

TROUT UNLIMITED OF SOUTHWESTERN VERMONT
May 16th, 2006 Chapter Meeting MINUTES

Attendees

Officers

Eric Rickstad	President
Frank Nelson	Treasurer
Peter Bellamy	Secretary
Steve Hemkens	Director
David Carmona	Director

Members

Don Kinney
Alan Edmunds
Joe Phillips

Guests

Kevin Dean (Clearwater TU)

Minutes

Welcomed visitor, Kevin Dean, from the Clearwater TU chapter, NY.

Open discussion and review of the State's proposal -- "**Interim Plan for the Management of the Batten Kill Trout Fishery** (Draft, April 17, 2006)", by Ken Cox, VT Fish & Wildlife Department

Discussed the state's proposal, specifically as it pertains to the stocking of 1000 sterile rainbow trout into the lower Battenkill.

In a recent meeting between TU board members and proposal author, Ken Cox, it was revealed the issue of stocking has been included in the fishery management plan for the Battenkill primarily due to the urging of a vocal minority.

It was suggested that this voice, the 'squeaky wheel' in this case, is not satisfied with the findings of the recent report on the brown trout population decline (2000-2004), that the solution to restoring this wild trout fishery is by restoring the cover for the fish, and allowing them to recover and rebuild their numbers naturally. Instead, it is believed that this vocal minority wishes to be able to 'catch & keep' trout from the Battenkill immediately, rather than wait another some-odd years for the fishery to recover naturally.

In order to prevent this stocking from tacking place, and to instead allow the wild trout population to recover naturally in conjunction with the planned & future habitat restoration efforts that should continue to be the logical next steps following up on the state's five year scientific research into the brown trout population decline, our next steps are as follows:

The basic points of our position statement, as it stands, are as follows:

- The state of Vermont is responsible for managing the Battenkill River as a wild trout fishery. Stocking rainbow trout is in direct conflict with this responsibility.
- Stocking rainbows goes against the state's own biological and scientific findings that the wild trout in the Battenkill NEED every bit of cover they can get.
- Rainbows are susceptible to disease and can pass disease to other trout and potentially decimate wild populations.
- Stocking trout over wild trout has proven to result in fewer numbers of wild trout.
- Rainbows migrate and may go into our prized wild brook trout tributaries, upsetting the balance of wild brook trout in the Roaring Branch, Lye Brook, Bourne Brook, and others.

- A return of healthy numbers of WILD brown and brook trout will have more of a beneficial economic impact on the area.
- Anglers will return again to catch the legendary trout of the Kill. Will they return and travel from afar to fish for 11" stocked rainbows they can catch in their home waters, or anywhere else? Not likely.
- The return of cover in the river and especially along the river banks will help flood control and slow bank erosion that leads to loss of property along the river.

This position statement will be finalized over the next few days and posted on the chapter web site and distributed via email to chapter members. We welcome your comments and contributions to help make this as complete, accurate and detailed as possible

In June, there will be a public forum to discuss this proposal, which will most likely be held in the Manchester, VT area, and we will need all members to attend and voice disapproval of the state's plan as it stands in order to defeat the proposed stocking. To reiterate, we will need MAXIMUM ATTENDANCE at this upcoming June meeting to defeat the proposed stocking of the Battenkill.

We have several petitions in circulation, including a few hard-copies, and also have an online petition posted on our chapter website for people to sign up in opposition to the proposed stocking. We will forward more petitions to chapter members so that they can gather signatures from friends and co-workers.

Other items to do:

We will draft and post a form letter on the chapter web site, which can be printed and filled in or simply cut-and-pasted into a new document, which can then be mailed and/or faxed to the various contacts listed on the website (specifically, the VT Fish & Wildlife Commissioner, Wayne Laroche; Eric Palmer, Director of Fisheries, VT; and Ken Cox, VT Fisheries Biologist).

The mailing addresses, phone numbers, email addresses, and fax numbers will be posted on the chapter website for these and other local and state representatives.

We need to become a louder 'squeaky wheel' than the one which caused the inclusion of the stocking line-item in the state's proposal and we can not do this without all members picking up the phone, signing one of the petitions, writing letters and emails, and most importantly, attending the upcoming meeting in June. Date to be determined.

We will also be writing op-ed pieces to the various local papers (Bennington, Manchester, Rutland) in order to spread the word on this issue and educate on the importance of wild trout versus hatchery trout in the Battenkill.

Finally, we are also working with national TU to get a link/article from the nation TU site to our chapter site so that we can increase the number of signatures on our petition, and increase the volume and intensity of our opposition.

Notes taken by Peter Bellamy.