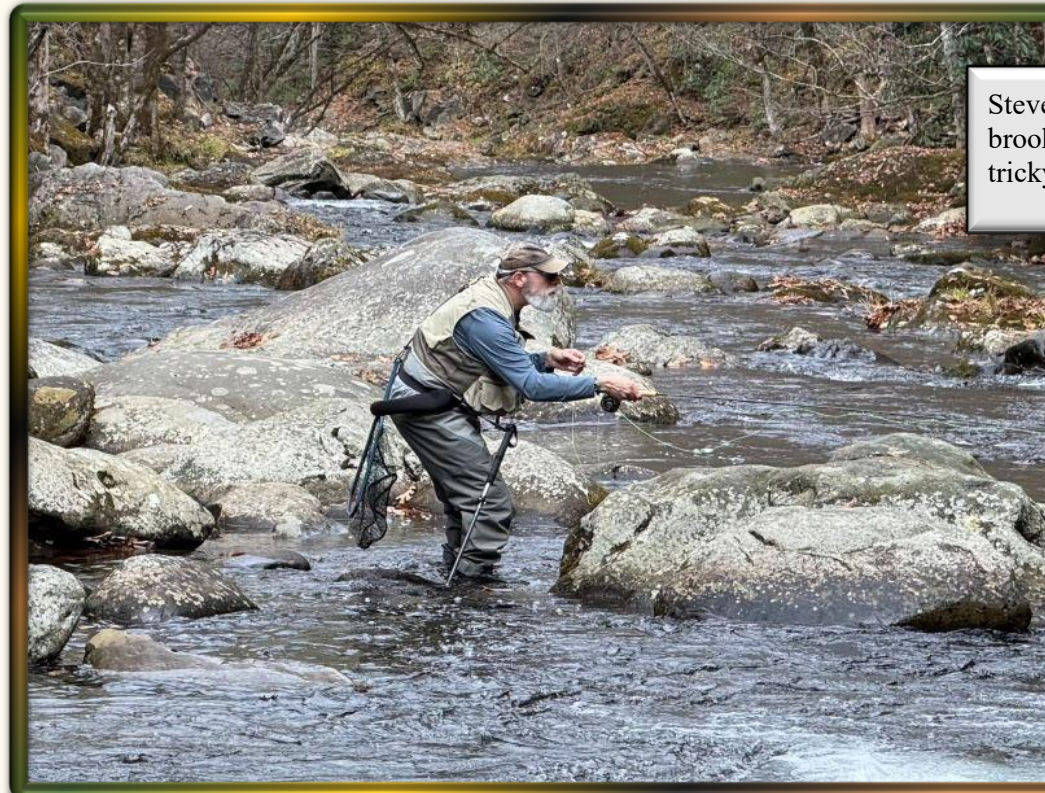
Park Rangers welcome participants and volunteers at the Great Smoky Mountains National Park at the start of the Park Trust and Healing Waters outing in Tennessee.

photo by Jeb Stewart

“Winchester Healing Waters” continues on the next page.

WINCHESTER HEALING WATERS

The Great Smoky Mountains National Park /
Healing Waters Fishing Outing -- continued



Steve Weik stalks elusive and finicky brookies while navigating some tricky footing on the Little River.

photo by Jeb Stewart

This was the 10th year of this partnership event between the Great Smoky Mountains National Park Trust and Project Healing Waters. Besides the Winchester and the Roanoke-New River Valley, Virginia programs, over 50 volunteers, staff, and participants from programs in Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina, Missouri, and GA had the opportunity to fish the park's pristine waters for wild rainbow and brook trout.

A few beautiful “naturalized” rainbows made it to the net for one of the Veterans fishing the Little River.

photo provided by North Carolina Region Healing Waters



Since 1983, the National Park Trust has acquired many of the missing pieces of our national parks, benefiting 56 national park sites across the country. The Trust sponsors youth education and family initiatives, including the Buddy Bison, College Ambassador, and Military Family Programs, as well as National Kids to Parks Day, which serves tens of thousands of children annually and cultivates future park stewards. The Park vision is that public parks, lands, and waters should be cared for, enjoyed, and preserved by all for current and future generations.

The Middle Prong of the Little River in the Smoky Mountain National Park was the focus of the fishing outing. According to Jeb, “it is a mountain stream with large boulders — lots of rock-hopping and a bit treacherous. Several folks took falls.” It was technical fishing, with only a few Veterans catching a few of the native fish. Apparently, for Steve and Jeb, it was more of a fishing outing than a catching event.

The drive to and from Tennessee was long, especially for a two-day weekend event. Breaking up that long haul on the way home on Sunday, Steve and Jeb stopped and fished the South Holston in Bristol, TN, for a couple of hours. The water was good, as Jeb reported, but it was windy at times and challenging; however, they did have a few non-committal hits.

Jeb appreciated the opportunity to guide Steve and noted that it was a good learning experience for him. “I didn’t need to hover over him. I gave him a few tips and showed him spots to fish. It’s apparent that Steve is comfortable with fly angling and is now at the point where the learning curve is lessened by getting out on the water more often,” Jeb added.

“Winchester Healing Waters” continues on the next page.



Thank You to Our Supporters for 2025!

Winchester Project Healing Waters would like to thank all of its supporters for their commitment to our mission and for helping make 2025 another successful year. Their support and promotion of our program activities, events, and outreach greatly enhanced our Veterans' development as fly anglers. What's more, the commitment and support for these services continue to foster opportunities for healing and connection among our program participants and volunteers. We realize that all of these businesses and organizations are invaluable members of our volunteer team, and we appreciate their continued support of our mission in helping heal those who serve.

A very special thanks to:
Winchester Chapter Trout Unlimited
Jake's Bait and Tackle, Winchester
South River Fly Shop, Waynesboro
Rose River Farm, Syria, VA
Double Spur Outfitters, Star Tannery, VA
Izaak Walton League, Winchester, VA
VFW Post 2123, Berryville, VA
Elks Lodge 873, Winchester, VA
Vietnam Veterans of America, Winchester, VA Chapter 1019
Veterans Center, Martinsburg, WVA
Lake Frederick Veterans Association
Capon Valley Bank, Stephens City
Mission Barbeque, Winchester and Charlottesville, VA



Phil Stevens (l) presents Brittany Pearson, Manager at Mission BBQ in Winchester, with a certificate of appreciation from Project Healing Waters. Brittany was responsible for coordinating the meals MBBQ provided at Lake Neff and Cool Spring outings this past year.
photo by Wayne White



WINCHESTER PROGRAM UPDATE – DECEMBER 2025

by Wayne White



All monthly meetings will now start at 6:00 PM, beginning with our next meeting on Wednesday, 14 January 2026, from 6:00 to 8:30 PM, at Rachel's Kitchen, Shenandoah Lodge, Lake Frederick. This meeting will include a presentation on the 2026 calendar of events and a fly-tying class. The calendar below supports our veterans' ongoing education and skill development in fly-fishing and is subject to change.

December
6 – Program Holiday Party at Rachel's Kitchen, Shenandoah Lodge, Lake Frederick, from noon to 3 pm.
10 – No Project Healing Waters monthly meeting in December

January
14 – Monthly Meeting
9 - 10 Jan – Virginia Fly-Fishing and Wine Festival, and *Women's Symposium*
17, 24, 31 Jan and 7 Feb -- Rod Building Classes at Jake's Bait and Tackle (JBT)
31 Jan -- Fly-Tying at Jake's (JBT)

February
7 -- Rapidan TU Chapter Fly-Fishing Show, Warrenton, Virginia
11 – Monthly Meeting
21 and 28 – Fly Tying at JBT

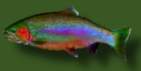
March
11 – Monthly Meeting
14 and 21 – Fly-Tying at JBT
28 – PHW Fly-Tying Marathon at the USMC Museum, Quantico

Additional information and updates about these activities and events will be published in *Lateral Lines* at <https://winchester.tu.org/>. Updates and post-activity information will be posted on Facebook at Winchester Project Healing Waters.

Wayne White
Program Lead
Wayne.White@projecthealingwaters.org
703-919-2952



Jim White
Assistant Program Lead
Jim.White@projecthealingwaters.org
703-650-8696



Barbara's Books

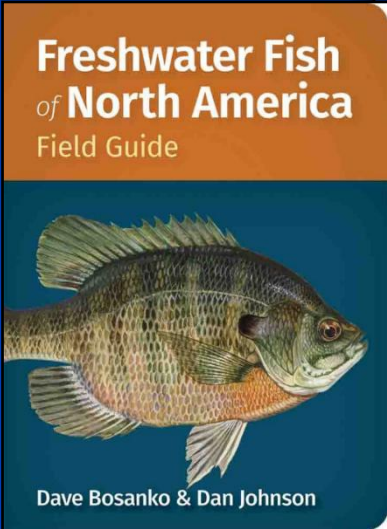
Series created by Barbara Gamble

Freshwater Fish of North America Field Guide

Authors: Dave Bosanko & Dan Johnson
Print Length: 312 pages
ISBN-10: 1647556066
ISBN-13: 979-1647556068
Publisher: Adventure Publications
Publication Date: 3 March 2026

Freshwater fishing is a perfect outdoor activity for all ages and skill levels. There's a whole world to discover beneath the surface of North America's lakes, rivers, and streams. Whether you're casting for bass, spotting an unfamiliar species, or simply exploring aquatic life, the *Freshwater Fish of North America Field Guide* by Dave Bosanko and Dan Johnson is the ultimate guide to the fish you'll find.

When you're not sure what you reeled in, pull this handy guide out of your tackle box and narrow your choices by family (based on visual characteristics). Then identify your prize with the intricately detailed fish illustrations. Further verify the type of fish using the "Similar Species" comparisons.



Book Features:

- Detailed information about nearly 1,200 species
- Professional illustrations—perfect for fish identification
- Helpful facts about habitat preferences, feeding behavior, and reproduction
- Expert fishing tips, including recommended baits and techniques for dozens of species
- Bonus content on fish anatomy, invasive species, and responsible angling practices

This authoritative guide blends scientific detail with practical advice, making it perfect for anglers, educators, and nature lovers. Learn how fish navigate their underwater environments and discover new techniques to improve your success on the water.

Dave Bosanko spent 30 years as staff biologist at two of the University of Minnesota's field stations. An avid fisherman and naturalist, he has long enjoyed applying his extensive field research to patterning fish location and behavior and observing how these fascinating species interact with one another in the underwater web of life. He lives north of Minnesota's Twin Cities.

Dan Johnson began his journey in outdoor communications in the late 1980s, penning fishing and hunting columns for local newspapers. Along the way, each new step led to editorial, public relations, and event marketing positions that further fueled his desire to share a love of the outdoors with audiences from all walks of American life. He lives north of Minnesota's Twin Cities.

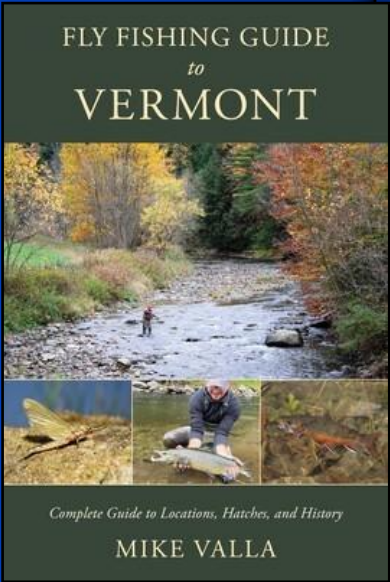
Sources: amazon.com and the publishers

Fly Fishing Guide to Vermont: Complete Guide to Locations, Hatches, and History

Authors: Mike Falla
Print length: 296 pages
ISBN-10: 0811776913
ISBN-13: 978-9780811776912
Publisher: Stackpole Books
Publication Date: 20 January 2026

The Green Mountain state is home to some of the best fly fishing in the country, yet most traveling anglers concentrate their attention on a few of the more famous streams. In this complete guide to the best fly fishing streams and still waters in Vermont, Mike Valla shares detailed information on where to go, current fly patterns, and advice from local experts. Species covered include trout, landlocked salmon, and smallmouth bass (Lake Champlain and its tributaries offer world-class warmwater fly fishing opportunities).

In this complete guide to the best fly fishing streams and still waters in Vermont, Mike Valla shares detailed information on where to go, current fly patterns, and advice from local experts. Species covered include trout, landlocked salmon, and smallmouth bass (Lake Champlain and its tributaries offer world-class warmwater fly fishing opportunities).



Mike Valla was inducted into the Fly-Fishing Hall of Fame in 2024. He is the author of *Fly Fishing Guide to New York State*, *The Founding Flies*, *Tying Catskill-Style Dry Flies*, *Tying and Fishing Bucktails and other Hair Wings*, *Tying the Founding Flies*, *The Classic Streamer Fly Box*, and *Favorite Flies for the Catskills*.

He is the recipient of the Poul Jorgensen Golden Hook Award and is often invited to speak about fly fishing in local, national, and international fly-fishing events and gatherings.

He is a frequent contributor to *American Fly Fishing* magazine and has published articles in *Fly Fisherman*, *Fly Tyer*, and *American Fly Fisher*. He served on the Board of Directors at the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum.

Valla has been fly-fishing for well over 50 years.

He lives in the town of Cambridge, New York, just a few miles from Vermont.

Sources: amazon.com and the publishers



ANGLER REFLECTIONS



Salmon, Steelhead, Rainbow reflections by Nick Brognano

(Caution: Some language in this article may not be suitable for all audiences.)

One day in early October I was stringing up my 8-weight rod and had to set it aside to do a household chore some would call a “Honey Do” task. Running the vacuum is a labor of love I perform voluntarily so I can eat good home-cooked food on a regular basis and wear clean clothes. The vacuum machine I use is dangerous and can suck up split shots the size of cannon balls within a blink of an eye.

This time the monster got close to my fly rod and before I could yank the ogre away it went for the tippet, then leader and fly line like a hungry Trout.

That S.O.B wasn’t satisfied until it pulled down my 8-weight and chewed it up before I could kill the switch. It sounded like a mad dog chewing on a chicken bone. Fortunately, I had a backup 8-weight at my daughter’s house not within reach of that mechanical bastard. That, dear friend, is how my annual pilgrimage to the Salmon River in New York began.

Fred, Elmer, John, and I fished for two and a half days and hooked onto a good number of King Salmon. Admittedly, fishing for Salmon that are more interested in meeting each other than searching for food can be a little boring. The angling technique used on the Salmon River is a “Drift and Lift” (DL) method with the hope of running the fly through the open mouth of the fish as you lift. It is an innumerable number of DLs before luck strikes, and a fish is on. When that happens all that ennui is forgotten. The exhilarating thrill of the fight far outweighs all the DLs.

Above: “...it pulled down my 8-weight and chewed it up....”
image created by Copilot from a prompt by Bill Prokopchak

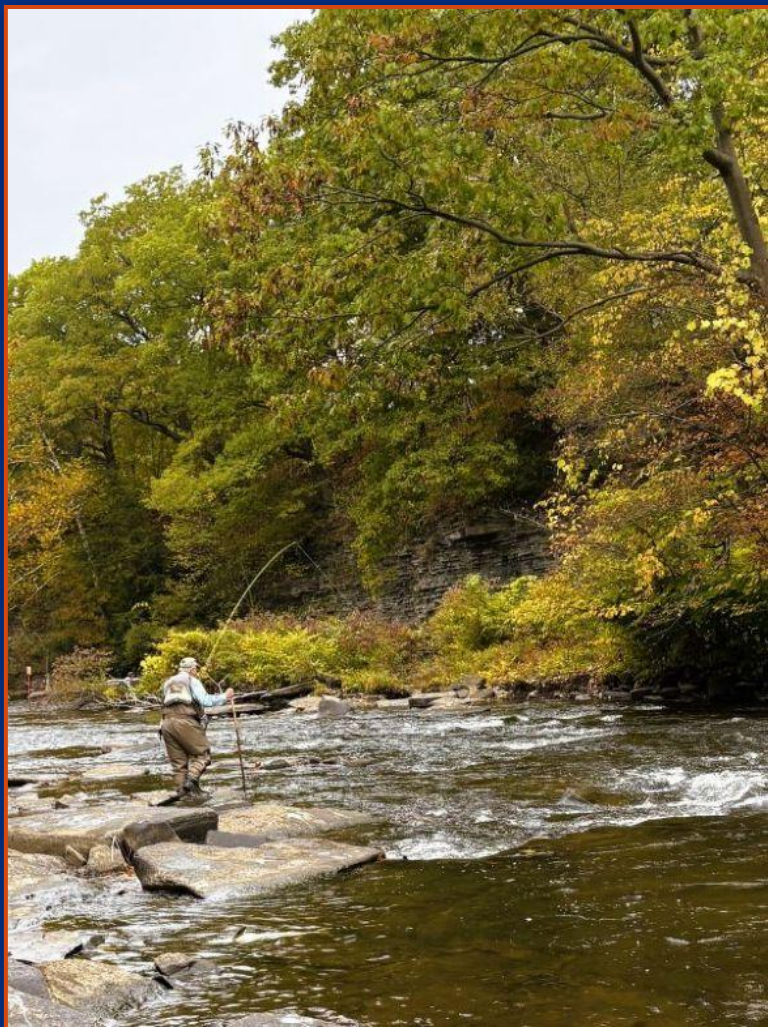
Right: “I saved my fly line and manually hauled the fish in....”
photo by Nick Brognano



Elmer fished across from me and, as expected whenever he gets too close, our lines get tangled. That happened just as I hooked onto a King Salmon. At first, we could not tell who had hooked the fish and it was very competitive. Elmer only gave up and relaxed his line when it was clear I had hooked the King. Nevertheless, I lost the fish.

Unrepentant Elmer continued fishing with his bad habit. At some later point I fixed onto a monster. This was a big one, and the fight was strong and long. Just as it was nearing the shore it decided to turn back into the strong current. Suddenly my 8-weight rod snapped! The crack sounded like a firecracker going off. I had struggled with this fish for a long time. With my right hand I quickly grabbed the line. I saved my fly line and manually hauled the fish in as my rod lay at my side in pieces.

“Angler Reflections” continues on the next page.



Top: “Fred was fishing downstream from me...”

Below: “...and frequently hooked fish.”

photos this page by Nick Brognano

I was fishing just above the rapids when I hooked another big King. I was able to control this big guy and thought he was ready to roll over and surrender as I nudged him closer to the bank, but I was wrong. He unexpectedly resurrected himself and took off downstream into the rapids. I was down to my backing within seconds and then bingo, it suddenly happened, disaster struck. My line snapped. I watched my yellow fly line slip away like an unusually long string of spaghetti. Obviously, I was having one “Hell” of a day.

A few years ago, someone’s fly line drifted by me at the same Salmon River and I was the lucky recipient. Today it was payback, and I took that into consideration as I dragged myself back to the house to get more fly line. I guess when a person has fished as long as I have, uncommon experiences are limitless. With two broken rods and lost fly line I prayed this experience would never be repeated. I also thought and seriously contemplated that it would be very prudent for me to let the malign influence of the stars pass over when planning my next trip to the Salmon River.

ANGLER REFLECTIONS

-- CONTINUED
-- CONTINUED

What a sad and happy hero! It was a 36-inch female duly measured by good old credible Fred. I took a picture of the fish that destroyed my last 8-weight. At least the fish was bigger than that damned vacuum cleaner, and the fish paid the final price for its damage. I was a bundle of mixed and confused emotions as I later sat on the bank sucking my thumb. Elmer graciously offered his 8-weight which was back at the house we were staying in. Sometimes that guy comes in handy.

Elmer said he hooked and landed more fish this year than ever before. I bet next year he will say the same thing. Nevertheless, I did witness a lot of fish caught by the big guy. He landed a Steelhead, which was the only Steelie caught during the entire trip. When I finally got myself organized and fishing again, disaster struck once more. I had a fish on and a young boy with a net in hand asked if he could have the fish which I hadn't landed yet. I said sure.

All that net did was frighten the fish even more. After several unskillful jabs with the net, the fish took off taking all my leader and tippet with him. That kid was smart enough to not ask again to net a fish. You won't believe this but shortly after that mishap another catastrophe struck.



“Angler Reflections” continues on the next page.

ANGLER REFLECTIONS -- CONTINUED

Right: “At least the fish was bigger than that damned vacuum cleaner....”

Below: “In early morning he (Fred) happily landed his first Salmon. It was a 33-inch Salmon, weighing in at 15 pounds, 4 ounces...”

photos this page by Fred Boyer



Fred was fishing downstream from me and frequently hooked fish. In early morning he happily landed his first Salmon. It took him 10 full minutes to land it. It was a 33-inch Salmon, weighing in at 15 pounds, 4 ounces, which he proudly photographed, filleted, and ate when he got home.

It was delicious, he said.

Fred did a lot of exploring on this trip and could see plenty of fish wherever he went but like us could only entice a few. John also landed a Salmon which I feel compelled to remind the reader is no easy task. Unfortunately, John’s knees were causing him a lot of pain, forcing him to rest more and fish less.

Communication amongst the four of us was by cell phone but there was a fifth person far, far away from us communicating his fishing day for Trout in Montana.

...

The following is from Bill fishing the Missouri River in NW Montana: “Two Steelhead-size Rainbows today among smaller ones. Imagine catching a Steelie where it has room to run not only up and down stream, but in and every direction. What a tussle! I hooked the first one in water only 12 to 18 inches deep.

The fish made several blistering runs which required dipping the 7/8 weight reel in the river to cool the drag! Plenty glad I had the bulky reel. I kept constant pressure on the fish with my 11-foot 3-weight rod.* I eventually netted the brute after a heart – pounding struggle that might have lasted five minutes or more.

“Angler Reflections” continues on the next page.

ANGLER REFLECTIONS -- CONTINUED



Above: “He (Elmer) landed a Steelhead, which was the only Steelie caught during the entire trip.”
photo by John Sexton

* Bill's note: My amazing 3-weight, 11-foot fly rod has deftly handled the tiniest Shenandoah National Park Brookies, fat football-shaped hybrid Cutbows in the Smoky Mountains, and Steelhead-sized Browns and Rainbows in Montana. Paired with the proper fly line and a heavy reel with quality drag to balance the long rod, I have been amazed at the size of fish it can handle.

“The other big Rainbow was at the end of the day, floating in a WaterMaster borrowed from Scott Shendow. It was a determined submarine that took my size 18 scud and made a crash dive into deep water. The fish went left and right but generally downstream. We covered a good quarter mile before I even knew what species it was. It was a spectacular iridescent male Rainbow.

“In the process of fighting this fish, it dragged me directly in front of a man who was wade-fishing. I apologized for ruining his evening as I floated by. He was most gracious.... Had one runner yesterday that made my reel scream so loud and long that, even with the drag set tight, it created a backlash in the reel. Fortunately, I was able to clear the backlash before the fish ran again. Rainbows here are an iridescent version of a typical Rainbow. Beautiful fish. The older ones get fat on the bugs in the water.”

So, dear reader there you have it, all that from Bill in NW Montana to us in Upstate New York.

At this moment there isn't much to report regarding Steelhead fishing except to say I am more than ready and just about packed to start out next week for Erie where the Steelhead are waiting for Elmer, Fred, Bob, Mike, and me. I will let you know the results. There hasn't been much rain up there and the streams are low. It is possible the trip may be put off until the area gets some nice rainfall. Before I end this, I would like to say that my wife has been looking for her vacuum cleaner, and I am keeping my mouth and laptop shut.

Incidentally, is anyone out there wanting to sell an 8-weight rod?



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



Here are a couple of nice fish that a WTU member caught on a fly recently.



Poet's Corner:
Poems selected
for the angler

The Night Before
Steelhead

by Bill Prokopchak
20th-21st Century
USA
Inspired by
Clement C. Moore
1779-1863
USA



NIGHT BEFORE STEELHEAD
Ink wash by W.M. Prokopchak © 2025
after a photo from Copilot



‘Twas the night before Steelhead, when all through the house,
Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse.

The fly rods were readied with meticulous care,
In hopes that huge Steelhead soon would be there.

The grandkid was nestled all snug in her bed,
While visions of Steelheads all danced in her head;
And Mamma with her kerchief and a small cup of booze
Had just settled her brains for a long winter’s snooze.

When out at the truck there arose such a clatter,
Mamma sprang from her bed to see what was the matter.
Away to her laptop she flew like a flash,
Turned on the spy cam and gave a great laugh.

The moon on the breast of the new-fallen snow
Gave the luster of mid-day to objects below,
When what to her wondering eyes should appear,
But her elderly spouse, and all of his gear.

The little old angler was lively and bright.
She knew in a moment it must be all right.
More rapid than eagles he ran to his truck,
“When I’m out there fishing, I just can’t get stuck.”

He whistled, and chuckled, and checked off his stuff.
“I’ve got waders, and fly rods, if that’s not enough,
I have tippets, and leaders, and a cell phone or two.
In the bed of the truck! In the toolbox, too.”

As dry leaves before the Erie winds fly,
When they meet with an angler mount to the sky.
So up to the truck old Bill scurried around,
With a truck full of gear. He was Lake Erie bound.

But wait, there is something still that he must do,
So back to the house our old hero withdrew.
And then, in a twinkling, Mamma heard on the stairs,
The old angler kneeling and saying his prayers.

As she closed up her laptop, and was turning around,
Up jumped the angler with hardly a sound.
He was dressed all in Gore-Tex, from head to his feet,
And with nymphs, flies, and license, he was nearly complete.

A bundle of clothes that he carried in hand,
And it looked so darned heavy he could hardly stand.
His eyes, how they twinkled, they really were glowing,
“It is time for the Steelhead, I’ve got to get going.”

His broad little mouth was drawn up in a smile
And said to his wife, “I’ll be gone for a while.”
He was ready to leave and excited to go.
She said, “It’s now midnight. Get on with the show!”

With a wink of his eye and a peck on her cheek,
He jumped in the truck for the drive to the creek.
He stepped on the gas, and he gave her a whistle
And away he now flew like the down of a thistle,

But she heard him exclaim as he drove out of sight.
“Happy fishing to all, and to all a good bite!”

Winchester TU Monthly “BarFly” Events

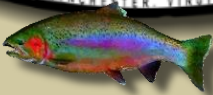
Wednesday, 17 December 2025, 7:00 PM
Wednesday, 21 January 2026, 7:00 PM
Wednesday, 18 February 2026, 7:00 PM

Escutcheon Brewery
Commercial St., Winchester, VA

The Winchester Chapter of Trout Unlimited (WTU) will gather at Escutcheon Brewing in Winchester to offer anglers and **non-anglers** in our area the opportunity to learn about Trout Unlimited and to tie fishing flies.

No fly-tying or fly-fishing experience is necessary.
All participants under age 21 must be accompanied by a responsible adult.

See you at the next Winchester TU BarFly.



Trout in the Classroom (TIC) News

by Lisa LaCivita

Thanks to our hardy band of volunteers who delivered brook trout eggs to 17 schools and the Shenandoah Valley Discovery Museum. This year’s egg delivery volunteers were:

- Rod DeArment
- Tedd Gimber
- Galen Hart
- Sandra Hart
- Dave Juth
- Luke Robbins
- Jeb Stewart
- Mark Zimmerman

Many thanks to Dave Juth who picked up the eggs in Warrenton, VA, on delivery day and oversaw the day’s activities. Without his efforts Trout in the Classroom would not happen.

Schools participating in Trout in the Classroom

Admiral Byrd Middle School	Winchester
Boyce Elementary School	Boyce
Central High School	Woodstock
Clarke County High School	Berryville
D.G. Cooley Elementary School	Berryville
Daniel Morgan Middle School	Winchester
Dowell J Howard Center	Winchester
Handley High School	Winchester
Martinsburg South Middle School	Martinsburg
Millbrook High School	Winchester
North Fork Middle School	Quicksburg
Orchard View Elementary	Winchester
Powhatan School	Boyce
Sherando High School	Stephens City
Skyline High School	Front Royal
Spring Mills Middle School	Martinsburg
Strasburg High School	Strasburg



2025 - 2026 Calendar of Events Winchester Trout Unlimited

See also
<http://winchester.tu.org/>

December 2026

Wednesday, 17 December 2025 – Winchester Trout Unlimited BarFly
7:00 – 9:00 PM – Escutcheon Brewery, Commercial Street, Winchester

January 2026

Thursday, 8 January 2026 – Note the change in date
Trout Unlimited and Winchester Priority Waters meetings will move to Thursday, 8 January 2026, due to the New Year's Day Holiday.

January 2026 – Winchester TU Priority Waters Field Days will be announced later.

Wednesday, 21 January 2025 – Winchester Trout Unlimited BarFly
7:00 – 9:00 PM – Escutcheon Brewery, Commercial Street, Winchester

February 2026

Thursday, 5 February 2026
6:00 PM – Winchester Priority Waters monthly meeting

Thursday, 5 February 2026
7:00 PM – Winchester TU monthly meeting

Winchester Priority Waters Field Day
To be arranged. Watch for announcements from the Priority Waters Committee

Wednesday, 18 February 2026 – Winchester Trout Unlimited BarFly
7:00 – 9:00 PM – Escutcheon Brewery, Commercial Street, Winchester

March 2026

Thursday, 5 March 2026
6:00 PM – Winchester Priority Waters monthly meeting

Thursday, 5 March 2026
7:00 PM – Winchester TU monthly meeting

Winchester Priority Waters Field Day
To be arranged. Watch for announcements from the Priority Waters Committee

Wednesday, 18 March 2026 – Winchester Trout Unlimited BarFly
7:00 – 9:00 PM – Escutcheon Brewery, Commercial Street, Winchester

April 2026

Thursday, 2 April 2026
6:00 PM – Winchester Priority Waters monthly meeting

Thursday, 2 April 2026
7:00 PM – Winchester TU monthly meeting



The opinions expressed in *Lateral Lines* are those of the individual authors and are not necessarily those of Winchester Trout Unlimited or Trout Unlimited National.

All water sports, including fishing, and stream restoration activities have inherent dangers. Participation in all Winchester Trout Unlimited activities is at the participant's own risk and participants agree to hold harmless Winchester Trout Unlimited and its members. A responsible adult must accompany all minors.

