PATU Council Annual Meeting

September 14, 2024

VFD in Waterville, PA

PWWTU was represented by Bob Neu, Roger Dice, Johnathan Miller and Chuck Buffington.

Buffington’s notes:

The meeting was called to order at 9:30 am by Len Lichvar, President, who served as the master of ceremonies.

1.Lichvar introduced the new Executive Director, Eric Null who comes to us from a 14-year stint as the Manager of Deep Creek Lake in Maryland. Eric lives in Uniontown and worked with Len previously in the Somerset Conservation District.

Eric seems like a reasonable guy. He likes to base decisions on hard data instead of emotion. He said: “contact me with issues”.

2. Conservation committee chairman Brian Wagner reviewed projects in PA that we support: 310 stream restoration projects in ’24, 155 science and stream monitoring projects; grants for stream restoration and tree planting via the Forever Wild program. This program issued a $5,000 grant in ’24 and had another $5K in their budget that was unspent.

Brian emphasized the harmful effect of warming due to climate change on wild fish populations and where they are in a stream.

Brian invited members to join virtual meetings of the Conservation Committee Climate Change Workgroup…3rd Thursday of each month. Contact Emily Baldauff. Brian explicitly made a plug for more involvement from interested TU members to be on this committee. This could be helpful for local chapters looking for additional projects to award unspent funding.

Brian noted that there is a Pennsylvania State Water Plan (current as of 2022) that is “non-regulatory” but a good starting point about water discussions.

Brian pointed out a growing interest in “forever chemicals” such as the goop that firefighters use to extinguish flames. These chemicals are poly-fluoro-alkyl compounds that are very stable (eg Teflon) and degrade slowly if at all in the environment. They’re found in apex predators including fish, so there’s some movement to recommend not eating a full meal of wild trout every day. More to come.

Examples of good work by the committee include a. preventing habitat loss by ATVs in Penrose Swamp Barrens. B. finding out that Hazel creek near Weatherly PA had healed itself, c. opposing a slaughterhouse in Clinton County that wanted to take stream water from Fishing Creek and return offal.

A very interesting event occurred on the Roaring Branch of Lackawanna River. Someone opened large pipes embedded in a dam and flooded the stream with very mucky water. Some accumulations of silt were 6” thick downstream. Not good for the fish or insects. The interesting aspect is that there a huge number of lakes and ponds in PA, each of which has accumulate silt and could easily produce downstream damage if it were released..

Other projects include:

Neonic insecticides (similar to nicotine) their impact on insects and eventually animals that eat them.

Road dumping to control dust and the impact on the water shed.

Impact studies of solar & wind farms, warehousing, oil & gas well plugging and micro plastics on storm water.

3. Nate Walters, a PF&B cold-water unit leader spoke very elegantly primarily about a revision to the PF&B strategic plan for management of trout streams in PA. The plan is in draft form now, will be available for public comment on the PF&B website in Oct and November and is scheduled for implementation in January 2025. Since this plan will guide PF&B activities and protocols in the future, it’s important to review it before implementation.

Nate spoke to the success of a collaborative effort between PAF&B and local chapters, local universities, etc called the “Unassessed streams program” that has the primary objective of identifying wild trout streams. Currently there are 6,000 wild trout streams containing 1200 Class A sections in PA. This is out of 86,000 miles of flowing water in PA.

Miller comment: One potential issue with the “unassigned streams program” is the specific time of year when these stream surveys happen. Since fish move throughout the entire river, including its tributaries, there is concern that surveyors are not adequately capturing streams’ wild trout populations, and thus those streams are not eligible for special regulations and future protection.

Attention was paid to cold water streams and Brookies as indicator species by a number of speakers including Eric Null and Nate. Eric plans to push the idea that we will all be healthier if we preserve the ecosystems that leads to healthy fish in cold-water streams.

Nate indicated that PF&B plans to implement a “trout health monitoring program”. This sounds like a wonderful opportunity for Dr. Wetzel to apply genetic testing to the populations.

Nate mentioned that putting large pieces of wood such as fallen trees into the upper reaches of wild trout streams has been successful in increasing the number and size of habitant brookies. Their survival is probably also enhanced by increasing the degree of difficulty for anglers.

Nate said one of the new strategic aims is to support research on the impact of “AIS” (aquatic invasive species) on “cold water resources”. Presumably that would include fish.

4. Elections for PATU leadership positions were held. There were no nominations and no volunteers for three regional VP slots, so Brian Mathie will continue to serve the SW District for another year in a hold-over position.

5. A nice brochure for Rivers Camp was distributed and should be sent to all our members to help identify youth who may benefit from our scholarship program.

6. Dave Rothrock gave an impassioned plea for all of us to fight hard against any change in the PF&B policy of putting stocked trout into streams with wild fish. Apparently, PF&B (or at least one of their commissioners) has asked for a review of the policy. According to Rothrock, out of the ten (10) PFBC commissioners, only two (2) are wild trout advocates, the rest support stocking in Class A waters. Calling your local legislators will put pressure on the PFBC commission which in the past, influenced the commission’s decisions.

JM: Ways to get involved - email Emily Baldauff (Emily.Baldauff@tu.org) or any of the below:

* TU will send an action petition on October 1st. Sign and Share with others.
* Attend virtual PFBC Meeting on October 2nd at 10am. Provide public comment
* Attend PFBC Commissioner’s meeting on October 21 at 9:30am (PATU and TU national will be there) and provide public comment

Comments by Dice:

7. Fishing for Maine Brook Trout presented by Ralph Scherder. *Dark Skies* is a multifaceted web site for the fly fisher containing links to an online magazine, blog, stream reports, merchandise, guide services and You Tube Channel. Ralph talked about the adventures of fly fishing for brook trout in select areas of Maine. He likened the experience with that of brook trout fishing in PA about 150 years ago. His presentation included the distribution of wild brook trout in NE United States and zoomed in on one high concentration of brook trout in the NW corner of Maine. His advice for a successful trip should include: Planning including maps & gazetteers, local fly shops, water release schedules on tail waters, and schedule your visit for May and June.

His presentation contained pictures of pristine streams and plenty of large brook trout. Ralph Scherder recommends a book titled *Squaretail* by Bob Mallard. This is a story about Brook trout.

8. Trout in Classroom (TIC) and Women’s Program Update from Amidea Daniel of the PFBC. The TIC is a nation-wide program fostering awareness and knowledge on cold-water conservation in the classroom. Some statistics of their success in PA includes:

417 classrooms in 200 school districts in 61 counties partnering with TU & 37 PA chapters.

Over 15 years activity they involved 88,983 students, 10,389 adults with the financial support of $4,115,938.

PATU is the largest participant with PATU contributing around $305,664.

The Women’s Programs in PA started around 2009. Their objective is to involve women in all aspects of trout fishing and conservation. Their motto is Collaborate, Appreciate, Teach, Connect and Heart. (CATCH). The programs begin with leadership retreats and networking sessions, diversity, and inclusion sessions. The program will provide materials and equipment to assist in the women’s programs. A typical 3-day retreat will include networking, social media exchange, a project such as riparian buffer work, exchange of ideas and fishing. One highlight of the retreat is a scavenger hunt that is successful and becoming a tradition.

The objective is to recruit, retain, reactivate women in the in conservation of cold-water resources and fly fishing.

9. Priority Waters and the Pine Creek projects update with Scott Koser of TU. Scott opened with a map of PA indicating the 4 major regions of priority waters: Allegheny, Laurel Highlands, Delaware and the West Branch of the Susquehanna River. Our state has 31 projects for the rehabilitation in these areas. Each project has an action plan containing goals, issues, strategies, partners, and decision makers. Each plan identifies stream threats and opportunities for restoration, cleanup and protection. Visit the prioritywaters.tu.org website for additional details on each area of our priority water plans. Allegheny and WB of Susquehanna are complete. TU national is working on Delaware plan. Laurel Highlands will be the last plan to be created. Plans are not public yet. Reach out to Scott Koser via email for more details.

Scott then presented several Pine Creek area projects including before and after photos:

Rought Cut Lodge area with a bank erosion rehabilitation.

Thompson Hollow Road with bank stabilization and drainage improvement

Long Run with stabilization and bank restoration

Blockhouse Creek with bank regrading, stabilization and tree planting

Lick Run upcoming replacement of culverts and road crossings. This project was just awarded $936,000 according to Scott. Combination from TU and NFWS

10. States Council Awards were presented by Judi Sittler. PWWTU did not qualify for any awards this year.