

SMITH RIVER TU NEWSLETTER

Winter 2025

UPCOMING EVENTS

- **January 23 & 24** Angler's Choice Open House. We will have a booth at this event to provide information, community outreach and demonstrate fly tying. Jason Collins is the lead, jaymcoll81@yahoo.com
- February 21 Virginia Council of Trout Unlimited Meeting hosted by Thomas Jefferson Chapter. Location: Charlottesville, VA. 9:00am-1:00pm
- March 5, March Regular Meeting. Meeting will be held at Hugo's Restaurant, 25 Bridge St N, Martinsville, VA. Starting at 6:30pm Chris Powell, Operations Project Manager at Philpott Lake will be our guest speaker. Chris will give an update on the Philpott Lake Dam

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER



Hello everyone,

As we enter another new year, I want to thank all those that helped with cleanups, joined us at meetings, TIC releases, fishing trips and everything in between.

The members and friends of SRTU make the chapter great every year. Next year, one of our biggest planned projects is assisting with Virginia stream culvert assessments. TU National has interest in many states with trout, and particularly native brook trout. Many culverts can be updated to expand and strengthen brook trout ecosystems.

I hope everyone has a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Jason Collins,
Smith River Trout Unlimited President
276-732-3361
Jaymcoll81@yahoo.com



Recent Chapter Events

December 4th Chapter Meeting

Held at Hugo's Restaurant with guest speaker George Palmer DWR. Around 20 members came out to listen to the annual update from George on the health of the trout population in the Smith River.



December Chapter Meeting Guest Speaker



On December 4th Smith River TU held our last chapter meeting of the year at Hugo's Restaurant in Martinsville. George Palmer, lead biologist for the Smith River from Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) joined us once again as our guest speaker to discuss the health of the Smith River and in particular the health of the brown trout population. George gave a great presentation that included a lot of the data he and his team collected in 2025. Results from this year were compared against previous years to show how the brown trout population is doing.

For those who are unaware, Smith River TU assists DWR every year with three sampling collections on the Smith River. Below is a list of the three samples conducted this year.

Philpott Dam – Martinsville Dam 2025

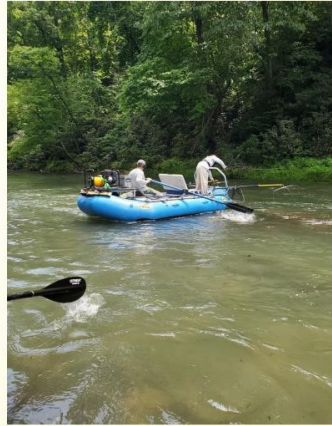
Site	Sampling Distance River Length (Km)	Sample Time (hr)	Gear Type	Sample Dates
Dam to Bassett	9.42	3.05	Raft Electrofisher	7/9/2025
Bassett to Great Road	8.2	2.37	Raft Electrofisher	6/25/2025
Doe Run	4	1.22	Boat Electrofisher	6/5/2025

Totals 9.8 miles 6.6 hrs

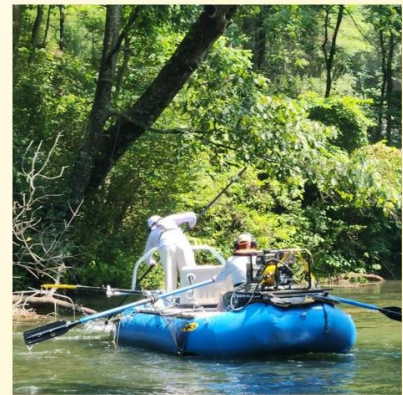


Using floating rafts rigged with electric probes the team floats down the river. As the fish are shocked they become paralyzed briefly and float to the surface where a netter stands ready to grab them and put them into a cooler.

Above Martinsville Dam



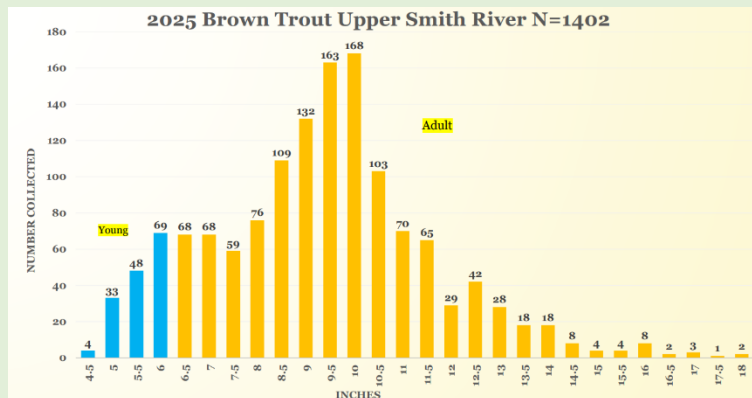
Below Martinsville Dam



Once the cooler is full the team pulls off to the side to record weight, length and species for each fish. The data is recorded and reviewed later date by the DWR team.

Data Collection 2025



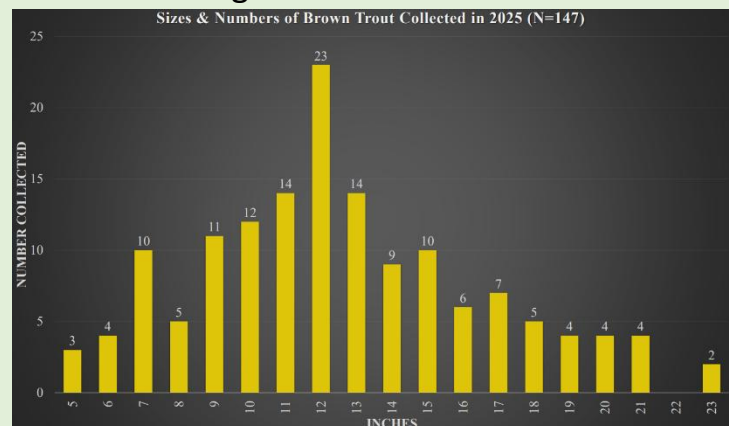


During the presentation George highlighted the health of the population of brown trout in both the section of river from Philpott Dam down to Martinsville Dam (Upper) and from the Martinsville Dam to the Smith River Sports Complex (Lower). Based on

this analysis and the comparisons to previous years DWR is able to track the overall health of both sections of the river. In general the Upper section shows a larger population of fish but they tend to be smaller on average.

The Lower section has fewer fish but they tend to have larger average size. In the graph above you can see results from the Upper where the majority of fish were in the 8-11 inch size. In comparison in the second graph below of the Lower section the majority of fish were in the 9-15 inch range.

In the discussion during the presentation George discussed some of his thoughts on the reason for this, as well as options on how to balance the populations out.



One key option identified is the removal of the Martinsville Dam.

This would eliminate a wall of separation and allow both populations to merge. The fish in the Upper section would be able to spread out, thus easing the competition for food. The Lower section would benefit from the more abundant food sources found in the Upper section that would be able to flow downriver unhindered.

Dam removal is not within DWR's control, but some other options George discussed that are within their abilities includes the release of thousands of fingerling sized trout and physically moving some fish from the Upper to Lower

sections. Both of these options are being used by DWR and these efforts do help to maintain the stability of the trout fishery.

This is just a summary of the presentation given by George. If you would like to view the full slide presentation please visit smithriver.tu.org.

Sampling for Walleye with DWR

By Al Kittredge

On Wednesday 12-10-25 I was invited to assist the Virginia DWR sample the Philpott Lake Walleye fishery. The sample starts the afternoon before when biologists string gill nets across 20 previously designated coves in the lake. The same coves are used year after year so as to compare data and spot trends. The nets and fish are pulled the following morning and driven to the nearby Fairystone Farms Wildlife Management Area maintenance facility, where a large crew of biologists are waiting to "work them up", or collect and record data. (Yep, that's snow on the ground - This is an all weather operation - The biologists on the boat don cold water "flotation immersion suits" similar to those worn by commercial fishermen and oil rig workers)



The most difficult part of the "work up" procedure is separating the fish from the gill nets. Larger fish, especially walleye, twist and turn in an attempt to get free. It makes a big mess which requires time, false starts and a lot of "sighs" as we work them free without cutting the net. All 20 nets are freed of fish before we proceed to the next step in the data collection procedure.



Each fish is then identified, assessed for general health, measured and weighed. Walleye were the target, but gill nets do not discriminate. We also collected suckers, catfish, crappie and bass. Especially troubling was the large number of Alabama Bass that were included in the bass count. Alabama Bass are considered an invasive species in Virginia and many other states beyond their original habitat. They are much more aggressive feeders than

Largemouth and Smallmouth and soon overeat their food source resulting in eventual stunting of all fish in waters where they have been illegally "angler" introduced.



Otolith or hard calcium carbonate structures which are the fish's inner ear are removed from all the walleye. The otolith or ear bones function to help fish hear and maintain balance. They also record the fish's age and environmental growth rate similar to rings on a tree. Each fish has two otolith which resemble a small grain of white rice. They are cataloged and saved in a small envelope for later examination under microscope.

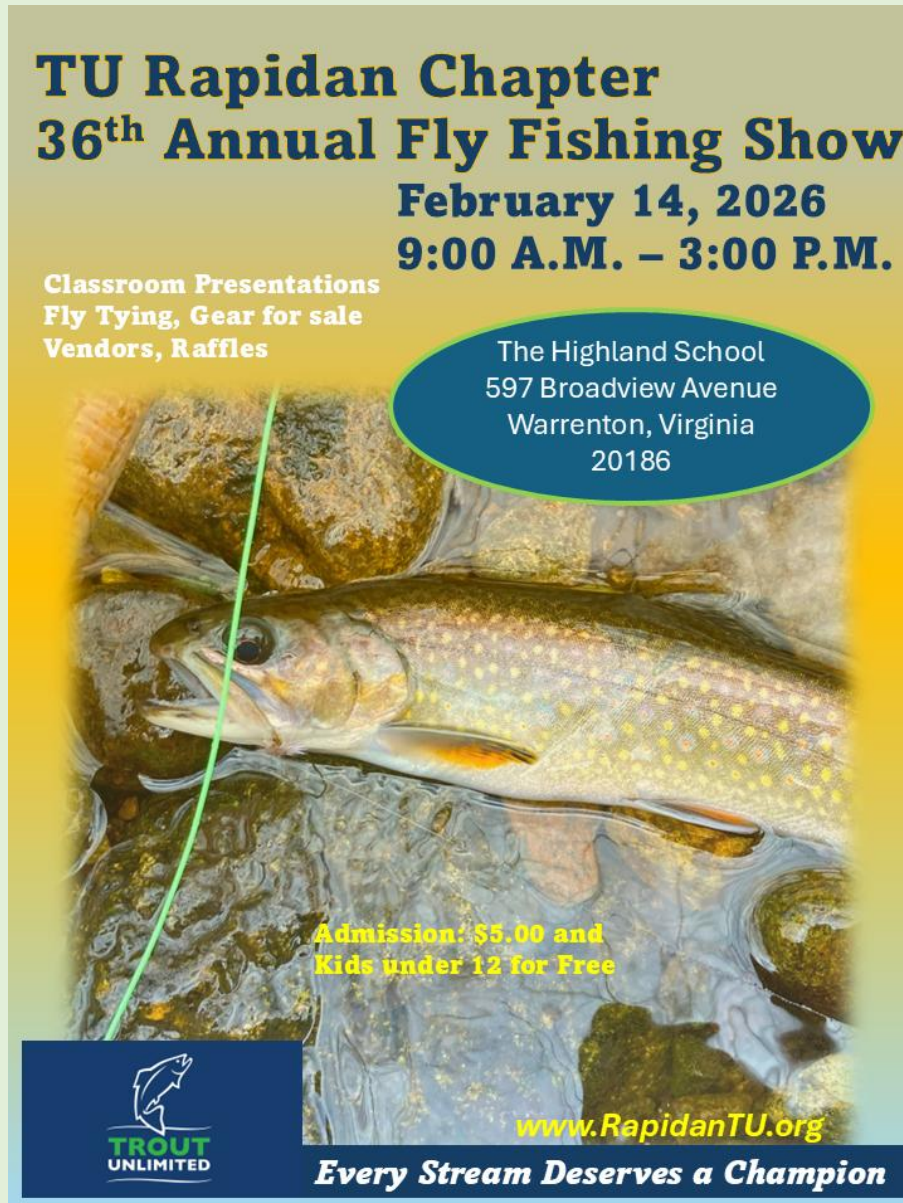


There ya go - another long, wet and cold day in the life of Virginia's DWR fisheries biologist's. They told me they'd been installing and pulling gill nets most of past two weeks at other locations and would be doing it

again the next day at Lake Kerr. Their data collection and analysis help make management recommendations that maintain and improve our recreational fishery programs.

ANNOUNCEMENT FROM OUR FRIENDS IN RAPIDAN TU CHAPTER

With keynote speaker Beau Beasley and special guest, Author Marcia Woolman, who is premiering her new book and will be doing book signings.

A poster for the TU Rapidan Chapter 36th Annual Fly Fishing Show. The background is a photograph of a rainbow trout in a stream, with a green fishing line and a fly visible. The text is overlaid on the image.

TU Rapidan Chapter
36th Annual Fly Fishing Show
February 14, 2026
9:00 A.M. – 3:00 P.M.

Classroom Presentations
Fly Tying, Gear for sale
Vendors, Raffles

The Highland School
597 Broadview Avenue
Warrenton, Virginia
20186

Admission: \$5.00 and
Kids under 12 for Free

www.RapidanTU.org

TROUT UNLIMITED

Every Stream Deserves a Champion

COMMUNITY CORNER

Have an interesting article, fishing trip photo or some fishing tips you want to share in the newsletter? Please email us at smithriverchapter@tu.org. We'd love to hear from you.



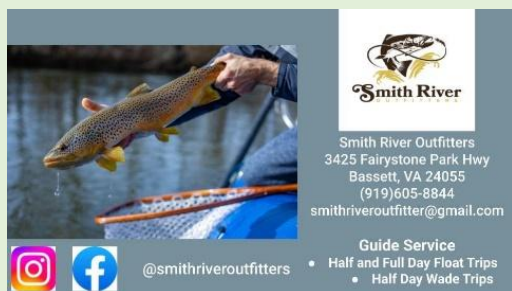
For a fly fishing guide on the Smith give Matt a call.

Lucky Strips Fly Co.

www.luckystripsflyco.com

276-732-0517

Smith River, Va



Interested in fishing on the Smith but aren't sure where the best spots are? Are they biting on dry flies or nymphs? Call Smith River Outfitters and schedule a full or half day trip. Local guides are ready to put you on some fish.



Smith River Chapter

Trout Unlimited

Smithriver.tu.org

Visit our Facebook group where we share event announcements and photos.
<http://www.facebook.com/SmithRiverTU>



For story suggestions or to share photos from your recent fishing trips please contact us at smithriverchapter@tu.org

Smith River TU Chapter Officers

Chapter President – Jason Collins (jaymcol81@yahoo.com)

Chapter Vice President – Jeff Deering (jdeer76@yahoo.com)

Chapter Secretary – Adam Gordon (gordonadam81@gmail.com)

Treasurer – Eric Tichay (erictichay@yahoo.com)

Board Members

Roy Ford

Al Kittredge

Matt Tuggle

Membership Chair Danny Newman