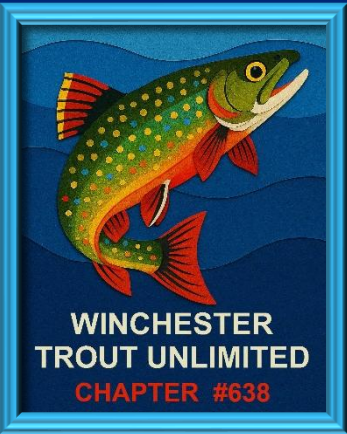




Celebrating
31 Years of
Lateral Lines

Lateral Lines

Monthly Magazine of Winchester Trout Unlimited
Chapter #638

“Age improves with wine.” -- Anonymous

October 2026
Volume 31, Number 10

Next Winchester TU Meeting

Thursday, 1 October 2026, 7:00 PM
Laurel Ridge Community College

Winchester TU Priority Waters Meeting

Thursday, 1 October 2026, 6:00 PM
Laurel Ridge Community College

Project Healing Waters Monthly meeting

Wednesday, 14 October 2026, 6:00 PM
Shenandoah Lodge, Lake Frederick, VA

BarFly

The next Winchester TU BarFly
Wednesday, 21 October 2026
7:00 PM at Escutcheon Brewing Co.
142 W. Commercial Street, Winchester



For complete calendars, please see

Page 13 for Winchester Project Healing Waters

Pages 8 for Winchester Priority Waters
Field Days

Page 25 for Winchester Trout Unlimited

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Bill Prokopchak, Newsletter Editor
wilpro@comcast.net



photo courtesy of Virginia DNR

Winchester TU & Shenandoah Audubon Present “Shenandoah Freshwater Fisheries” by Brad Fink

Mark your calendar for the
Annual Joint Meeting on
1 October 2026 at
Laurel Ridge Community College
Science Building, Room #145
7:00 PM

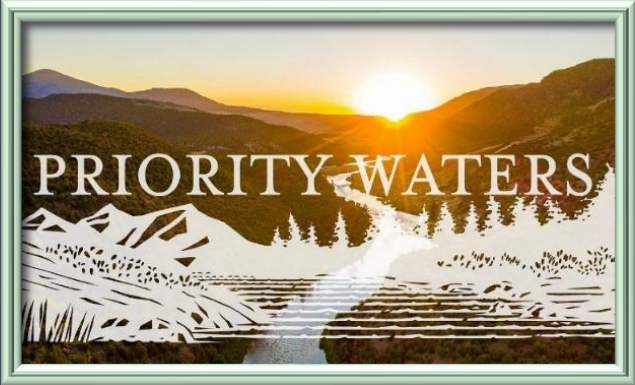
Brad Fink is a Coldwater Fisheries
Biologist with the Virginia Department of
Wildlife Resources.



Winchester Priority Waters

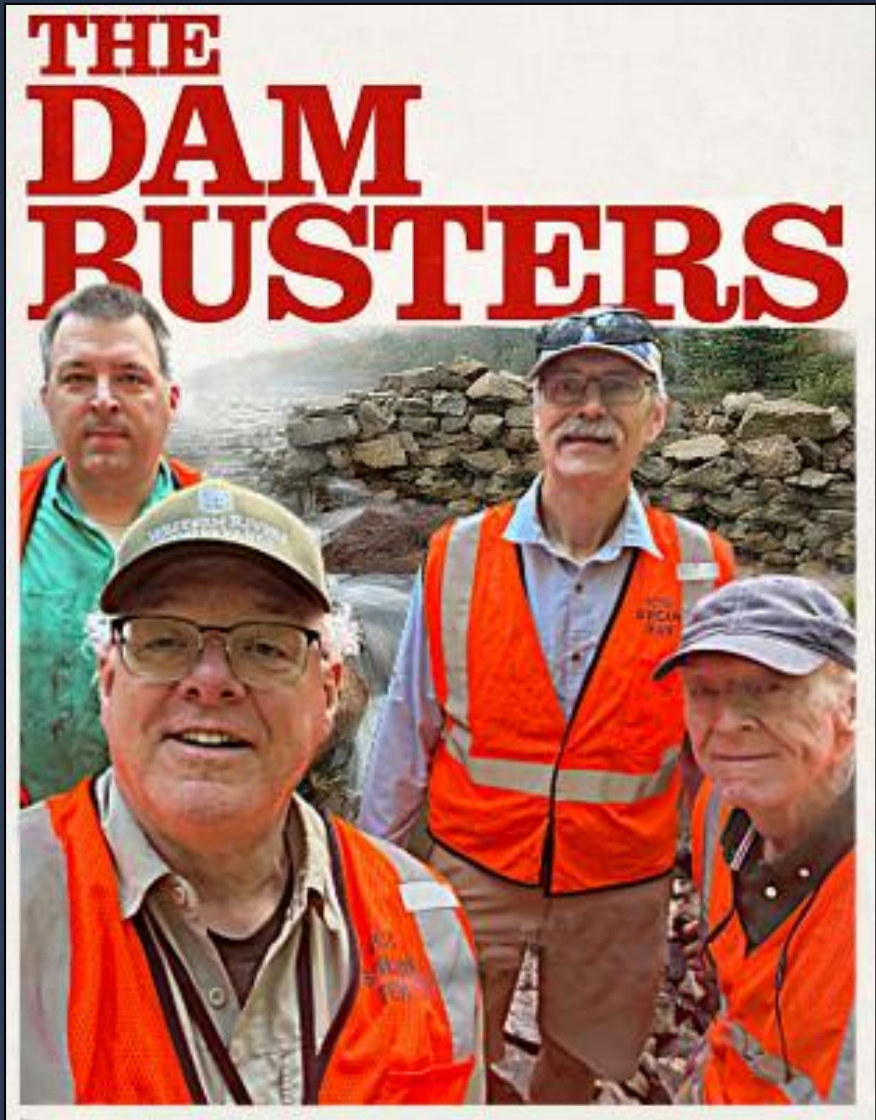
Part 1 of 2

The Dam Busters



(Removal of an illegal rock dam on Little Passage Creek)

by Michael Lawler Smith with the Winchester Priority Waters Team
photos by Michael Lawler Smith unless otherwise noted

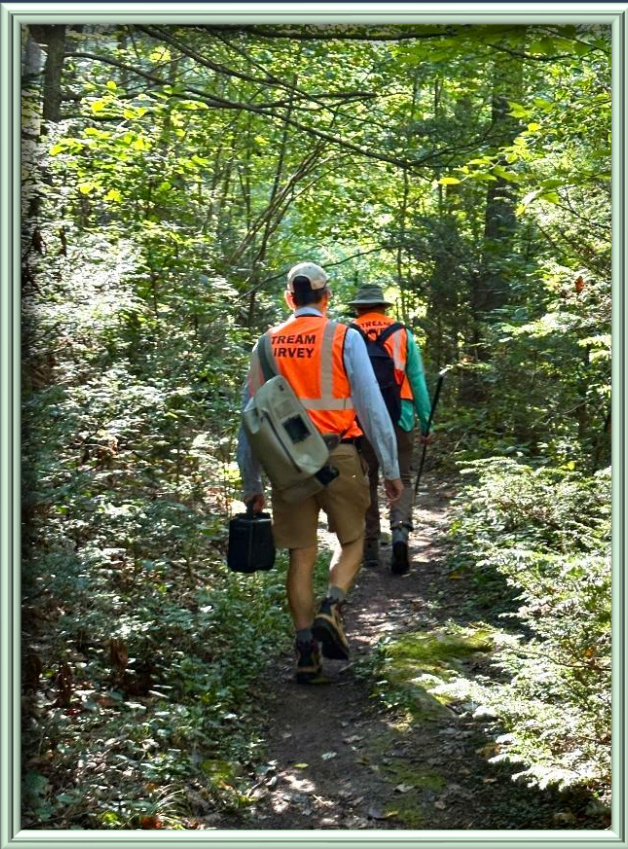


Dam Busters poster featuring a photo of the Dam Busters by Luke Robins.
The busted stone dam image by A. I. Copilot.
Images merged by Bill Prokopchak

Above: The Winchester TU Priority Waters “Dam Buster” poster reminiscent of the advertising poster for the original Dam Busters of WW II fame.

Dam Busters team photo by Luke Robins

Right: Garbed in official looking Stream Survey vests, the “dam busters” crew heads down Mudhole Gap trail to carry out their mission.



“Priority Waters” continues on the next page.

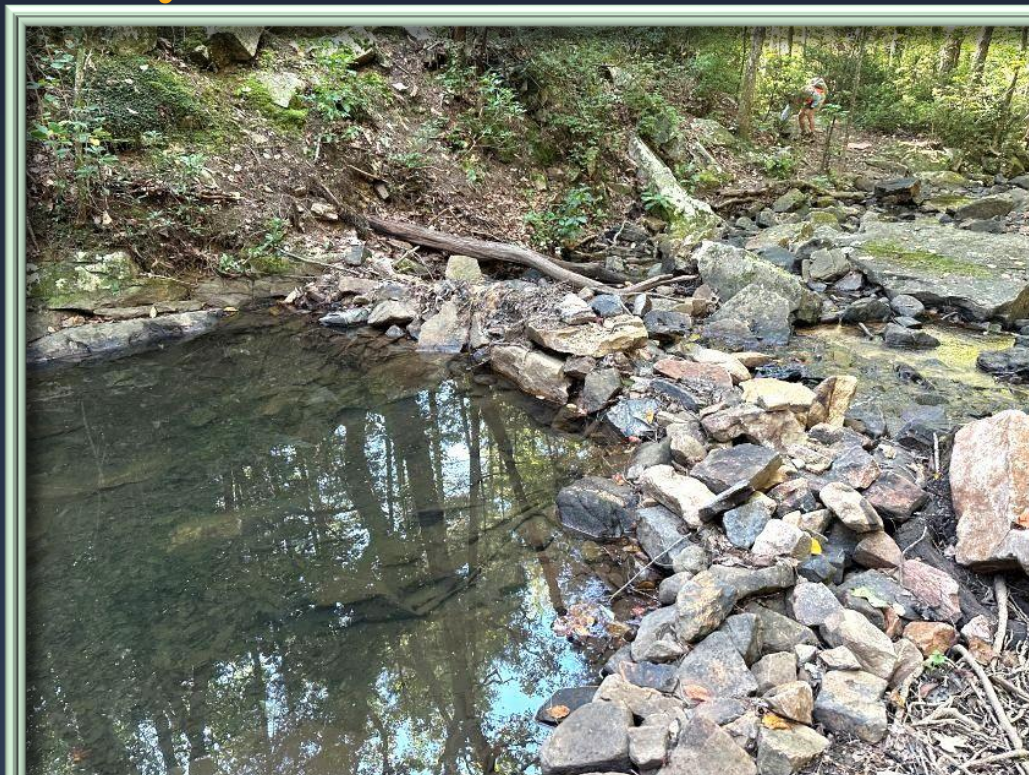
Winchester Priority Waters

Part 1 of 2

Dam Busters – continued

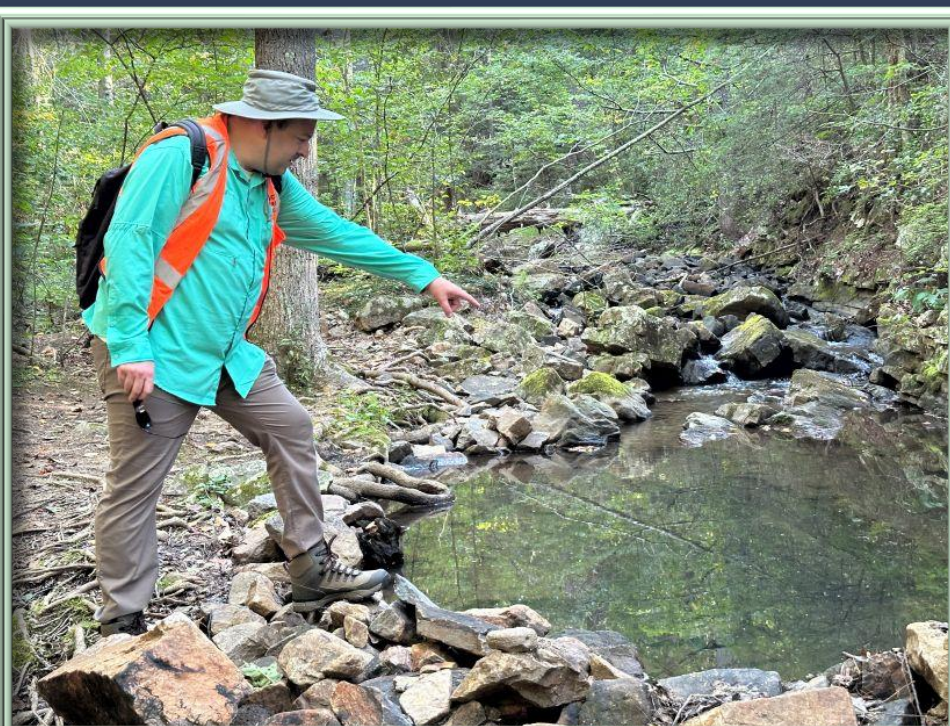
Right: A tranquil scene of the “swimming hole” before disassembly began.

Below: Nick Skorup points out the edge of a blue tarp the crew had not seen previously.



And much of the Priority Waters team was nearly as incredulous as those 1955 US film audiences when fellow team members on a barrier assessment mission shared a startling discovery on 5 August 2026 along the lower reaches of Little Passage Creek – an “engineered” dam and swimming area on the creek, that offered the safe footing of a pond liner bottom, ample fire ring, and hewn log seating.

Quite nearly a sight worthy of those Recreation.gov fantasy scenes. They had the photos to prove it.



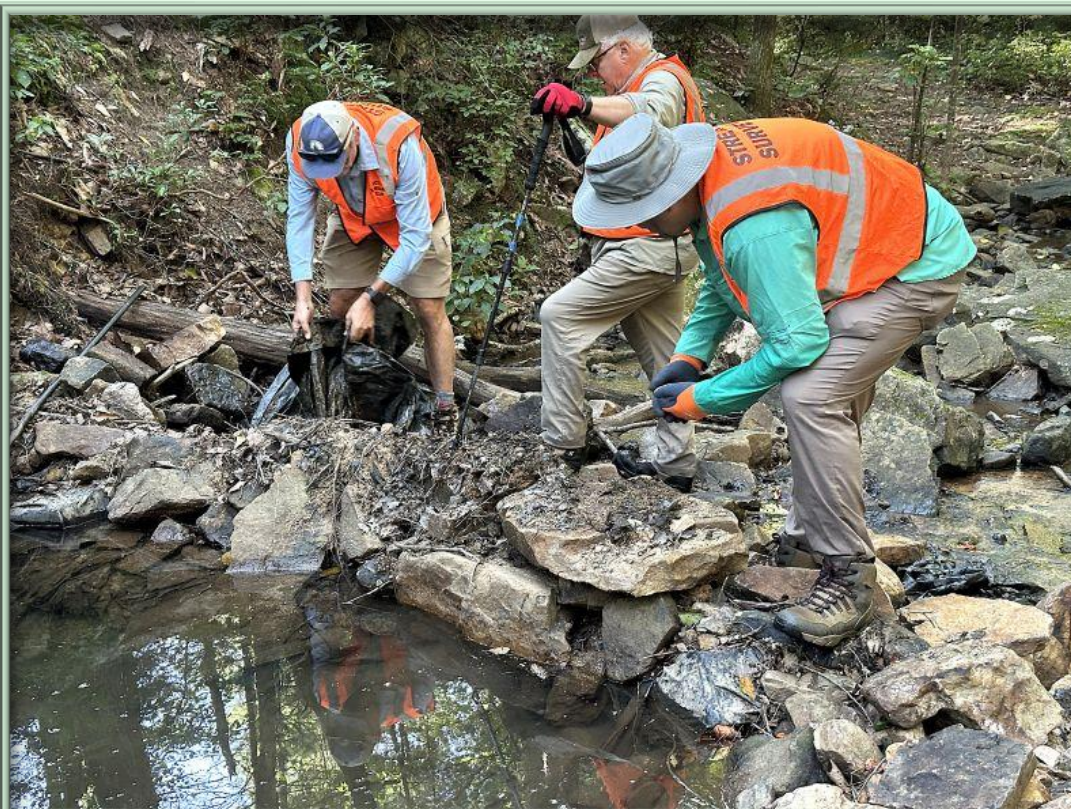
Right: A storm had raised the water and overtopped the dam as evidenced by the sedimentation deposited atop the structure.



“Priority Waters” continues on the next page.

Winchester Priority Waters

Part 1 of 2 Dam Busters -- continued



While the “swimmin’ hole,” replete with summer amenities had been unforeseen, the reality of illegal rock shifting and dam building has an all too familiar history on public lands. And before we bid adieu to that halcyon year 1955, in-the-know old timers will acknowledge that damming up “cricks” in that era was deemed as natural as a stroll in the park. And, what the heck, what good scout leader back in the day wouldn’t coax his troop toward such watery construction endeavors? – and besides, it just gives fish a place to grow bigger, right?

Well, that was then. This is now. As a species and a society, we know better. Or should. Rock dams, alas, still seem to capture a portion of the national imagination. A quick search on YouTube will disclose an alarming plurality of “damming creek” videos (and variations on that search phrase). While social media platforms also offer excellent fare on riparian conservation, those offerings appear to earn far smaller viewer numbers.



Top: Finding the edges of the plastic pond liner materials proved to be the first challenge.

Middle: Nick Skorup (l) and Tedd Gimber prepare to lift and remove a portion of the pond liner.

Right: A mighty tug and the restrained water began to break free.



“Priority Waters”
continues
on the next page.

Winchester Priority Waters

Part 1 of 2

Dam Busters

-- continued



So, what's wrong about rock dams?

They can and do block fish passage. That includes preventing brook trout from reaching spawning sites; barring other species such as bluehead chub from accessing sites where their communal spawning mounds can benefit other nongame fish species. Rock dams can interrupt life cycles at the macro level as well, destroying home and haunts for several beneficial native invertebrate species.

On the morning of 9 September 2026, four members of the Priority Waters team (Tedd Gimber, Luke Robins, Nick Skorup, and Mike Smith) were "men on a mission." Equipped with a pry bar, crowbar, trash bags, and lots of determination, and approval of the authorities, they embarked on the half mile trek down into Mudhole Gap to breach the dam, remove the plastic liner and restore natural stream hydrology.

Fortunately, stream flow and temperature were good that day. There was visible flow at the base of the dam; water temperature was approximately 62 degrees. Tedd had hoped to acquire some aerial footage of the site via his drone. But the leafy canopy in the section of the gorge was simply too dense to allow safe operation (apparently even a "smart" drone can't swim).



Top: Luke Robins (l) adjusts some downstream rocks to direct the flow into the main channel, while Tedd and Nick begin work on a new section of submerged plastic liner.

Middle: That surprising instant when the liner pops free!

Right: ... and the instant thereafter.

"Priority Waters" continues on the next page.

Winchester Priority Waters

Part 1 of 2

Dam Busters

-- continued

The group paused at the outset to fully assess the scene and agree on the best and most efficient way to proceed. All agreed it was unnecessary to remove the entire structure in order to restore and replicate a more natural flow profile. It was also soon apparent there was not just one liner but several sections, including a blue tarp.

Before the demolition commenced, all spent a few minutes noting and observing fish species present: blacknose dace, creek chubs, and possibly a stoneroller minnow. Then all repaired downstream, just below the dam, and bent down to spot the lowest point along the dam's crest: that was where work would begin.



Upper Right: Thankfully, a quick recovery and no accidental spill.

Above: Nick stands aside the breached dam and the restored natural pool.

Right: Nick hoists the “lunker” pond liner, as his ever-helpful team members exhort, “Did you remember to wet your hands first?”



“Priority Waters” continues on the next page.

Winchester Priority Waters

Part 1 of 2

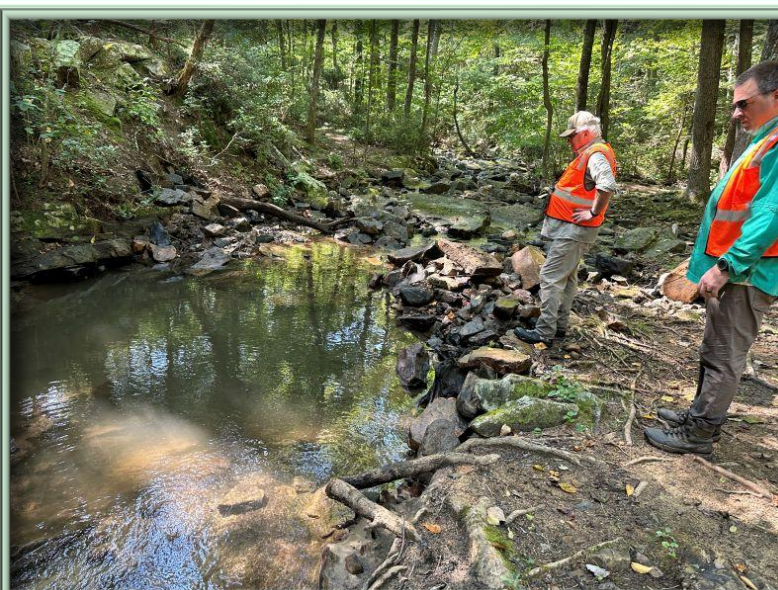
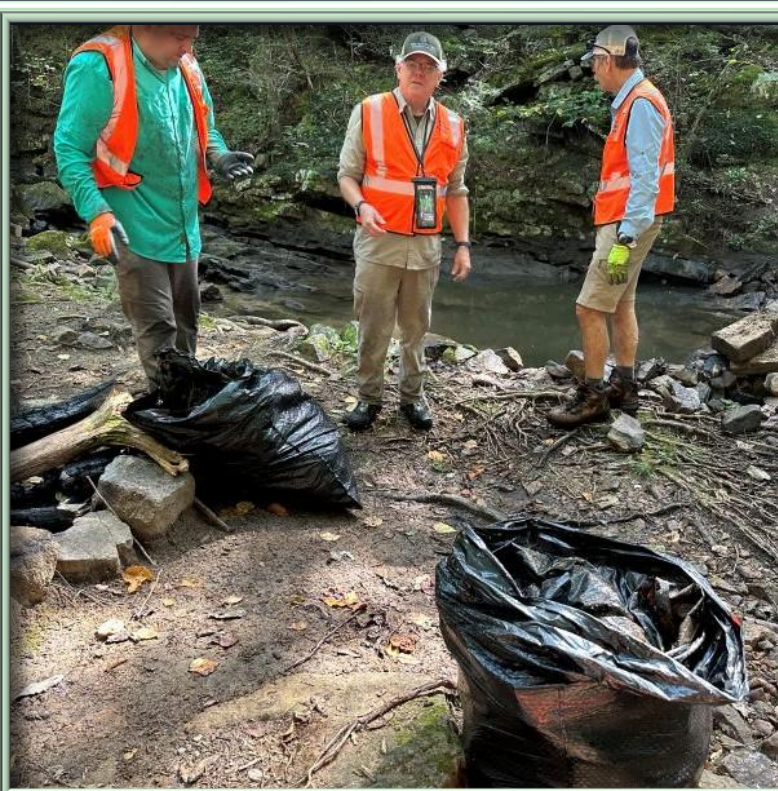
Dam Busters

-- continued

The work proceeded more quickly than first anticipated. With part of the team identifying the extent and edges of the tarp and liner materials, the rock movers on the crew focused on hauling out the very largest stones first. This allowed tugging at the liners' edges and dislodging smaller and looser rock debris. Slowly and steadily, a channel was restored; rocks were distributed along the banks and downstream in as "natural" a placement as possible (acknowledging that the stream itself is the final arbiter of "natural" in distributing rocks).

At length, the task was done. The crew waited while the water in the newly lowered pool cleared. Within minutes, fish were again visible – with one stunning addition to the species roster: an adult brook trout zoomed from deep in the recesses of center pool up to its head. An almost blindingly swift movement. But it was unmistakable. A lighthearted crew urged Nick to hoist the "lunker" of the day – the largest section of pond liner – with their faux advisory about safe handling.

Toting trash bags stuffed with plastic pond liner, the foursome hiked back up to Tedd's truck and returned to Front Royal in early afternoon. The former "swimmin' hole" site – though not an official testing destination – will be checked again this fall to see how the stream is repairing itself.



Top: Bagging the pond liners for the long haul out.

Above: Luke and Nick look for fish as the restored pool clears. They spotted blacknose dace, creek chub, and a stone roller minnow. But the swift flash of an adult brook trout topped all for sheer excitement.

Left: Tedd captures a stream temperature reading at the head of the pool: 62°F.

"Priority Waters"
continues
on the next page.

Winchester Priority Waters Part 2 of 2

Adaptability is the Byword

by the Winchester Priority Waters Team

When the Priority Waters team began assembling for its Thursday, 3 September 2026 meeting, it discovered it had to be quick on its feet. The familiar gathering place, Rachel’s Kitchen in the Shenandoah Lodge at Lake Frederick, was still hosting another, earlier group. But ever vigilant for opportunity, the team set up interim quarters in the next-door arts studio.

And at 6:00 PM sharp, team leader Mike Makufka called the team to order. Attendees comprised Tedd Gimber, Dave Juth, Drew Paterson, and his daughter Leah, John Prescott, Luke Robins, and Mike Smith.

Mike Makufka briefly reviewed the agenda he had shared earlier via email, as well as the minutes of the prior meeting which the team approved. The primary topic of the evening was “Dam Busting 101.” Followers of the team’s activities on these pages will recall that the final barrier assessment of lower Little Passage Creek on National Forest property back on 5 August 2026 had disclosed a very robust rock dam and “swimmin’ hole” complete with a plastic pond liner.

Team leader Makufka had shared this finding with our contact at the George Washington & Jefferson National Forest and sought guidance on how to proceed. The dam and liner were indeed illegal placements, per the Forest Service (FS), and the team was allowed (and encouraged) to carry out its removal. No special use permit would be needed to do so, and a special letter conveying that message was unnecessary.

Detailed discussion followed addressing preparations for the planned 9 September 2026 dam removal. The crew would convene at 8:00 AM that day at the usual spot (Target parking lot, Riverton Plaza). Tedd Gimber said he would provide a heavy duty pry bar; he added that he would bring a copy of our enabling FS partnership document should the group face a potential encounter with the dam’s fabricators. Luke Robins suggested the crew bring and wear its high-visibility vests (tagged “Stream Survey Crew”) to present an official and uniform presence.

The team had harbored some mild trepidation about the possibility of encountering one or more of the structure’s builders. Their efforts had not been insignificant: heavy duty pond lining materials and interlocking stonework suggested something more than a summer whim. Moving heavy rocks is no light-hearted lark, nor were the adjacent fire ring and log seating area. While the recreational intentions of the unknown builders were clear enough, their reactions to encountering a crew undoing their handiwork were less certain. In an age of “road rage,” might “trail rage” be a potential subset?

Mike Makufka advised the group that via his emails with Dawn Kirk, FS, senior forest managers were unwilling to post signs currently regarding not moving rocks / damming streams because such signage in the past has not been very effective – and signs have been stolen or vandalized.

Mike M. then turned the group’s attention to future remaining field dates for 2026. The next field workdays (after the 9 September 2026 dam busting) are:

Dates Scheduled for Winchester Priority Waters 2026 Field Work	
<u>Date</u>	<u>Activity</u>
7 Oct 2026	Water Quality Monitoring
2 Dec 2026	Water Quality Monitoring

John Prescott and Tedd Gimber have travel conflicts for 7 October. Mike Makufka offered if we might want to begin a preliminary assessment of Large Woody Debris (LWD) on the project streams. He further noted that we currently do not have anyone available to provide us formal training on assessment procedures but pointed out that we have an LWD document on our shared Google drive and urged all team members to become familiar with it. Mike Smith suggested it is important we start habitat assessment because our FS project states we should make recommendations for future work based upon our observations and assessments. Mike Makufka added that we currently have no baseline assessment, and we could commence an LWD assessment/inventory on 2 December.

Mike Makufka shared that he had been in contact with TU’s Abby McQueen, Seth Coffman’s interim replacement. She had been Seth’s supervisor (Seth has accepted a post with another environmental group) and she indicated they are working to find a permanent replacement. Mike said he had shared with Abby some highlights of our work to date and noted that while she is based out of Canaan Valley, WV, she indicated she would try to attend the Virginia Council gathering at Graves Mountain Lodge 19 September 2026.

Tedd Gimber provided an update on the status of outreach to downstream landowners along Little Passage Creek, and added that Pete Dalke, of Friends of the North Fork, could not find any points of contact. Mike Makufka reported that he has a friend whose girlfriend resides on nearby Boyer Road and is interested in helping us identify key landowners.

Mike Smith distributed to the team copies of the one-page outline of the PowerPoint slide show he was drafting for presentation about Winchester TU’s Priority Waters activities to the annual Virginia Council meeting 19 September 2026 and invited group input and suggestions. Mike Makufka, Tedd Gimber, and Luke Robins all volunteered support and provided subsequent review and input.

In wrapping up the meeting Mike Makufka summarized action items going forward:

- Mike M. would submit a form for a “nominal effects” memorandum to Forest Service (for 9 September 2026)
- Mike M. would follow up on landowner identification of lower Little Passage Creek.
- All should review the Large Woody Debris document on the team’s Google Drive
- Mike Smith would put together a presentation of the Winchester chapter’s Priority Waters effort for the State Council, with support from Tedd and Luke as needed.

The meeting adjourned right at 7:00 PM as the regular chapter meeting was about to commence. The Priority Team once again invites all chapter members to consider joining the team or at least participating in a team meeting or filed event.



WINCHESTER HEALING WATERS

by Wayne White



EST. PROJECT 2005
HEALING WATERS

PHW PART 1 OF 3 WINCHESTER VETERANS ENJOY WEEKEND RESPITE COURTESY OF THE WARD BURTON FOUNDATION



Top: Ward Burton (c) welcomes Winchester PHW members Gary Myers (l), Christian Nelson, Christina Nelson, and Wayne White upon arrival at the weekend's start.
Photo by Joe Meritt

The Ward Burton Wildlife Foundation (WBFW) hosted Winchester Healing Waters Veterans for a weekend of fishing, camaraderie, and great food at its property in Clover, VA, on 4-6 September, as part of a recent partnership with Project Healing Waters.

This was one of seven events for the PHW Virginia Region this year. Beginning in June, each Virginia PHW program has spent a weekend at one of the two properties: one in Clover and the other in Halifax. The Foundation provided food and accommodations in the air-conditioned main facility, at no cost.

Off-road vehicles for transportation came in handy for accessing two freshwater ponds on the property, Sanders and Preacher Watts, about a mile hike away.

The seclusion and serenity of the 300-plus acres added to the appreciation of this special outdoor retreat. The plentiful wildlife of deer, numerous birds, as well as black bear served as a reminder of how we were not alone in this beautiful wilderness.



Above: An afternoon break from the heat gave extra time for knot tying. Gary (r) helps Christian with finishing an improved clinch knot. The class also covered the Davey knot, the perfection loop, and the surgeon's knot.
photo by Wayne White

“Winchester Healing Waters Part 1 of 3” continues on the next page.

WINCHESTER HEALING WATERS

PHW PART 1 OF 3 WARD BURTON FOUNDATION – CONTINUED

Fishing was challenging with high humidity and midday temperatures in the high 80s, but the few oversized bluegills and select largemouth bass did not disappoint. Canoes also made fishing the entire ponds possible; however, that brought many lessons for our fly anglers as they learned new casting techniques while searching for the elusive warm-water game fish.

Over the past several years, the WBWF has also partnered with the USO and the Wounded Warrior Project, providing outdoor events that let veterans benefit from nature and the great outdoors while fostering camaraderie and friendly competition.

Many thanks to Ward Burton and his staff for making this outing possible. Special thanks to Joe Merritt, site manager. Besides juggling the logistics and shopping for all the food and groceries, Joe also showed his culinary talents by slow smoking a pork shoulder and serving an exceptional meal on Saturday night.

An extra thank you to Gary Myers for serving as Winchester's lead volunteer, coordinating all support with the Foundation during the outing.



EST. PROJECT 2005
HEALING WATERS



Above: Landing her first largemouth bass on a fly rod gave Christina good reason to smile.

photo by Christian Nelson



Left: Gary guides Christina on Sanders Pond. The canoes let anglers easily access some of the best fishing on these secluded and protected waters. Kayaks were also available for use.

photo by Wayne White

“Winchester Healing Waters Part 1 of 3” continues on the next page.

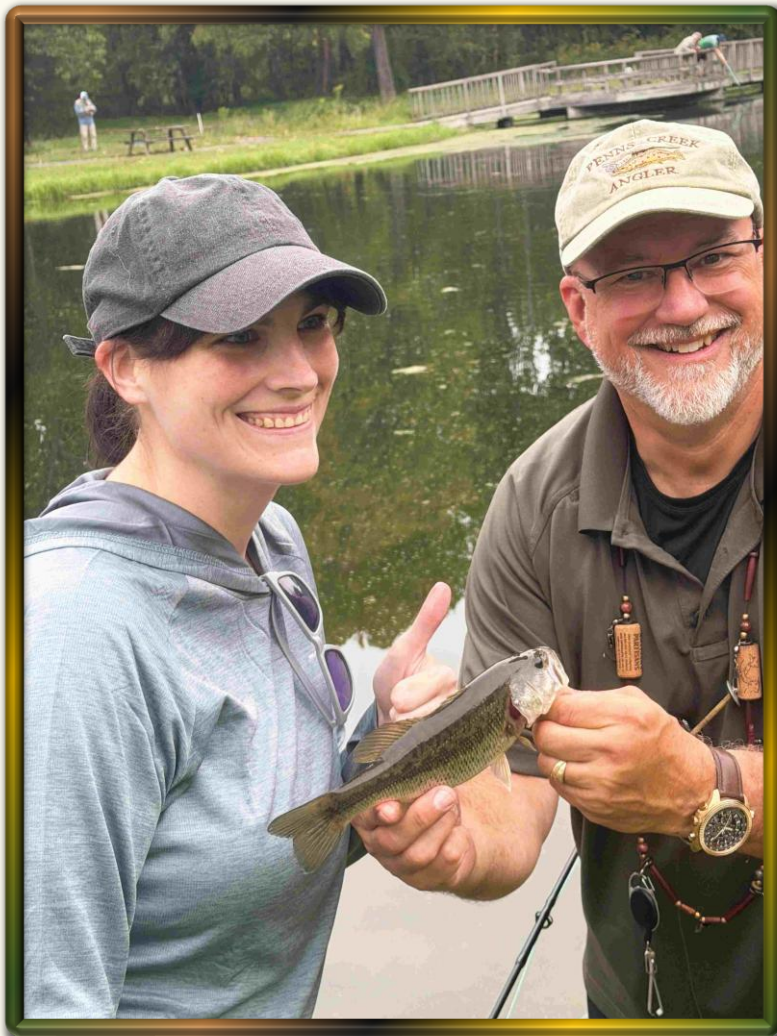
WINCHESTER HEALING WATERS

PHW PART 2 OF 3

LEETOWN HATCHERY PROVIDES GREAT FLY-FISHING LESSONS FOR NEW ANGLERS



EST. PROJECT 2005
HEALING WATERS



The Leetown Trout Hatchery in Kearneysville, WVA, always provides great action, especially for new fly anglers, and the recent outing on Saturday, 12 September, did not disappoint.

Besides those with previous experience on the pond, several newly enrolled Winchester program veterans fished for the legendary large rainbows for the first time. And everyone caught fish!

Thanks to the volunteers, who guided the novices in assembling the fly rods, selecting flies, and casting. With the fish on, they patiently coached them on landing the fish and safely removing the hook. They even learned to revive some of those monster trout exhausted at the end of the fight. All fish were safely returned to the pond!

A very special thanks again to Frank Roach, a Vietnam Veteran who operates the USGS hatchery, for his continued support of our Veterans and for allowing the Winchester program access to the Leetown Hatchery. His meticulous care of the facility always ensures a safe, special environment for our Veterans.

Above: Shannon Andress, a new participant from the Vet Center, is proud of her first fish on a fly rod -- a largemouth bass -- that Dan Soper helped her locate, fight, and land at the Leetown Hatchery!

Right: After assembling his rod, James Asti (l) and Cole Bradshaw (r) review final angling tips with new participant Ron Moorefield.

photos by Wayne White



**“Winchester Healing
Waters Part 2 of 3”
continues on the next page.**

WINCHESTER HEALING WATERS PHW PART 2 OF 3 LEETOWN HATCHERY – CONTINUED



EST. PROJECT 2005
HEALING WATERS

Right: The Leetown Hatchery is an excellent venue for casting instruction while learning the art of fly angling for feisty trout. Jeb Stewart (r) demonstrates the correct casting stroke for Jeremie Dellapenta, a new fly fisherman at his first Leetown outing.

Below: While changing flies, Luke Robins (l) demonstrates tying an improved clinch knot for Chad Vincanton and explains the best way to test the knot to ensure that it will hold.

photos by Wayne White



WINCHESTER CHAPTER OCTOBER - DECEMBER 2026

by Wayne White

PHW PART 3 OF 3



PLANNED ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS OCTOBER - DECEMBER 2026

current as of 15 September 2026

October

5 – Vets Center, Falling Waters, WVA, Monthly Meeting 6:00 – 7:30 PM

14 -- Monthly Meeting Wednesday, Rachel's Kitchen, Shenandoah Lodge,
Lake Frederick, from 6:00 to 8:00 PM.

17 – Fly-Tying Material Give-Away at Jake's Bait and Tackle,
10:00 AM – 2:00 PM

21 -- Double Spur Outfitters. Winchester Fishing Outing
at Cedar Creek, Star Tanery. Limited to six participants and six guides

23 – 25 -- Regional Trip -- Legends Of The Fly Saltwater Tournament.
One participant.

28 -- Rose River, Winchester Day Fishing Outing, Rose River Farm, Syria, VA
– Six participants and six volunteer guides.

November

2 -- 4 – Regional Trip -- Fall River Bound. (Lebanon, VA)
One participant and one volunteer guide

5 – Vets Center, Falling Waters, WVA, Monthly Meeting 6:00 PM – 7:30 PM

5 – 8 -- NEW Regional Event at River Hill Farms. (Lebanon, VA)
One participant from each program.

11 -- Monthly Meeting Wednesday, Rachel's Kitchen, Shenandoah Lodge,
Lake Frederick, from 6:00 pm to 8:00 PM.

December

5 – Christmas Party at Shenandoah Lodge, noon to 3:00 PM

No Monthly Meetings!

Wayne White
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Barbara's Books: From the Archives

Series created by Barbara Gamble

A Season in Patagonia: An Angler and Naturalist's Journey to a New World

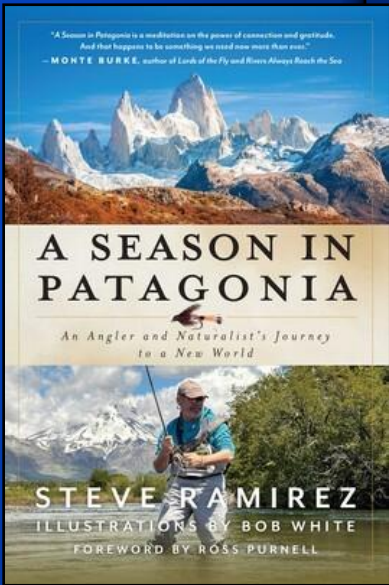
Author: Steve Ramirez
Illustrator: Bob White
Print length: 240 pages
ISBN-10: 149309100X
ISBN-13: 978-1493091003
Publisher: Lyons Press
Publication Date: 3 November 2026

A Season in Patagonia is angler, naturalist, and outdoor conservation author Steve Ramirez's newest collection of fly fishing, nature trekking, and exploration stories that are intended to entertain and enlighten his readers while focusing on "Nature and the Best of Human Nature." In **A Season in Patagonia**, Ramirez takes us on an epic journey retracing the westward expansion of Euro-American conquistadors while exploring the legacy and lessons offered by the Indigenous peoples of Mexico, Central, and South America.

Traveling thousands of miles by bush planes, drift boats, pangas, four-wheel-drive vehicles, horseback, and on foot, we experience the waters, landscapes, cultures, and histories of each place and its people. Along the way we explore rainforests and cloud forests, mountains and mangroves, rushing rivers and rolling seas. And we encounter incredible fish and other wildlife that reflect the peoples and places of "The Americas"—south of the Rio Grande.

A Season in Patagonia is an adventure of discovery, wonder, gratitude, and joy.

It is a call to action and a reason for hope.



Steve Ramirez is an award-winning outdoor and conservation author who lives and writes in the Texas Hill Country. Steve's first book, *Casting Forward: Fishing Tales from the Texas Hill Country*, was featured in the film *Mending the Line* starring Brian Cox and Sinqua Walls. His other books *Casting Onward: Fishing Adventures in Search of America's Native Gamefish*, *Casting Seaward: Fishing Adventures in Search of America's Saltwater Gamefish*, and *Casting Homeward: An Angler and Naturalist's Journey to America's Legendary Rivers* have all received critical acclaim as important works of outdoor adventure and conservation literature.

Sources: amazon.com and the publishers

Trout Do Not Lie: An Anthology of The Robert Traver Award Fly-Fishing Stories

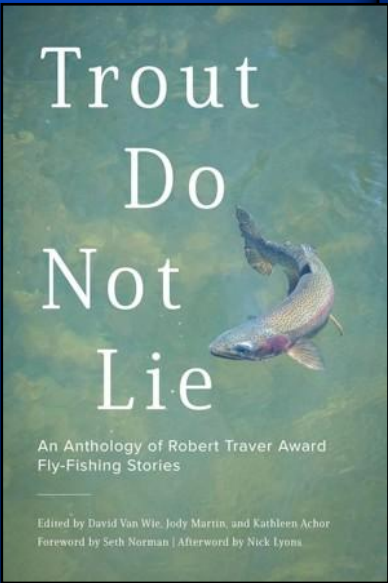
Editors: David A. Van Wie,
Jody Martin, and Kathleen Achor
Foreword: Seth Norman
Afterword: Nick Lyons
Print length: 198 pages
ISBN-10: 0811778282
ISBN-13: 978-0811778282
Publisher: G11-Stackpole Books GPQ
Publication Date: 3 November 2026

The Robert Traver Fly-Fishing Writing Award has been the most widely recognized international award for fly fishing stories in the English language for thirty years. The annual Traver Award is jointly administered by the John D. Voelker Foundation of Marquette, Michigan and the American Museum of Fly Fishing in Manchester, Vermont.

As an anthology of twenty honored stories from 2008 to 2025, this volume includes many of the best voices in fly fishing over the past twenty years.

"Moving and heartfelt, the remarkable stories in Trout Do Not Lie remind us that fly fishing sometimes takes us to places that go well beyond our farthest casts."

-- Stephen Sautner,
author of Every Cast:
Chronicles of a Deeply
Hooked Angler



David Van Wie is the author of *Storied Waters* (Stackpole Books) and *The Confluence* (Peter E. Randall Publisher, 2016). He teaches environmental journalism at Dartmouth College and speaks frequently at fly fishing shows, Trout Unlimited dinners, and other events. He has also been a guest on several major fly-fishing podcasts.

Dr. Joel (Jody) Martin won the Traver Award in 2021 with his story "Simon's Daughter." Jody is associate vice president for research at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County. He is the author of *The Spirituality of Fly Fishing* (2016).

Kate Achor is editor of *The American Fly Fisher*, the journal of the American Museum of Fly Fishing in Manchester, Vermont.

Sources: amazon.com and the publishers



Poet’s Corner:
Halloween Edition
Poems selected for the angler



A *LATERAL LINES* Halloween tradition, we are happy to present this Steelhead spoof of the Edgar Allen Poe classic.

THE MAVEN
also known as EVERMORE

by Bill Prokopchak
with apologies to Edgar Allan Poe and his masterwork,
“The Raven”

Once upon an evening dreary, while I angled, weak and weary,
Having many a quaint and curious thought of ancient fishin’ lore,
While I casted, mostly placid, suddenly there came a rasping,
As if someone gently gasping, gasping just along the shore.
“Tis some angler,” I muttered, “gasping just along the shore.
Only this, and nothing more.”

Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak October,
And each falling, dying leaf wrought its ghost upon the shore.
Eagerly I wished for rises; sadly, I had only misses
From my Prince Nymph came but sorrow -- sorrow for the lost
“Big Thor” --
For the rare and radiant Steelie whom the anglers named
“Big Thor”
Famous here and *Evermore*.

And the silken, sad, uncertain rustling of the leafy curtain
Thrilled me -- filled me with fantastic terrors never felt before;
So that now, to still the beating of my heart, I stood repeating
“Tis some angler’s heavy breathing, gasping up along the shore
Some late angler is retreating, splashing on the slip’ry shore;
This is it and nothing more.”

Presently my soul grew stronger; hesitating then no longer,
“Sir,” said I, “or Madam, truly, your forgiveness I implore;
But the fact is I was casting, and so gently came your gasping,
And so faintly you came rasping, rasping up along the shore,
That I scarce was sure I heard you” -- here I looked back at the
shore;
Nothing there and nothing more!

Deep into the leaves I’m staring, long I stood there wondering,
fearing,
Doubting, thinking thoughts no angler ever dared before;
But the silence was unbroken, and the rippling water gave no
token,
And the only words there spoken were the whispered words,
“Big Thor?”
This I whispered, and an echo murmured back the words,
“Big Thor.”
“It’s the wind,” I said, “and nothing more!”

Back into the creek I’m turning, all my soul within me burning,
Soon again, I heard the rasping somewhat louder than before.
“Surely,” I said, “that is something in the woods behind me, surely;
Let me see, then, what is hidden, and this mystery to explore --
Let my heart be still a moment and this mystery to explore; --
It’s the wind and nothing more!”

Turning here, I grabbed the branches, parted them with heart a
flutter,
In there stepped a stately MAVEN from the path upon the shore;
Not a bow or curtesy made she; not a minute stopped or stayed
she;
But, with look of lord or lady, stood upon the rocky shore --
Stood upon a rock so steady there upon the rocky shore --
Stood, and stared, and nothing more.

Then this MAVEN so beguiling got me somehow into smiling,
By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance she wore,
“Why’s your face so drawn and deathlike, you,” I said, “are surely
spirit,
Ghastly grim and ancient MAVEN wand’ring on the evening shore
Tell me what your preferred name is on this evening’s rocky
shore!”
Quoth the MAVEN, “*Evermore*.”

Much I marveled this young spirit to her speaking thus so plainly,
Though her answer’s little meaning -- little meaning that it bore;
Ever blessed ghost I’m seeing standing there upon the shore --
Ghost or beast upon the rocks, just standing there upon the shore,
With such a name as “**Evermore**.”

But the MAVEN, standing lonely on the rocky shore, spoke only
That one word, as if her soul in that one word she did outpour.
Nothing further then she uttered -- but I say, I shook and shuddered
Then I scarcely more than muttered, “On this evening, hope you’ll
leave me --
I am trembling as I stand, and I am hoping she will leave me.”
MAVEN then said, “**Evermore**.”

Startled at the stillness broken by reply so aptly spoken,
“Doubtless,” said I, “what it utters is its only stock and store
Caught from some unhappy angler who struck out on river’s water
Broken tippet, shattered rod, oh the burden MAVEN bore --
Till the dirges of her hope that melancholy burden bore
Of **Ever**, **Ever** -- **Evermore**.”

But the MAVEN still beguiling all my fancy into smiling,
Then my wading staff I pointed at the ghostly bore;
Then, at once I started thinking, I betook myself to linking
Thinking unto thinking, thinking what this ancient ghost of yore --
What this grim, ungainly, ghastly, gaunt odd angler’s ghost of yore
Meant in croaking, “**Evermore**.”

There I stood engaged and casting, but no Steelhead was I
catching
To the ghost whose eyes of fire burned into my Steelhead lore;
The MAVEN and I stood there blinking, my eye on indicator
seeking
On the indicator’s color peeking as it floated down the river,
But with daylight growing dimmer and no lamp light, I did shiver
Ghostly MAVEN did, then, whisper, “**Evermore**.”

Then, I thought the air grew denser, perfumed from an unseen
censer
Swung by spirit MAVEN for whose foot-fall splashed upon the
shore,
“Wretch,” I cried, “Fish God has sent you -- by your spirit he has
sent you
Respite -- respite and amnesia from the memories of Big Thor.
Help me, MAVEN, kindly spirit to forget the lost Big Thor!”
Quoth the MAVEN, “**Evermore**.”

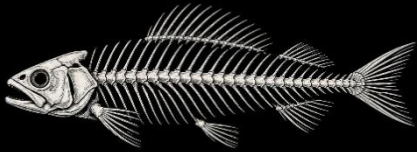
“Prophet!” said I, “thing of evil! -- prophet still, of ghost or MAVEN!
Whether tempter sent or tempest tossed you on this creek so
Desolate yet all undaunted, on this Steelhead land enchanted --
On this stream by horror haunted -- tell me truly, I implore --
Is there -- is there tell me truly -- tell me -- tell me, I implore!
Of the Legend of Big Thor.”

“Angler!” said I, “thing of evil! -- prophet still of ghost or MAVEN!
By the heav’n that bends above us -- by the Steelhead we adore --
Tell my soul with sorrow laden if the ancient lore be true,
Will I catch the vaunted Steelhead whom the legend calls
Big Thor?
Hook the rare and radiant Steelhead whom the ancients named
Big Thor?”
Quoth the MAVEN, “**Evermore**.”

“Be that word our sign of parting, ghost or fiend!” I shrieked aloud
“Get thee back into the forest on this night of Halloween
Leave no mem’ry as a token of that specter I have seen!
Leave my wishes un-fulfilled and get you back upon the shore!
I know I will never land the Steelhead that the old folks call
Big Thor!”
Quoth the MAVEN, “**Evermore**.”

And the MAVEN, never moving, still is standing on the shore
On the rocky shore, she stood there right upon the Erie shore;
And her eyes have all the seeming of a demon’s that is dreaming,
And my lamp light o’er her streaming throws her shadow on the
shore;
And Big Thor now from the shadows swims so near as ne’er
before
“Can I catch him?”
Quoth the MAVEN, “**NEVERMORE!**”

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Fish skeleton by A. I. Duck

Winchester TU Monthly “BarFly” Events
Wednesday, 21 October 2026, 7:00 PM
Wednesday, 18 November 2026, 7:00 PM
Wednesday, 16 December 2026, 7:00 PM

Escutcheon Brewery
Commercial St., Winchester, VA



See you at the next
Winchester TU BarFly.

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.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Some fish from Camp Naknek.
Kurt Nyberg



ANGLER REFLECTIONS



Mountain Time

reflections

by Michael Lawler Smith

photos by Michael Lawler Smith
unless otherwise noted

The cutthroat's home pool. The natives make excellent use of hiding spaces afforded by the overhanging vegetation.



In late August I traveled to Colorado. Just a week's stay. Most of the time in the lovely area around Breckenridge. My wife and I have spent a lot of time there over the years.

It is a familiar place, one of fond memories. The purpose, if one even needs a "purpose" to go there, was to quietly mark my birthday. A birthday present trip. The birthday number ended in a 0. It had not been one I was eager to greet.

There was a little dollop of dread in facing it. An event in late spring had cast a pall over the ensuing summer. Somehow, on a May evening, I had ended my fishing at a local seven-acre county park lake and returned home without my fishing pouch, a repurposed camera bag that had dutifully toted my minimalist Tenkara gear for over a decade. Nothing fancy. Just functional. Until it wasn't. I did not even discover its loss for several days. That fact, too, vexed me. I couldn't dismiss the episode lightheartedly, with a wave of the hand and a breezy "Ah, another senior moment."

Because of a looming adventure to Italy in June, I opted not to dwell on the loss, nor share it (with its troubling implications) with my family, lest it cast a shroud over their long-anticipated journey. The trip came off as planned, an extravaganza. I was captivated by Italy, entirely.

Upon my return, I fished less and less at the little park lake which in preceding years had probably accounted for more than 70% of my total annual angling outings. Excuses came easily: too many floating algae mats, too much duckweed, too much watermeal. All true enough. But lacking candor. I was avoiding my old venue.

The decade I would leave behind in August had begun optimistically. So much to do, so much to look forward to. But by decade's end, I had logged nearly a dozen funerals of close friends and cherished family.



The little meadow stream is narrow and deep, with recessed undercut banks that provide excellent habitat and escape shelter for its native cutthroat trout. Extensive grazing would surely collapse the banks.

"Angler Reflections"
continues on the next page.

ANGLER REFLECTIONS -- CONTINUED

Nevertheless, the prospect of Colorado always lifts my spirits. Some of my brightest and happiest memories were made there. Certainly, two of the happiest years in my career played out in Lakewood, where my agency had its regional office astride the vast federal center.



Where there is grazing, there is
Fortunately, no cattle were seen in the nameless little stream.

All I need to hear are a few bars of John Denver's famous song about the state and reveries flood in. When my job took me back east, back to Washington, at least I had great memories while I sat in I-66 traffic.

Not only had my wife and I lived in Colorado for a happy brace of years, we vacationed in its mountains nearly every year for almost four decades. Planning this August trip was not difficult. Our base would be "Breck." Daytrips outward? Two, for sure: to the Routt-Medicine Bow National Forest near Steamboat Springs, and Rocky Mountain National Park.

While the trip was admittedly nostalgia fueled, there were objectives. Precisely two in number. I was intent on visiting a little high meadow stream I first encountered over a quarter century ago, a "secret" place a Forest Service biologist had directed me to in confidence, one with a "A-minus" population of Colorado River cutthroat trout. The letter and "minus" signify that it is believed to be a pure strain population, but one that may have had a distant long-ago rainbow trout influence. The second objective was to revisit another stream, high in another mountain range, that once fed my avidity for catching undue quantities of nonnative brook trout. But now, the hope was to affirm the successful eradication of the invasive species and (hope of hopes!) to encounter one of its newly restored cutts (A+ strain, to be sure).

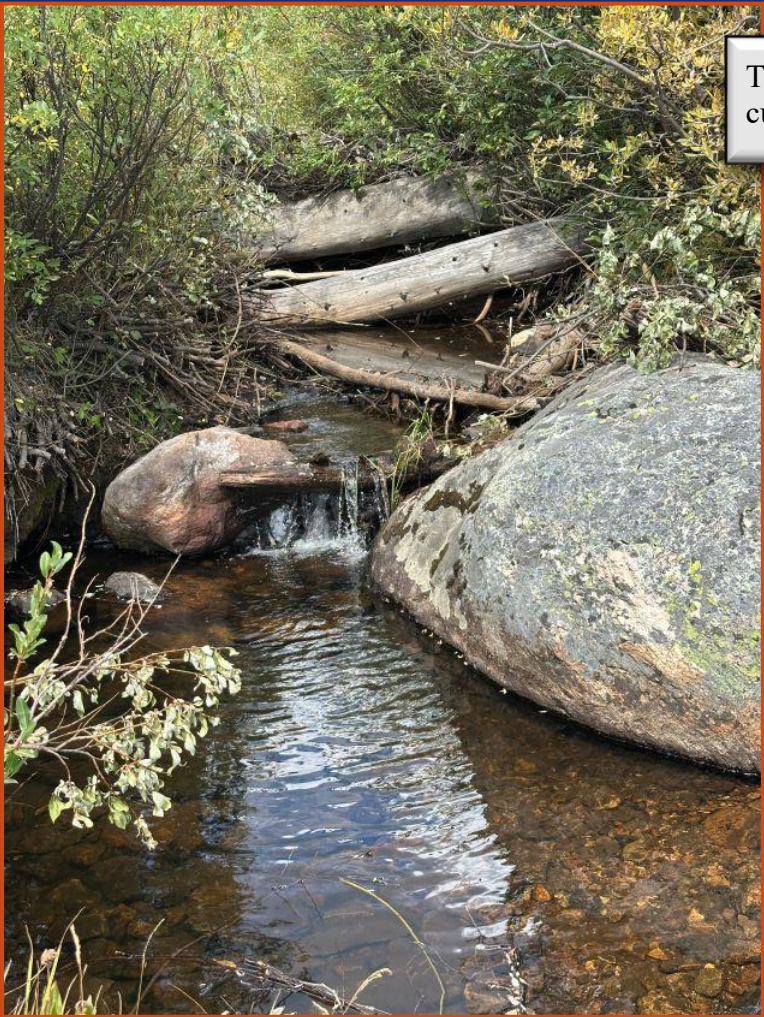
Our first morning in Colorado, we pointed the rental SUV north and followed Colorado Rt.9 and US 40 northward to Routt County. Along the way, the landscape triggered countless recollections – a forest road that leads to a high mountain lake where once upon an extravagant summer twilight I witnessed (and cast to) hundreds of rising trout, rings dimpling the surface randomly and abundantly. We rounded a bend into a broad rolling expanse of sage, the plain where my kids saw their very first pronghorn. Everywhere we looked, memories flowered.



Evidence of both grazing and clear cutting were readily apparent when I arrived at my secret cutthroat stream. Native trout in the West face increased threats.

"Angler Reflections"
continues
on the next page.

ANGLER REFLECTIONS -- CONTINUED



This little pool certainly could have hosted a native cutthroat, but none were engaged that particular day.

At length we arrived at the forest road that would take us to our first destination. High on a plateau, the road in was passable. Not severely rutted; no jutting boulders. I measured the miles carefully to locate this creek. It is small. Yet one must navigate to the tenth of a mile. Exactly. Overshoot by even a hundred yards, the stream is missed.

I always tense up as I near it. Will there be another vehicle there? On a September visit several years ago, I beheld two vast “lifted” pickup trucks. Texas plates. An elk camp. But fortunately, it was several hundred yards away from the stream. I slipped in and out unobserved. In the following year, I found no evidence they had ever discovered the stream.

Today, the stream was ours alone. But there were changes on the landscape. A forest ridge about a half mile to the southwest was being timbered. A clear cut.

We had seen logs stacked by the roadside ready for the hauling truck. The little meadow adjacent to the stream had been grazed, recently as the fairly fresh cow pies attested. But fortunately, no signs of cattle getting into the creek. Still, Eden had been breached. On the way in, we saw numerous camping rigs in pullouts along the road. And there were mountain bikers, now a nearly ubiquitous breed of recreationist throughout the high country.

I stretched out my Tenkara line; I applied some floatant to the little caddis fly. Peering over the bush that obscured my view, I looked at the little pool below. The color of weak iced tea. I could see no fish. I cast. A wind puff rebuffed my fly to the near bank. My second cast must have reached the water because I heard a faint splash and instinctively raised the little rod. It was a cutthroat. For a stream that small, the fish looked almost humorously big. I quickly guided it to net, and the barbless fly came free. I filled my little acrylic photo tank, gently poured in my catch, lidded the tank and shot several pictures. The fish was home again in a matter of seconds. I collapsed my rod and spooled my line. The trip was a success. My wife looked a bit quizzically at me. I replied: “I got what I came for.”

More driving and then we came to the other mountain range, one my wife was far more familiar with. A sizable river drains this range.



I used to fish the main river for rainbows, brooks, and browns. My wife would fish too on occasion. Invariably, she would manage to out fish me and retire to a sunny rock to read a book she always brought along. But today we were heading to the upper headwaters of a remote tributary, the *raison d’etre* for the pricey SUV.

This little brook in the Colorado high country may yet again host its native fish, the Colorado River cutthroat trout. But their return, as I learned, may take considerable time for the species to fully re-establish itself.

“Angler Reflections” continues on the next page.

ANGLER REFLECTIONS -- CONTINUED

The road is awful. Indeed, it was awful thirty years ago. Northern Colorado winters have dealt it far more abuse than the Forest Service has provided maintenance. Big round boulders loomed often; loose cobble and washboard ridges hinted at long-ago efforts to smooth the surface. Deep ruts forced sharp swerves to avoid mayhem. It took fifteen minutes to navigate last half mile.



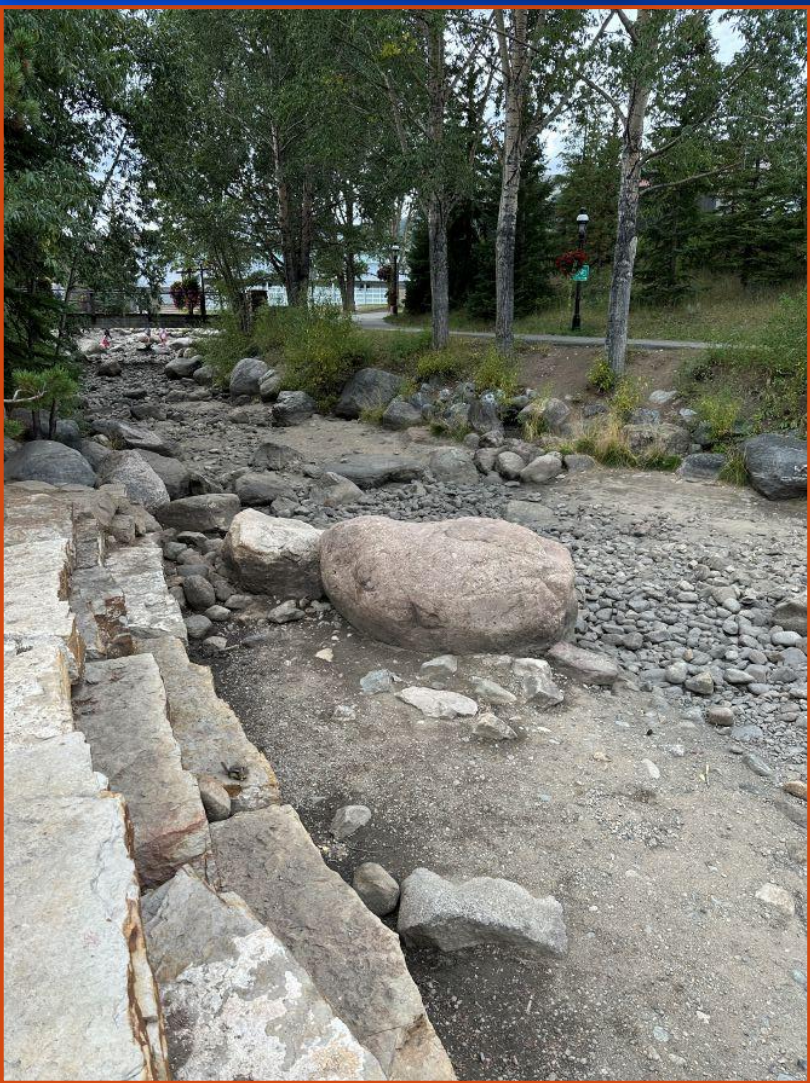
The mountain landscapes of northern Colorado have held me in their thrall for forty years.

Again, this too is a small stream. Nearly forty years ago when I first encountered it, it was a “dream” fishery – if all you ever dream of is the literal “fish on every cast.” I would like to think I was already past that stage in my angling life back in those days; but clearly it had lingered until such time when I could engage with such a reality. This was long enough ago that I could indulge the fancy I was introducing the #16 parachute Mr. Rapidan to the Rockies. Hubris, I know.

The fish-on-every-cast thrill dissipates rather swiftly. Then I was left with the opportunity to savor the breathtaking beauty of the scene. A high alpine plain with scattered stands of evergreens, and patches of flowery meadow – summer elk range. The stream was a jewel. Crystal clear, ice cold, practically overflowing in cobalt-backed brookies. But I knew that halcyon scene less than a decade. Then came the Routt Divide Blowdown of 1997. Everything changed. The area by the small creek was closed for several years. When it finally reopened, I made my pilgrimage. The brook trout still abounded. But increasingly they were no longer my goal. Over the years I had hatched a theory this creek just might have a relic population of native cutthroat. They became the object of quest.

From reading Patrick Trotter’s *Cutthroat: Native Trout of the West* upon its publication in 1987, I went from intrigued to entranced by this multi-strain species. But my quest within this high, remote little basin always came to nought. On revisiting the stream back in 2023, after a several year hiatus (such is the discouraging nature of bad roads), I was startled to see an elaborate fish passage barrier at the creek’s lower crossing. My eyes didn’t deceive me; the district fisheries biologist affirmed its purpose and recounted the ongoing efforts to restore the native. I explained my history with the creek, added my wholehearted citizen endorsement, and vowed not to name to little fishery in anything I wrote (just as I had promised another biologist about the first creek visited above).

The Blue River in downtown Breckenridge, CO in late August 2026. The impacts of last winter’s lack of snowpack were obvious.



“Angler Reflections” continues on the next page.

ANGLER REFLECTIONS -- CONTINUED

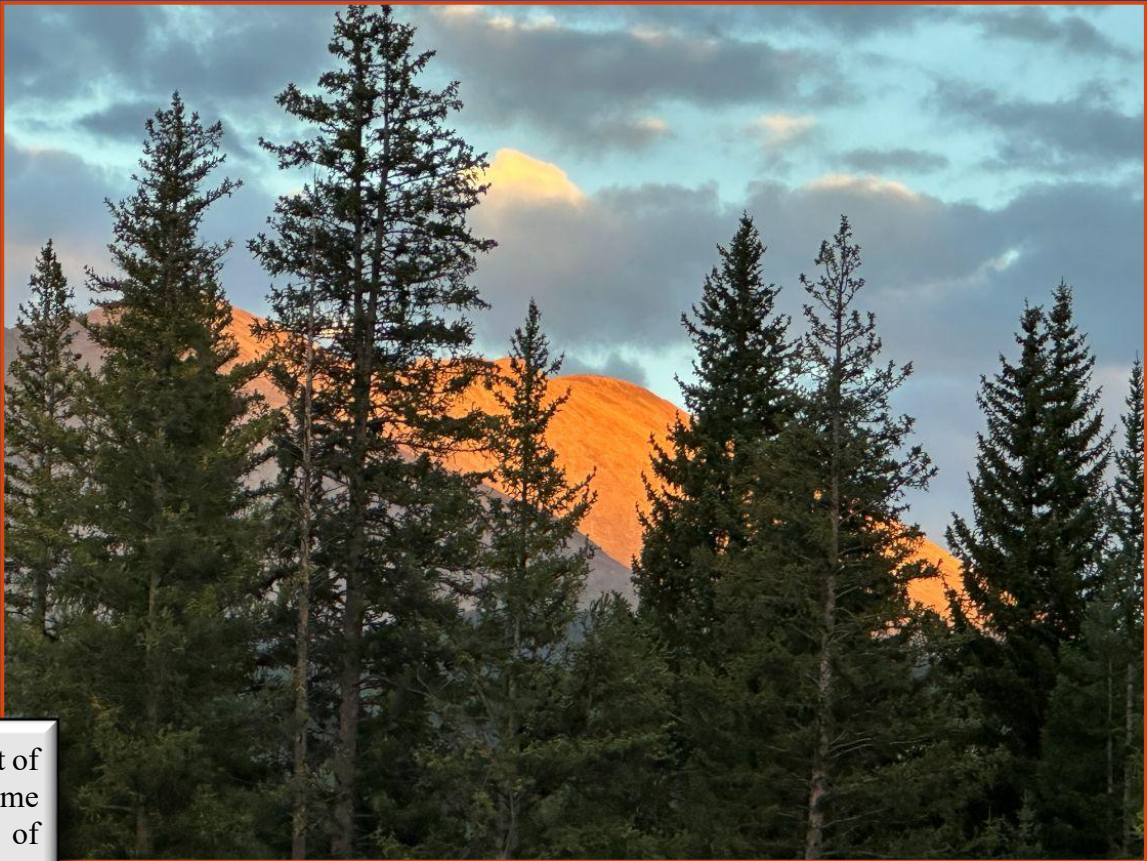


The Swan River near Frisco, CO, is an ongoing success story in stream restoration.

Arriving at length at the creek, I unfurled the same Tenkara rig, fly and all, and began gently probing each pool. I moved slowly, as much because of the elevation and my age as from stealth. The little pools were lovely. They deserved the restoration of their natives.

But after a quarter hour of casting, it appeared no cutthroat trout yet resided in this stretch. While a restored native would have been exciting, it really wasn't essential. That no brook trout grabbed my fly was encouraging. And after all, it can take fully five years, and up to a decade, for a restoration population to successfully reestablish itself. My advancing age and chronic impatience must accept yet again that Nature's schedule need not mirror mine.

And after all, it can take fully five years, and up to a decade, for a restoration population to successfully reestablish itself. My advancing age and chronic impatience must accept yet again that Nature's schedule need not mirror mine.



Bald Mountain southeast of Breckenridge offered some memorable moments of alpenglow.

“Angler Reflections” continues on the next page.

ANGLER REFLECTIONS -- CONTINUED



Appearing calm but forlorn, the native would be back in his habitat moments after this photo was taken.

Thoroughly winded, I returned to the SUV and slowly crept back down the battered road. The pace this time allowed me to savor the majesty of the views which were “harvest” enough for this stellar day. I had managed to visit my two western “stray puppies” (a term given by a late friend to my penchant for adopting unusually humble little creeks), and these rendezvous had restored me.

I fished only one more time on the trip, upon a stream I *can* name: Swan River. It is a tributary to the Blue River that feeds Dillon Reservoir (now astonishingly low): the Blue is one of the state’s vaunted Gold Medal waters. The Swan spent decades as an ugly duckling. Colorado’s headlong mining era had lain waste to the basin. Summit County, Colorado details its history far better than I:

https://www.summitcountyco.gov/services/community_development/open_space_trails/special_projects/swan_river_restoration.php

The Swan yielded my biggest brook trout of 2026. “Biggest” is quite relative. As it flopped at my feet, hook still engaged, the instantaneous realization occurred that both my landing net and photo tank were comfortably nested within the old leather backpack I wore. Had I a third or fourth hand, unzipping and offloading the needed gear could have been done in a trice. But a trice was all that the trout needed to unhook itself and dart forward to wedge itself firmly between two stout stones. Still momentarily dumbfounded that my third and fourth hands were unavailable, a semi-swift ponder suggested I bend down to perhaps contain the creature. Marvelous concept: “noodling” a brook trout. I slowly angled and lowered myself, conscious that backpacks can be real pranksters with physics, I attained a suitable position just as the brook trout powered forward, leaving two fairly sizeable stones falling sideways in its wake. What a sight to behold at that level!

I fished no more that trip. I marked my birthday with a lovely brunch at a favorite restaurant in Frisco. When the waiter came to present the check, he bent low and advised: “Your meal has been taken care of, sir.” I must have looked confused. My wife understood at once. The waiter explained that our daughters had called the restaurant, described us (apparently to a T), and treated us. That’s an event I hope never to forget.

On our final evening in Breckenridge, amid the packing and planning the return to the airport the next day, I would occasionally walk over to the condo’s sliding glass door to peer out at the gathering evening. Beyond the idled ski lifts, past the grove of Englmann spruce, alpenglow brightened upon Bald Mountain to the southeast. It grew moment by moment. And then, like all alpenglow, it faded. As it must.



I had caught grand total of 1.9 trout on this trip. It may have been the very best fishing trip of my life.

Closeup of a Colorado River strain Cutthroat Trout. The Forest Service and Colorado Parks and Wildlife have expended considerable funds and effort to restore the species to many of its former habitats. But such efforts take time and consistent funding to succeed.



Calendar of Events

Winchester Trout Unlimited

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

**For a calendar of Winchester Priority Waters field days,
please see page 8 of this newsletter.**

**For the complete Winchester Project Healing Waters calendar,
please see page 13 of this newsletter.**

October 2026

Thursday, 1 October 2026

6:00 – 7:00 PM – Priority Waters monthly meeting.
Laurel Ridge Community College
Science Building, Room #145

Thursday, 1 October 2026

7:00 PM – Winchester TU annual meeting with Northern Shenandoah Valley Audubon at
Laurel Ridge Community College. Featured speaker is Brad Fink, Virginia Department of
Wildlife Resources Cold Water Fisheries Biologist
Laurel Ridge Community College
Science Building, Room #145

Wednesday, 7 October 2026

Priority Waters field day

Wednesday, 14 October 2026

6:00 – 9:00 PM Project Healing Waters Monthly Meeting Wednesday,
Rachel’s Kitchen, Shenandoah Lodge, Lake Frederick

Wednesday, 21 October 2026

7:00 –9:00 BarFly at Escutcheon Brewery

November 2026

Thursday, 5 November 2026

6:00 – 7:00 PM – Priority Waters monthly meeting

Thursday, 5 November 2026

7:00 PM – Winchester TU meeting

Wednesday, 11 November 2026

6:00 – 9:00 PM Project Healing Waters Monthly Meeting Wednesday,
Rachel’s Kitchen, Lodge, Lake Frederick

Wednesday, 18 November 2026

7:00 –9:00 BarFly at Escutcheon Brewery

December 2026

Wednesday, 2 December 2026

Priority Waters Field Day

Thursday, 3 December 2026

6:00 – 7:00 PM – Priority Waters monthly meeting

Thursday, 3 December 2026

There is no Winchester TU monthly meeting in December

Wednesday, 9 December 2026

There is no Project Healing Waters monthly meeting in December



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.

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