



**Nor'East Chapter Trout Unlimited**  
Conserving and restoring Massachusetts's North Shore coldwater fisheries

## *NETU Newsletter*

### *November 2023*



## *Meeting Notes*

*Our Next (hybrid) Meeting will take place on  
Monday, 6 November 2023, at 6:00PM  
at the IRWA Headquarters  
143 County Road, Ipswich, MA 01938*

***SPEAKER at 7:00PM:***

***Neil Shea, IRWA Restoration Program Director***

*Neil will be talking about river restoration efforts in the Ipswich River Watershed and beyond, including updates on dam removal projects and other upcoming exciting opportunities.*

***Zoom Link for online attendance at this Meeting:***

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81765185731?pwd=S3ZsNlAvM2szZE1RN3dqeFE0YW9DZz09>

## *Greetings from NETU President Ben Meade!*



**Happy fall! I hope everyone reading this has had an opportunity to get out on the water or has plans to in the near future. It's a great time of year.**

**It's a common question amongst angler friends. "Have you done much fishing?" Or - worded differently - "Been out on the water much?" Probably almost every angler you asked would answer - in so many words - that they don't fish as much as they would like to. Like many, I am no different. Free time is precious; fishing time - even more so! With two young children at home, free time/fishing time is extra valuable for me. However, this past summer, fishing time and parenting time were combined into some of my most cherished memories of being a parent (so far!). Adelaide (age 7) learned quickly how to cast a dry fly ~15 feet off of the dock at the family camp. Her younger sister Lillian (age 5) and her cousin Augie saw Adelaide and, of course, wanted to join in! A few pictures accompany this letter.**

**Now, I am under no illusions that either Adelaide or Lillian will grow up to be enthusiastic anglers. If it happens, great! However, what I do hope is that, as they age, they continue to appreciate spending time outside amongst all of the beauty in the natural world around them. Fishing is a perfect avenue for that learning curve. I am convinced there is nothing more precious than watching a young child's eyes light up at the sight of a pumpkinseed sunfish that they just caught with a fly or a worm. The size of the fish caught doesn't matter. Neither does the number of the fish caught. But the presence of the fish, and the person teaching them to fish, does matter. As time goes on and children grow up, these parenting moments matter perhaps more than we know.**

# *November 6th NETU Meeting*

## *Speaker: Neil Shea, Restoration Program Director Ipswich River Watershed Association*

*Neil is a river enthusiast, hiker, and newfound fisherman. He holds a Master of Science degree in Geosciences from the University of Connecticut, where he researched watershed evolution in the Front Range of Colorado. Neil returned to his hometown of Ipswich to join the Ipswich River Watershed association staff as Restoration Program Director after spending 6+ years living & working in the Pacific Northwest.*

*Neil will be talking to TU Nor'East about the state of river restoration in the Ipswich River watershed and beyond, including updates on dam removal projects and other upcoming and exciting opportunities.*

**Neil Shea**  
*Restoration Program Director*



Office: 978.412.8200

Cell: 978.471.9321



# Conservation Committee Reports

## **Howlett Brook fishway officially opened!!!**

*The Local News*

September 25, 2023

[John P. Muldoon](#)

<https://thelocalnews.news/2023/09/25/howlett-brook-fishway-officially-opened/>



### **TU Nor'East – Conservation Committee Report (Neil Shea)**

#### **Status Update on Watershed Restoration Projects –**

**The Howlett Brook fishway project is officially completed and was celebrated with a ribbon cutting ceremony on Thursday September 21<sup>st</sup>. The ceremony was attended by many of the project partners working together as part of the larger efforts to restore migratory fish passage to the entire Howlett Brook watershed. TU Nor'East was strongly represented by Jim McDougall and Carl Soderland, who were there to witness State Senator Bruce Tarr and State Representative Kristen Kassner cut the ribbon on the project. Continuing to bring visibility and awareness to restoration projects like this will be instrumental in maintaining momentum.**

## Conservation Committee Reports (continued)



**Previous page:** Photo by Alison Colby-Campbell. Pictured from left to right are: Erin Bonney Casey (IRWA), Brian Kelder (NOAA), Neil Shea (IRWA), Sen. Bruce Tarr, Rep. Kristen Kassner, Michael Armstrong (MA DMF), Ben Gahagan (MA DMF), and former Rep. Jamie Belsito.

**Above (Left):** Howlett Brook Fish Ladder. **Above (Right):** Carl Soderland and Deb Lindahl (IRWA)



**The Willowdale Dam fishway project** is now in its early stages as the great team at Alden Research Laboratory begins to explore the feasibility of various natural bypass solutions at the dam.

**The Ipswich Mills Dam removal project** is still within the public comment period for the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) review. The project had two productive public meetings over the week of September 11<sup>th</sup>. The Town of Ipswich Select Board also hosted a special meeting for the project on the evening of September 19<sup>th</sup>. Members of the public spoke freely about the project and the Select Board deliberated at the end of the meeting in deciding how to proceed. In the end, a motion was made to put the project to a ballot vote before the Select Board would make a decision. The date for this ballot vote has yet to be determined but it will be a key step in the future of this restoration effort.

## *Editorial Comment*

*Hello! My name is Fred Jennings and I volunteered to take over the NETU Chapter Newsletter, at least on a temporary basis so we could continue with this important method to keep in touch with our Chapter Members! We need you folks to provide interesting material for this Newsletter, OK?!? Send stuff to me at [peakdawn@yahoo.com](mailto:peakdawn@yahoo.com)*

# Conservation Oriented Email Conversations

**Re: River eNews: Celebratory Cake, Dams, and a Reading Round Up**

Carl Soderland <carlsoderland1971@gmail.com>

To:irwainfo@ipswichriver.org,Ben Shea,Fred Jennings,Ben Meade

Fri, Oct 6 at 12:34 PM

Ben:

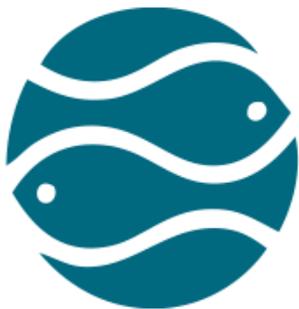
Excellent article on "Fishway-Deep Dive". 2 thoughts: when discussing the Ipswich Mills Dam, it says " Dam removal is especially beneficial in lower mainstem habitats" I think you should add something about why it is more beneficial. This is the major question many who don't understand this ask of me. I would strengthen this by answering that question more clearly. Second: the statement "A new large nature-like fishway may pass many fish species at some level of effectiveness". This leaves the door open to further pushing the idea of a fish ladder. Cost, space and effectiveness are so important and need to be stressed. As MFW said, whenever possible, dam removal is always preferable.

My thoughts would be to make this even stronger and send it to the Ipswich paper as an article, not a letter. The vote is going to be very important and the more we can educate, the more reasonable people will listen and vote based on knowledge.

Also, with your permission, we should include this article in the NETU Newsletter.

Thanks for all your effort.

Carl



**IPSWICH RIVER  
WATERSHED ASSOCIATION**

October 5, 2023

River eNews



## **Fishways: A Deep Dive with Division of Marine Fisheries**

Many of you have heard all about our work on the Ipswich Mills Dam Removal Project. We consider this to be the most important restoration project on the river, and for our organization. You know how passionate we are about improving migratory fish passage - and we believe dam removal is the right choice at this site for the fish.

At recent public comment sessions we heard people say, "Why won't a new fish ladder work?" And it's a good question - we're celebrating a brand new fish ladder in Topsfield, why is that not the answer for Ipswich? We asked the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries what they think - [read all about it on our blog](#). (entire blog reproduced below...)

### Howlett vs Ipswich Mills Dam: Diving Deep into Fishways

October 4, 2023

The Ipswich River is cluttered with dams and outdated culverts which fragment habitats and impede fish passage. It's why we are working systematically along our river to improve migratory fish passage by updating and improving fishways and removing dams where we can. In 2022, IRWA and other project partners received a federal grant to address fish passage at five dams. For the first time ever, that means that every dam on the main stem of the Ipswich River (plus one on the Parker River) has a plan in progress to improve fish passage and the health of the river.

Recently we celebrated a [new fishway that's adjacent to the Howlett Brook Dam](#). Meanwhile we're in the middle of a public information campaign to take down the Ipswich Mills Dam. The Mills Dam is a particularly contentious issue as people struggle with the changes dam removal will bring with it. So the question is – why wouldn't we install a new state of the art fish ladder instead of removing the dam?

The Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) manages the state's commercial and recreational saltwater fisheries and oversees other services that support the marine environment and fishing communities. So we took a deep dive with Ben Gahagan, Diadromous Fish Biologist at DMF to see what they think of the current state of the Mills Dam fish ladder and how it is different from Howlett Brook.

#### **What are diadromous fish and why are dams so problematic for them?**

A diadromous fish is a fish that must move between fresh and saltwater to complete its life cycle. The most iconic example of this is the *anadromous* salmon, that is born in freshwater but migrates to and lives most of its life in the ocean. It then returns to freshwater to spawn as an adult. *Catadromous* fish do just the opposite; they are born in saltwater but live most of their lives in freshwater. Moving between these environments is very difficult on their bodies and they typically have a limited time frame to make that journey. Because of this, the delay a dam or a sequence of dams with fishways can cause as fish search for the fishway entrance or make multiple attempts to ascend or descend can have real effects on a population. The American eel is the only catadromous fish in North America. Because of this fascinating life history diadromous fishes are especially vulnerable to infrastructure like dams and culverts. To have viable populations of diadromous fish we need to get them in and out of rivers and ponds quickly and safely.

#### **What is the current state of fish passage at the Ipswich Mills Dam?**

While no formal data for the Ipswich Mills Ladder exist, based on studies of these ladders in other locations they typically do an adequate job of passing river herring upstream with acceptable levels of efficiency and minimal delay for a ladder. They have not been shown to effectively pass American eel, American shad, or most native fish species. The ladder does not provide any type of safe or effective downstream passage.

(continued on next page)

## *Conservation Oriented Email Conversations (continued)*

### **Why is a fish ladder the right choice for Howlett Brook Dam but not for the Ipswich Mills Dam?**

State regulations require that dam owners provide passage for sea-run fish. DMF works with dam owners of all varieties, including private landowners, municipalities, and corporations to achieve the best passage outcome possible at a location. In most cases, dam removal is the best option from both a passage and cost-effectiveness or liability perspectives. Ipswich Mills and Howlett Brook both present opportunities to improve the watershed and access for migratory fish (the primary DMF perspective) with different constraints, benefits, and potential outcomes. Despite the differences, it is important to acknowledge that whatever benefits Howlett Dam enables for fish will in part be determined by what the Town decides at Ipswich Mills, as it is one of two dams between the ocean and Howlett Brook – and any fish wanting to make it up Howlett Brook must pass both.

Ipswich Mills is a larger and higher dam built of more “permanent” materials than Howlett Brook. Dam removal is especially beneficial in lower main-stem habitats like Ipswich Mills. A new, large (and very expensive– more expensive than removal) nature-like fishway at this location may pass many fish species at some level of effectiveness and delay in passage but will not provide the full suite of passage improvements and additional ecological benefits, like reduced water temperature and increased dissolved oxygen content that dam removal would. A fishway is also a structure that must be operated and maintained, adding to the costs the owner (in this case the Town) must allocate in time and resources, in addition to the costs for the still-existing dam. A fishway that is not operated and maintained well will not pass fish well. Dam removal removes all operations and maintenance costs and potential issues for passage while providing the best possible outcome for the ecological health of the river and migratory fish like river herring, eel, lamprey, and potentially American shad in the future.

Howlett Brook Dam is a concrete and wood dam that blocks passage to habitat that is more limited than the mainstem Ipswich in the sense that it has far less area to support spawning and rearing for migratory fish. Here, the private landowner valued the impoundment over any ongoing operations, maintenance, or liability in the future. Importantly, the ladder will not aid American eel, so further efforts remain for DMF to better understand the need for eel passage at this site and potentially provide some sort of ramp. While the full benefits of a dam removal will not be achieved here, the ladder is a positive development and opens hundreds of acres of potential habitat for alewife and lamprey. Also, building a fish ladder at Howlett Brook does not rule out dam removal in the future if the opportunity arises – it just means some benefits are realized now, with potentially more in the future.

As you can see – it’s complicated! What is clear is each site is unique. Between ownership, liability factors, and the changing range of fish traveling the river at various points along the river – there is no one-size-fits-all solution for fish passage. Here at IRWA our single sustained mission is to protect and restore the Ipswich River and its watershed. As part of that mission we will continue to do the complex work of restoring fish populations to the Ipswich River one fishway or dam removal at a time.

*Pictured above: Ben Gahagan at the Howlett Brook Fishway in Topsfield. Photo by Alison Colby-Campbell.*

## *Conservation Oriented Email Conversations (continued)*

***Editorial Note: Please save and submit interesting email exchanges that might be of interest for our Newsletter readers! Thanks. –FBJ***

\* \* \* \* \*

***The first item below appeared as a question from our website, and it led to an interesting and informative email exchange which follows.***

Name	Denis Markiewicz
Email *	<a href="mailto:wdenismarkiewicz@gmail.com">wdenismarkiewicz@gmail.com</a>
City of Town *	Ipswich
Would you like to receive our monthly newsletter? *	Yes
Can we help you with something?	I wrote recently asking if folks knew how long there had been a fish ladder at the Willowdale dam. I am under the impression that recently fish ladder work had been done there, perhaps a new fish ladder had been funded. I was thinking that in the proposal for the new fish ladder, sometimes there is historical information given. Maybe in that historical information the dates of early fish ladders at Willowdale would have been mentioned. Do you ever see the proposal for the fish ladder?

**On Tue, Sep 12, 2023 at 6:33 PM James MacDougall**

**<[jm3@me.com](mailto:jm3@me.com)> wrote:**

**The only fish ladder was built by the state in 1925.**

**We maintain the ladder for Greenbelt. They own the ladder, Foote Bros. owns the spillway/dam. Maybe they can help you.**

**From the field,  
Jim MacDougall**

**Topsfield, MA**

## *Conservation Oriented Email Conversations (continued)*

On Sep 28, 2023, at 3:48 PM, Denis Markiewicz <[wdenismarkiewicz@gmail.com](mailto:wdenismarkiewicz@gmail.com)> wrote:

Jim,

With all the discussion about the Ipswich dam, I am curious to understand more about the fish going up the Ipswich river. I have been at the Willowdale dam and seen someone busy with the fish ladder there. And I know that there is a fish ladder at the Mills Dam. I do not know if the ladder at the Mills Dam is at all operative. Are there any fish that go up the river now to spawn, that make the whole trip? I know that the fish ladder at Willowdale is being used, but what fish are those? Do some fish travel back and forth between above and below Willowdale? And I hear about spawning pools or areas. Obviously things have changed since early times. I hear people are interested to improve the spawning areas. But where are these areas located? Right above the Willowdale dam, or in the Ipswich Wildlife Sanctuary, or further up tributary streams? Just trying to get a picture of where the fish have of go.

Thank you for your attention,

Best regards,

Denis Markiewicz

On Thu, Sep 28, 2023 at 4:38 PM James MacDougall <[jm3@me.com](mailto:jm3@me.com)> wrote:

Denis,

The fish ladders along the Ipswich River are for many species of fish. One target group are the river herring. They are made up of Shad, Blue-backed herring and Alewife. Another group would include trout moving either up and down the river to find summer time refugia or in and out of the saltmarsh. Another migratory fish is the sea lamprey. They swim up to gravel/riffles and spawn. And last are American eel that, as adults, swim out to the Sargasso Sea. Their young swim back up the river and live in ponds and slow water along the river. White suckers and fallfish would also use a fish ladder to access spawning areas.

When it comes to the herring, the Shad can not use the existing fish ladders and is hence gone from the river. The Alewife and Blue-back populations are hanging on by a thread. The alewife spawns in ponds and the Blue-back spawn in the river on sandy bottoms. The only pond that is now available for spawning and is historically known to have alewife spawning is Hood Pond. Others have been cut off by barriers like Wenham Lake and Silver Lake. Maybe Middleton Pond.

A study in 2007 showed that one of the herrings hung out at IRWS at Bunker Meadow, plus an area up by Perkins Island and the beginning of the Salem-Beverly canal. No-one has observed any spawning just above the Willowdale dam but there is habitat there.

Lamprey spawn in all the riffles up to the Bostich Dam in Middleton.

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## *Conservation Oriented Email Conversations (continued)*

The old fish ladders function poorly. They concentrate the fish into a single pathway making it easy for predators to pick them off. Many fish just don't like them. Plus the Ipswich Mill dam is inundating potential spawning habitat for smelt which have nearly disappeared from the river.

I hope this helps.

Jim

Jim MacDougall  
Topsfield, MA 01983

Carl Soderland <carlsoderland1971@gmail.com>

To: James MacDougall, Neil Shea

Cc: Ben Meade, Fred Jennings

Thu, Sep 28 at 4:53 PM

Great response Jim. It is clear that a lot of education about fish ladders needs to be done. There is a lot of misinformation and misunderstanding about fish ladders from citizen experts. Denis' questions are good ones and your response excellent. Maybe Fred could put your response in the news letter. I am also going to try to write something educational about fish passageways but.....I am no expert and I will pass it by you for your input.

Thanks,

Carl

## *Conservation News Reports and Items of Interest*

**NOAA article: "In Search of Atlantic Northern Shrimp"  
28 September 2023**

**[https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/science-blog/search-atlantic-northern-shrimp?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=govdelivery](https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/science-blog/search-atlantic-northern-shrimp?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery)**

**SIGN UP FOR THE PIE RIVERS NEWSLETTER!**

**<https://pie-rivers.org/news-events/e-news/>**

## Conservation Oriented Email Conversations (continued)

### Yahoo Mail -- Fwd: Mousam River Clean Up

Carl Soderland <carlsoderland1971@gmail.com>  
To: Ben Meade, Fred Jennings, James MacDougall  
Tue, Oct 3 at 11:32 AM

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Eldredge Bros. Fly Shop** <[info@eldredgeflyshop.com](mailto:info@eldredgeflyshop.com)>  
Date: Tue, Oct 3, 2023 at 9:11 AM  
Subject: Mousam River Clean Up  
To: <[carlsoderland1971@gmail.com](mailto:carlsoderland1971@gmail.com)>

Fred et al:

Unfortunately or fortunately, I will be away with Diane in Montana,\* a delayed COVID trip with some fishing, on Sunday, Oct 22 but would have loved to participate in this cleanup. This would be good to put in our newsletter for all interested.

Thank you for stepping up to do the newsletter. What came out last night was timing and people need a longer lead time to plan. Mid month with news for the next months events plus any future scheduled events would be great. Also, it would be good to include links to Concord Outfitters programs. All help excite the masses.

Thanks,

DrC



*Hi Folks,*

*The Sebago Chapter of Trout Unlimited is sponsoring a Discovery Day and Riverbank Cleanup of the Mousam River on Sunday, 10/22/23. Participants will meet at Rogers Pond Park in Kennebunk at 10 AM, where a brief discussion on the state of the Mousam River will be provided by Greg LaBonte from Maine FlyGuys and John Burrows from ASF. Following the discussion, volunteers will spread out to clean the accessible riverbank both upstream and downstream of Rogers Pond.*

*For the cleanup, please dress appropriately and bring a pair of gloves. Other cleaning supplies (such as bags) will be provided. You can earn a raffle ticket for every bag of trash collected for the chance to win gear and swag!*

*Please join us for this community event -- we look forward to seeing you there.*

*\* I'm sure that all of us will be quite sympathetic to Carl's plight described here... --FBJ*

# *Spencer Belson Report on 2023 TU Teen Summit*

## CURRENT ANGLER

### 2023 TU Teen Summit

By Spencer Belson



It was a scene straight out of the apocalypse: thick coils of barbed wire surrounded the crumbling hilltop, shards of dry, discarded stone crunching under our feet. 900 feet below, a highly toxic pool filled with water the color of the Statue of Liberty silently melted away at the hillside. A siren wailed as our group stepped through a gate in the fence, then a rifle blast echoed through the mile-long gorge. The remnants of old mine elevators stood watch over us like iron giants. Unfazed, our highly knowledgeable tour guide, Pat Cunneen, sarcastically exclaimed, “Welcome to the idyllic Berkeley Pit!”

#### **The Berkeley Pit: a Lesson in Disaster**

It was the third day of the 2023 [Trout Unlimited Teen Summit](#). From our home base at Georgetown Lake in Anaconda, Montana, the group of 24 passionate youth fly fishers and conservationists made the trip to Butte to tour the Berkeley Mine Pit, one of the largest Superfund sites in the nation. After days in the pristine Montana wilderness, the run-down mines in the greater Butte area came as a bit of a shock to the system. The shock was a necessary one though, as it demonstrated just how devastatingly barren an ecosystem can become when we don’t care for it.

In 2016, a massive flock of migrating snow geese landed on the “lake” that has filled in the pit. After just a short time of exposure, an estimated 4,000 geese were killed by burns from the pit’s toxic water. That highly toxic mine runoff is responsible for the demise of what was once one of the most fertile and biodiverse regions in the western United States, the Clark Fork watershed. The incident with the geese was just one of countless environmental disasters that have ravaged the greater Clark Fork ecosystem, making it uninhabitable for most fish and other aquatic species for decades. Ironically, all of the fishing we did during the Summit took place in the Clark Fork watershed, a testament to the resiliency of nature and the power of environmentalism.

## *Spencer Belson Report on 2023 TU Teen Summit (continued)*



Sawyer's Silver Bow cutthroat



Spencer's Flint Creek brown

The battle to mitigate the mines' damage to the surrounding landscape has been ongoing for over 40 years. There was a year-long stint between the pit's closure in 1982 and its designation as a Superfund site in 1983 when the pit sat festering like a centuries-old gash in Butte's once-unspoiled mountains. It quickly filled with groundwater, creating the blue-green "lake" we see today. Early instances of dying migratory birds, even before the snow geese massacre, sounded the alarm on the measures necessary to protect wildlife. The sirens and rifle blasts we heard walking in are part of a program to deter birds from the pit. Since 2019, water has been [pumped](#) out of the pit and treated, then discharged into nearby Silver Bow Creek.

Our tour of the Berkeley Pit was just one of many eye-opening activities we participated in during our five days at the Summit. As such a vast state with so much variety in landscape and culture, there was plenty for us to explore across southwest Montana. Coming from the lowlands of New England, I was amazed by the immense beauty we were surrounded by every day. Anywhere we went, snow-capped peaks were always visible in every direction. Sometimes the mountainsides were blanketed in a thick carpet of conifers, but more often they were wide-open grasslands, opening up to bare rock at higher elevations. Wildlife was prevalent, from the moose and bald eagles that frequented our camp to the mule deer and coyotes we saw on our commutes.

And, of course, there were plenty of fish. As many devoted anglers are already aware, Montana is famous for discontinuing the stocking of its rivers in 1974. This means that every fish we caught in moving water was of stream-born origin. While most of the state's creeks and rivers naturally support clean water, diverse habitat, and healthy fish populations, there are some that needed a little TLC to get there.

## *Spencer Belson Report on 2023 TU Teen Summit (continued)*

### **Exploring & Fishing Silver Bow Creek**

For instance, [Silver Bow Creek](#), which is the major drainage of the Butte mines, was (surprise, surprise) severely degraded by toxic mine runoff. Before the arrival of mining pioneers, the Salish Tribe used to describe the river as “the place where you shoot them in the head” (the “them” being westslope cutthroat trout, bull trout, and mountain whitefish). But then for over 100 years, it was essentially treated as an industrial sewer for the mines, the health of the watershed completely disregarded. Silver Bow became fishless, and the downstream Clark Fork nearly met the same fate.

In 2008, after years of restoration work, a meager “couple of” westslope cutthroat and brook trout were found near the mouth of German Gulch Creek. But to fisheries biologists who had spent much of their careers waiting for this very moment, it was a massive success. Since then, over 23 miles of the creek’s riparian zone and stream channel have been remodeled and restored. Fish numbers have slowly rebounded, to the point where our group was able to fish the creek with some limited success. While I managed to fool a couple of small cutthroats and a brook trout, it was my buddy Sawyer’s 14-inch cutthroat that proved the fishery was at its healthiest in decades.

### **Building Dams for Conservation**

There are also some waters with clean water and intact riparian zones that rank as decent fisheries, but lack the diversity and prevalence of fish-holding habitat to make them truly impressive. On one such water, a tiny mountain stream no more than four feet across in most places, our group completed a service project to improve fish habitat. Our objective was to construct a series of analog beaver dams – essentially man-made versions of the real thing. Beaver dams not only play an important role in creating deep pools for aquatic wildlife refuge, but also in spreading and cooling water. The dams force water underground, which continuously seeps back into the stream as springs. During dry spells, this spring seepage is crucial in maintaining a healthy flow level and cool water temperatures.

The group broke up into crews of four or five, each striving to win the unspoken competition for the “best” beaver dam. Tess Scanlon, Trout Unlimited’s Rock Creek Project Coordinator, along with field technicians from the US Forest Service, taught us the basics of building these simple dams. We began by weaving willow and alder branches through hardwood stakes already secured in the ground. To fortify the branches, we wedged in sediment and stones. The result was a tightly-knit dam that backed up the water, but remained permeable to fish and other aquatic life. As we worked, we’d often spook small pods of cutthroats playing in the pools, reminding me of the brookies back home. By the time we finished, many of these trout skirted through the pools we had just created like building inspectors, validating the integrity of our work.

### **World-Class Fishing**

As a group of diehard anglers, the highlight of the trip for most of us was the world-class fishing southwest Montana had to offer. On the first night, the group headed down to the shores of Camp Watanopa and Georgetown Lake. The fish in the lake were the only stockers we’d see for the next four days, but they sure didn’t act like the pellet pigs back home. Though I hooked and promptly broke off a nice rainbow on a Bionic Ant, it was my buddy Lucas who managed the only “real” fish that night, a chunky 18-inch leech eater. As the sun set, we had a blast messing around with an endless school of fingerling rainbows and watching our backs for “the locals”, a family of moose.

The next day, after finishing the analog beaver dam project earlier than expected, we enjoyed some surprise fishing time on nearby Flint Creek. While most freestones in New England are rocky and high-gradient, Flint was much more of a low-gradient meadow stream. Getting a good drift was made slightly more challenging by the late-runoff flows, but the resident browns were mostly happy to eat a well-presented Chubby or nymph tight to the cut banks.

## *Spencer Belson Report on 2023 TU Teen Summit (continued)*

As already mentioned, the third day had us fishing Silver Bow within the city limits of Butte. While I initially discredited the river as being artificial and human-engineered much like the Swift River in Massachusetts, the wild fish and natural setting changed my mind. It is true that the creek faced some rough times that required a great deal of human intervention to fix; however, the native plants, restored floodplain, and natural meander helped it fit right in with all of the other fisheries we explored.

On our final full day, the group headed to the Middle Fork of Rock Creek, a trip that had been talked up throughout the entire week. Thankfully, it lived up to the hype. The fishing started out a little slow, with the occasional small cutthroat eating our foam bugs. But as the light began to fade and the temperature dropped, the most epic hatch I have ever experienced was just getting started. Meaty green drakes popped through the surface en-masse, spurring a feeding frenzy from the fish below.

My fishing partner, Benton, and I settled into a long run chock-full of hungry cutties. Fish from eight to eighteen inches erupted across the surface, engulfing any unassuming insects in their path. I had fun playing with plenty of eight-to-thirteen-inchers, losing the occasional fourteen or sixteen when it shot downstream into the raging current.

Benton, on the other hand, seemed far more adept at landing his larger quarry. His only two fish that day were both beautifully-colored westslope cutthroat trout. The belly of his second was so fiery orange that it would rival any autumn brook trout. Both fish came up to eat a small Chubby Chernobyl, the same one I had purchased at last year's Summit in North Carolina, and that had caught my [biggest Swift River brown](#) last July. Call it a lucky fly, I guess!

### **Forever Friendships**

By the final day, our group had become a tight-knit family. By far, the best part of the Summit is the connections you make. As all of us have expressed, it's not easy finding other teens as passionate about fly fishing and conservation. Through the Summit, we have an incredibly rare opportunity to meet other kids that share the same interests and experiences. Though all of us may live in different states across the country, my buddies from [last year's Summit](#) and I continue to chat nearly every day. Truthfully, the five days of fishing and conservation together turns into lifelong friendships.

So the next time you hear someone complain about our sport being filled with a bunch of old, white men, remember there is a diverse generation of young anglers looking to prove that narrative wrong. And if you're one of those young anglers looking to connect with other teens that share your passion, feel free to reach out. Next year's Summit will be here before we know it – and I can't wait!



Benton's Rock Creek Cutthroat



The Whole TU Teen Summit Gang

# *Miles Cobb's Great Fly Fishing Adventures!*

Miles Cobb <milescobb@hotmail.com>

To: Fred Jennings

Sat, Oct 14 at 4:37 PM

My lifelong fishing hobby has slowly pivoted from conventional fishing to fly fishing. The casting process and focus on form has turned into my own type of meditational yoga. It's become wonderful at distracting me from the organized chaos of everyday life. To further my journey towards (enlightenment?) improving my novice fly casting ability, my wife got me a gift card for a half day trip with a Massachusetts based fly fishing guide, Brian Lynch from Pheasant Tail Tours.

In previous years I'd spent a couple nice fall days on the Fife Brook section of the Deerfield River and my goal was to set up a trip with Brian out there to educate me on that stretch.

The night before my scheduled trip Brian and I touched base. He told me he wanted to pass on my desired destination. "The fall stocking hasn't happened yet so the fish in there have been getting beat up quite a while. I'm gonna take you somewhere where there are no crowds and the fish haven't seen people for months. They're gonna be stupid and easy to catch!

I was disappointed about the location change but decided to put my faith in the expert. I will not name it out of respect for him.

I set my alarm for 5am but like a child on Christmas I woke up about 4. I didn't even bother trying to go back to sleep, I was up. With my extra time allotment I ate breakfast at home, then hit the road for my lengthy drive in the dark, excited and digging into my podcast library which of course focuses on fishing.

After a few hours and a state border, my sleep deprivation started to let doubt about the day creep in. Daylight was showing me a dreary, windy day. Was the unexpected spot going to be worth this round trip drive and tank of gas? Will the vacation day from work be worth it? Did I pack enough warm clothes? And if I don't catch any fish what stories can I come up with to make my family think the trip was still worthwhile?

I stopped at the gas station where we were meeting, got coffee #3 and breakfast #2, and met Brian. He took me to the spot, launched his drift boat and as we paddled across the empty lake he told me about his expectations for the day. The salmon in this lake were starting to stage for their fall run up a feeder river. He believed the brook trout were about to spawn too. Given this, he wanted to fish the area of the river mouth primarily with egg patterns. He tied on a dropper rig consisting of an egg suspended under a Chubby Chernobyl. I shared with him that, believe it or not, this was going to be my first time using a 2 fly rig. Also, I'd never caught a landlocked salmon so if I landed one it would be my first. I've got a lifetime goal of catching 100 different fish species and it would be a great day if I could add #63.

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## *Miles Cobb's Great Fly Fishing Adventures! (continued)*

It only took about 10 minutes of casting into the current before I leveled up. The dry fly made a slow-motion delay, as if it was snagging on the bottom, but I set the hook anyway and the rod bent over. "There's your salmon!" Brian shouted as we saw silver flash under the riffles. That first fish felt great and I was so happy to get my first photo and release of the day.

I worked the riffles thoroughly and got a couple more slow-motion delays, but this time with fruitless hook sets. We dropped farther into the lake, moved to a deep channel that paralleled the shore, and switched to an olive wooly bugger on a sink tip line. Buggers are my favorite fly, I think of them as the plastic worm of fly fishing – doesn't imitate anything in particular but will interest pretty much any fish that swims. I enjoyed talking to Brian about his job and hearing his views on trout management, trout sets versus strip sets, and I definitely enjoyed casting his Thomas & Thomas 5 weight rod – a "slight" step up from the entry level Cabela's White River 5 weight I still use.

The wind switched from coming from our right to coming from our left, so he let us get pushed back towards the river outlet, moving against its current purely from the wind. He replaced the hopper/dropper rig with a stone fly nymph and a mop fly combo, suspended under an indicator.

This setup did the trick! The taps or outright "bobber down!" came steadily. I landed a rainbow trout, a brown trout, and a fallfish (I appreciate every fish I catch from a fly rod). I also landed another salmon which was just as memorable as the first – I got a few taps but wasn't able to set the hook. I assumed that the fish had learned its lesson so I reeled in to make another cast, and just as my flies came into view and approached boatside I realized there was a fish in hot pursuit. I had time to blurt out in surprise "Is that a salmon?!" before it struck and hooked itself. The episode was just like the many times I've fished bobbers and worms with kids, only this time it was a salmon trying to commit suicide instead of a panfish. "I told you they'd be stupid!" Brian exclaimed. "They've been in 80 feet of water all summer and don't remember what flies and boats look like!"

Finally it was time to head back to the ramp. As he rowed the sky started to clear and the sun came out. Upon our return to the ramp, he gifted me the egg/Chernobyl combo and told me to head upriver to try some spots on my own. I asked what he thought about the chances were for a couple of flies I had that I'd tied myself..... golden retrievers? "Yes! If you can get back to the river outlet on foot those will be great for the salmon."

Encouraged by Brian's enthusiasm and the sun I went to the spot he directed me to by a bridge crossing. I pushed my way through the brush, found a good rock perch and cast my new dropper rig out into the clear water.

The most memorable fish of the day was the one I didn't land..... as my rig drifted a shape detached from the bottom. Not huge but still a fish! I watched the brown trout's tail pulse methodically, timing its rise to the surface to meet the Chernobyl before it reached the tailout of the pool. It didn't "sip" the way I've read about in picturesque fly fishing magazine stories. But watching it eat after that slow and steady ascent – it made my day. I lost the fish but I didn't care.

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## *Miles Cobb's Great Fly Fishing Adventures! (continued)*

I landed a total of 4 brown trout, 3 on the egg. The last brown hit the Chernobyl so stealthily that I thought the splash was actually the egg getting hit so hard that was abruptly pulled under.

Satisfied and knowing my clock to get home for dinner was ticking I headed towards another access point that was adjacent to the lake outlet. Not finding a good approach but not wanting to waste more time I recklessly charged down the steep embankment and managed to stay upright. I positioned myself in an open area, clipped off my guide's rig and tied on one of my homemade retrievers.

First cast, bang! I had my third salmon of the day and the first on my own creation. After netting, photographing and releasing I thought about quitting while I was ahead – how often can you get one cast, one fish? But as most of you know it's not always about catching the fish. It was the end of a tough but successful day, the sun was still out, and I still had a half hour to kill. I waded the areas we'd fished from the boat, hooked one more fish but lost it, and decided it was time.

The drive home felt much faster than the drive there, and I played music instead of podcasts to match my mood. How can I focus on listening and learning when I was reliving the day? 5 fish with Brian, 4 on my own – one of my most successful fly-fishing days, and in less-than-ideal weather conditions.



# *Chett Walsh's Great Montana Fishing Adventure*

## **Pix for TU Newsletter**

Chett Walsh <cwash@buildhealthinternational.org>

To: Fred Jennings

Wed, Sep 27 at 9:53 PM

Hi Fred, just came back from a few weeks in MT, lots of bows & cutty's. Fished the Spring Creeks in Livingston, many sections of Yellowstone in & out of park. Hit lots of feeder streams & the Madison, Jefferson & all over the Gallatin River its tributaries.

Great weather out there, they seemed to have recovered from that devastating flood a year ago, it was nice to disconnect & be in lots of areas with no cell service.

The health & quality of the fish there was only surpassed by the environment and scenery. Very tricky devils to land on #20 & #22 barbless midges, I netted about 25-30% of hook-ups and fought & lost the rest, some for 10-12mins on 6X so every surge was a nail biter as to: a catch or an escape! Many fish have flies on their jaws!

That's why they call it "fishing....not catching"

Later,

Chett Walsh



***That's All, Folks!***

*I hope you've all enjoyed this issue of the NETU Newsletter...*

***Fred Jennings, editor***