



TU Western Driftless Hotline

Upcoming Driftless Symposium by Sara Strassman and Peter Jonas

Save the date friends. The Driftless Symposium hosted by Trout Unlimited Driftless Area Restoration Effort will be held online Monday March 11 and Tuesday March 12. More information will be coming soon. One of the reasons the Driftless is thriving is the army of scientists, restoration specialist and nonprofit and agency partners working to study, care for and recover our fabled streams. The symposium features some of the most powerful and important voices in the partnership we have built to conduct this work. If you would like to present at the symposium or have an idea about a topic or speaker, please fill out the form linked below. You can also reach out to Peter Jonas via email to peter.jonas@tu.org

If you wish to present at this year's Driftless Symposium. Please fill out the [Driftless Symposium 2024 Speaker Survey](#) and we will be responding soon.

Great Waters Expo Event

Scheduled for March 15-17 at Hamline University, Great Waters Expo is the largest fly-fishing event in the Midwest. Great Waters is sponsored by Minnesota Trout Unlimited, and proceeds from the event go to support MNTU activities.

We need your help to make the event a success. We are looking for volunteers who can:

- Staff the ticketing and check-in booth
- Staff the raffle ticket booth
- Setting up and staffing meeting rooms

No special skills are required, although a friendly personality and an interest in talking about fishing are definitely assets. Volunteers will receive a free ticket to the Expo on the day they volunteer, and will have ample time to walk the floor and check out some of the events. If you would like to volunteer, please click [here](#) and fill out the form, and the Great Waters team will be in touch.

Hiawatha TU January Members Meeting

By John Weiss, HTU Board member

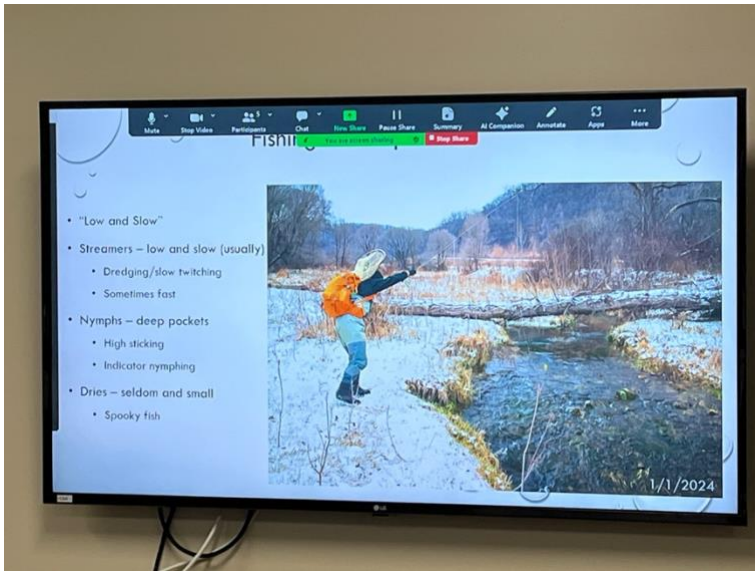
Winter is Jason Rieke's favorite time to fish trout. Few others out on the bluffland streams, air is crisp, water is clear. It's a good time to catch some big fish, which he loves to do.

"It's a great time to not have any pressure out there," he said. "Everything is so much more intense out there." Winter is also a great time to explore new places because there's less vegetation to impede you and you might get into places that are hard to reach in summer.

There is, however, that one little, tiny thing to also consider - it's winter which means it's often cold.



So one of the first things he talked about at the Jan. 2, 2024 meeting of Hiawatha Trout Unlimited was how to dress. Not the right fly, not the proper presentation, just how to dress.



The basics are dressing in layers, he said. He likes neoprene waders and puts a layer or two under them but doesn't wear jeans. He doesn't try to put too many pairs of socks on his feet because that actually makes them colder. Tight socks restrict blood getting to the feet and it's the blood that makes you warm; good clothing just keeps you warm. Wool socks are much much better than cotton because wool breathes and wicks away moisture while cotton absorbs it.

Oh yes, avoid felt-bottomed boots because they quickly ice up and make it hard to walk, and they get slippery.

He avoids one big bulky parka and dresses on top in layers with a breathable layer next to the skin. He carries a backpack so he can add or take off layers as conditions dictate. A good windbreaker for the final layer really helps.

Ah, gloves, a real conundrum for winter trout fishing. It's hard to fish with them, it's hard to fish without them. But Rieke said he's more and more using nitrile gloves. Others prefer wool gloves but he said take them off before touching fish. He also has a handwarmer pouch around his waist so he can put in his hands quickly to keep them warm.

These gloves are 6 mil and hold up surprisingly well. They do tear from time to time but it's not bad. We fished 3 miles of water from 7am-3pm on January 1st and he only tore 1 glove on a thorn vine.

And a hat, of course.

He typically wears a brimmed baseball cap and with a hood over it when necessary. Over the ear winter caps can be nice but can be too warm in his opinion and if it's sunny he highly prefers the brim over a non-brim.

If he gets cold, he just runs around a bit, swinging his hands below his waist. "It looks a little silly but it works," Rieke said.

For a rod, he suggests 9-foot 3- to 5-weights, but likes the 5-weight better. Don't bring your best rod because there's a better chance of breaking it. Avoid sticking your reel in the water, it will ice up. Iced-up guides are a real problem when it's below freezing, he said. Some try spraying them with Pam or lip balm but he said they don't last very long.

Use a long-handled net.

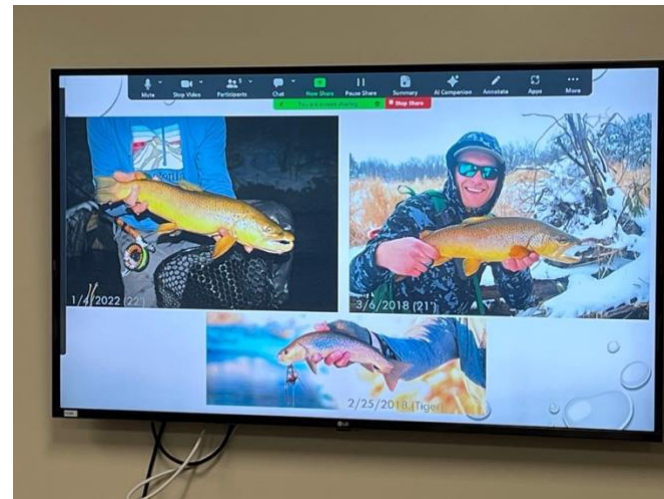
For flies, he likes bigger ones, especially the black or olive wooly buggers or Frick's Fix streamers. If he nymphs, he casts as 14- to 18 nymph like a bead-head hare's ear. If you want to go even smaller, try a 18- to 22 zebra midge, pink squirrel or beadhead pheasant tail. "If you're gong for numbers of fish, that is probably the best fly," he said about nymphs.

There are times for a dry fly and he likes the Griffith's gnat or parachute Adams.

How to fish was next up and he said he likes to go low and slow, essentially dredging the fly with a slow twitch now and then. But now and then, try zipping it along. High sticking for nymphs often works, using an indicator.

As for the right stream, he likes small to medium ones but not the headwaters because they are often very low.

Speaking of low, keep your expectations low. "You are going to see a lot of fish in different areas," he said. But catching them is another matter. "Low and slow is where they are this time of year," he said.



Finally, Rieke said keep fish wet and keep them in the water.

After the talk, Greg “Mr. Knot” Goodnow showed us a really neat one - the Orvis knot that is a quick way to tie a tippet onto a leader. You can do it by hand but he said using a forceps or hemostat works a lot better.

He suggested going to YouTube and looking for “Orvis knot.”

Win-Cres Happenings

By Mark Reisetter Win-Cres Board member

Win-Cres will be part of the April 27, 2024 Gamehaven Scout Camp as part of their support for community outreach opportunities; and will provide fly tying, casting, stream craft safety, and other information regarding trout fishing.

In addition, Win-Cres will continue to work with the Goodhue Fishing Club. The two-part Goodhue events will be held April 6 at Goodhue Schools and April 26 at Rushford, MN.

A motion was passed to reimburse Mark Schwanbeck \$100 for his streamside mowing along Rush Creek between the two County #25 road bridges.

Garvin Brook has not seen any beaver activity lately; thus no trapping will be needed.

Dusty Hoffman, DNR, has 3 sites for willow whacking in 2024. Dusty will get the possible dates for Win-Cres to assist in the whacking and application of a herbicide to prevent regrowth.

A plaque honoring Joe Lepley, that will be placed with the Lake Park Bench that Win-Cres had the city install, is in the works.

We received an update on MNTU’s future plans to create a Sustaining Fund for Trout in the Classroom, an annual Volunteer Recognition Awards Program, and the formation of an Advisory Council that will have representatives from every chapter in the state.

Programs for future membership meeting are as follows:

January 24 - Vaughn Snook, DNR’s Assistant Supervisor of Fisheries, Lanesboro

February 28 – Klaus Friedli

These meetings will be held at Sobieski Lodge, East 7 th St., Winona. Social hour is at 6:00 p.m. and presentations at 7:00 p.m. The public is welcome and encouraged to attend.

MNTU Education Program Update

By Amber Taylor

Currently, there are 68 schools and 2 nature centers participating in Trout in the Classroom (TIC) around MN with over 15 on a list hoping to join.

Fall (Sept – Nov) The Education team worked directly with over 1700 students at fall field days this year. Hundreds more learned with their teachers sampling aquatic macroinvertebrates and engaging in a variety of activities, to include fishing, learning about watersheds, water quality, and insects as bioindicators of water health. In addition to field days, students learn about trout habitat and what they need to survive as they set up tanks in their classrooms to prepare for eggs in December.

Winter (Dec – March) 25,000 eggs were delivered to 68 schools and 2 nature centers on December 6th! There was a great turnout of almost 40 people that responded to the request for egg day volunteers in the MNTU newsletter and chapter communications. Our team will be at the Great Water Expo to promote and raise awareness about MNTU youth education opportunities. Winter programs began on Thursday this week! MNTU educators will be conducting programs with TIC schools around the state. By March, we will have worked with over 1,000 students, leading hands-on lessons in and outside the classroom. They will learn about (and on) Minnesota's icy landscapes, fly tying, Minnesota fish species, and trout habitat design.

Spring (April-May) Spring releases are the culmination of the TIC program! They typically start in mid-April and run through the last week of school. Our team will work with teachers to plan, coordinate, and schedule these exciting events. We attend and lead activities at as many releases as possible during the spring.

Summer (June-August) In the past, we would book up to 40 programs with various partners on lakes around the metro area. Most of them were spin fishing off a dock and depending on the program partner, some of them often didn't run due to lack of registrants. We still intend to do some off the dock spin fishing type programs because we understand their importance for getting new anglers started. However, in working to align our programs more closely with MNTU's mission, our team will be leading 4, full day outings on trout streams and rivers called "Meet a Stream" days where participants will spend time walking the stream discussing MNTU habitat improvements, sample macroinvertebrates to assess water quality and which flies to use, and then spend a good chunk of time fishing.

Trout Clubs: Evan Griggs, our Environmental Education Specialist, is currently working with teachers to establish Trout Clubs at schools! This is an after-school club for students to gain more in-depth and hands-on experiences with fishing, fishing skills, habitat conservation, and more. Trout club is intended to be a small, high impact group of students who are passionate about learning more about these topics. As a benefit of this small group size, students get to explore outside the school, experience more learning opportunities, practice skills, and form a strong community based on a shared interest. MNTU educators and trained-volunteers will provide activity outlines, equipment, materials, and support. If you know of a school that is interested in forming a Trout Club, please contact Evan at tic.mntu@gmail.com.

Iowa Driftless Chapter

By Mike Rogers, President



February Chapter Meeting-- 7pm, 2/1/24 @ Tbock's in Decorah, IA-- virtual option available, contact tuiadriftless@gmail.com for link

Fly Fishing Clinic @ Decorah High School-- Saturday, Feb. 3 from 10am-Noon. Folks and families are welcome to join at Decorah High School Gymnasium for casting lessons, fly tying info, etc.

Hawkeye Fly Fishing Association Annual Event--Coralville, IA-- Feb. 16-18 details @ www.hawkeyeflyfishing.com

MNTU Statewide Service Awards

Starting in 2024, the Board of Directors for the Minnesota Council of Trout Unlimited (MNTU) will recognize members annually for the statewide awards listed below.

Dr. Thomas Waters Award for Minnesota Conservation

Formally awarded for “Midwest conservation” by the Helgeson family at the Expo, the Waters Award will now be given by MNTU annually as a lifetime achievement award. The Dr. Thomas Waters Award for Minnesota Conservation recognizes an individual who has made a significant contribution to environmental conservation in Minnesota as a member of Trout Unlimited. Award recipients will be selected by the MNTU Board Chairperson in consultation with the Board’s Executive Committee. Recipients of the Waters Award will be announced and recognized at the Great Waters Fly Fishing Expo.

Minnesota Trout Unlimited Distinguished Service Awards

A member of every Minnesota Chapter of Trout Unlimited (Gitche Gumees, Headwaters, Hiawatha, Twin Cities, and Win-Cres) will be recognized each year by the MNTU Board of Directors for their outstanding service and dedication to TU. Distinguished Service Award recipients are to be selected by a chapter’s leadership and communicated to the MNTU Board Chairperson by the 15th of February each year.

All five recipients of the MNTU Distinguished Service Award will be announced and recognized at the Great Waters Fly Fishing Expo.

A Classic Minnesota Winter Trout Opener

By Jason Rieke



Brian Kettering walking along a SE MN trout stream. January 1, 2024 | 28°F

We weren't quite sure what we were in for when we left Rochester at 5:30am on New Year's Day. It had been a particularly snowless winter up to that point, and in the wake of a correspondingly dry summer and fall, the water levels of many streams and rivers had been very low. Loaded up with winter gear and lunches, we headed southeast to spend Minnesota's winter catch and release opener on some of our favorite streams. When we arrived at our destination a little before daylight, we were relieved to see more flowing water than we had thought we would see and there was even a thin dusting of snow!



Jack Sackett casting into the cold and finding a trout at the end of the

The morning started off slow, and it took some time to catch the first fish of the year. We were each throwing small, wooly bugger-like streamers and had fished through a decently long stretch of mostly flat, shallow water. We didn't move or see a single fish until we reached a pool that finally had some depth and fast current dumping into it. It was there that we had a couple of swipes and then Jack hooked into the first brown trout of 2024. Typical with winter fishing, we found there to be long stretches (sometimes very long stretches) of fishless water and nearly all the fish of each stretch podded up in the deepest pool of said stretch. If we were more patient anglers, we probably could have caught quite a few more fish on nymphs in each of those spots. We were a little ambitious that day though and had left a bike at the end of a 3-mile-long stretch of stream. We had to cover water quickly and fishing streamers has always been our favorite way of doing that. When fishing streamers in the winter, the first cast counts and in most pools you get only a few chances at catching a fish. Streamers tend to bring out the biggest, baddest trout in each pool. We caught a couple of colorful mid-teens fish and moved a few others.



A couple of colorful winter brown trout

At one point, we came up to a pool that had a perfect vantage point to watch the angler. It was Brian's turn, and he made a cast upstream and across the pool and made a couple strips. As Jack and I peered into the pool, a big dark object turned and launched itself at the fly but narrowly missed. In excitement of what we had just seen, both Jack and I yelled with enthusiasm. Brian, being at water level and not wearing any polarized glasses, hadn't seen any of it. We advised him to give the pool a second to reset and then make the same cast. He followed the suggestion and made another cast. Just as during the first cast, the fly landed and Brian made a couple of strips. The same fish came shooting out towards the fly again, making almost a full circle around the fly before t-boning it. Brian, being the patient man that he is, somehow made a perfect strip set despite the ruckus that Jack and I were making on the bank after seeing this fish come back a second time annihilating his fly. We calmed down a bit and then I hopped into the creek to assist with landing the fish. We all high-fived, took a couple of pictures, then sent the beast back home. That fish was a personal best trout for Brian, and Jack and I both agreed that this was one of the coolest eats we have ever witnessed.



Brian with the best fish of the day, just shy of 18"

Winter Fishing Reflections

As I've been studying the gospel of John this winter, I can't help but see parallels between the eternal life that is only found through the savior Jesus Christ, and the life that is only found along the trout streams in the driftless winter. The brown and dead of this winter world is sharply contrasted by the vibrant color and life in the streams that course through these valleys. Springs of water come out of the hillsides and into these streams. The springs keep the waters cool in the summer and warm in the winter; a perfect, life-giving combination for trout, green watercress, and other aquatic life making me think of Jesus's words in John 4:14, *"but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."*



Fly of The Month: Holy Grail

By Lance Prado, HTU Board member



The Holy Grail is a great little caddis emerger pattern. The Holy Grail is one of those "go to" patterns used by many trout guides. The Holy Grail is just plain buggy and a very forgiving pattern to fish. The Holy Grail can be dead drifted, swung at the end of a drift or even stripped behind a streamer. The Holy Grail can be tied in three main colors: Natural, Olive and Black. All are equally effective and great to have in any caddis box!

Holy Grail Fly Tying Recipe:

Hook: #10-16 Tiemco 2487 or Tiemco 2457

Bead: Gold 7/64" to 3/32" Cyclops Bead

Thread: Red Veevus 14/0

Rib: Small Pearlescent Tinsel

Body: Natural Hares Ear Hareline Dubbing

Casing: Pheasant Tail

Thorax: Natural Hares Ear Hareline Dubbing

Collar: Natural Hungarian Partridge

All Materials can be found at www.rootriverrodco.com

Click the link to watch the tutorial.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p4Lhv3ChWxk>

Monthly Fishing Report

Lanesboro MN: [Root River Rod Co](http://www.rootriverrodco.com)

SE MN has been in a "Deep Freeze" but it looks like it is now coming to an end. We have temps predicted in the mid 30's for the next couple of weeks and fishing should be fantastic. By now you would think the fish should be in their deep winter holes and only feeding on tiny midges. But when I was out last week and the temperature was 1 degree, I found a stream where the water temp was 40 degrees and the fish were eager to eat a small black wooly bugger. I did however find that in bigger water that had more shelf ice the fish were down deep as suspected and would eat a zebra midge trailing off an orange scud. So, with warm temperatures on the way the snow will be slowly melting and the river temps will be fluctuating. I would recommend starting off with a small leech pattern and if that doesn't work move to a nymph rig and get down deep and fish slow water.

Recommended Flies:

Wooly Bugger size 14-8

Orange scud size 16-12

Red zebra midge size 18-20

Pheasant tail size 16-20

Miracle midge size 20



Upcoming Events Schedule:

Win-Cres Chapter Meeting: General meeting dates will be January 24 – 6pm at Sobieski Lodge with Vaughn Snook of the MDNR presenting.

IA Driftless Chapter Meeting: Feb 1 at Tbock's in Decorah

IA Fly Fishing Clinic: Feb 3, 10am – noon at Decorah High School, casting lessons & fly tying info

Hiawatha TU Members Meeting: Monday, February 5, 7pm 125 Live - Chapter Meeting Lance Prado, RRRCo presenting plus two beginner focused topics.

Hawkeye Fly Fishing Association Annual Event: Feb 16-18. Coralville, IA: details @ www.hawkeyeflyfishing.com

Win-Cres Chapter Meeting: General meeting dates will be February 28. Klaus Friedli. 6pm at Sobieski Lodge

Hiawatha TU Members Meeting: Monday, March 4, 7pm 125Live - Chapter Meeting. Mike Toft on Euro nymphing

MNTU's Great Waters Expo: - March 15-17, Hamline University, St Paul

Win-Cres Chapter Meeting: General meeting dates will be March 27, 2024.

Hiawatha TU Members Meeting: Monday, April 1, 7pm 125Live - Chapter Meeting. Brian Nerbonne, MNDR

Hiawatha TU Members Meeting: Monday, May 6, 7pm 125Live - Chapter Meeting. Monta Hayner

Resources:

[SE Stream Conditions](#) (MN DNR)

[State Map Trout Streams](#) (MN DNR)

[Southeast Streams](#) (MN DNR)

[AMA](#) (MN DNR Aquatic Management Areas)

[WMA](#) (MN DNR Wildlife Management Areas)

[SNA](#) (MN DNR Scientific and Natural Areas)

[State Forest](#) (MN lands)

[Driftless Hatch Chart](#) (Driftless Region)

[MN DNR Fish Kills Reporting](#) (or call 651-649-5451 or 800-422-0798)

[Trout-In-the-Classroom Map](#) (School Locations in MN)

[Wisconsin DNR Trout Streams](#)

[Iowa DNR Driftless Trout Stream Maps](#)

[IA WMA](#) (IA DNR Wildlife Management Areas)

[HTU's Iowa Driftless Stream Map](#)

HTU Website: <https://hiawatha-tu.org>

TCTU Website: <https://www.twincitiestu.org/>

TCTU Events: <https://www.twincitiestu.org/events.html>

[2023 MN DNR Driftless Stream Projects Map](#)

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