



The Evening

# Hatch

The Newsletter of the Michigan Fly Fishing Club

November 2023

## Regulating Our Steelhead



*The NRC is considering steelhead harvest restrictions and that has Michigan Trout Unlimited concerned.*

Michigan's Natural Resources Commission is considering possible restrictions to steelhead daily harvest limits for specific segments of rivers. The proposal is causing quite a stir. Right now, the daily bag limit is three. The change would mean anglers could only harvest one steelhead on several rivers.

Outside the fishing world, the amendment seems small. But inside, there's a heated debate among anglers about whether it's the right decision. Read what Michigan Trout Unlimited says about the proposed changes on **page 2**.

MFFC member Keith Burba is a coho fanatic and loves catching them in Southeast Alaska. Learn why silver salmon are Burba's Alaskan gold beginning on **page 5**.

Charlie Craven, fly-tying columnist for *Fly Fisherman Magazine*, tied his first fly when he was eight years old. He hasn't quit since.

Catch Jim DuFresne's interview with the noted tyer at his fly shop in Arvada, Colorado, on **page 7**. Then check out five of Craven's favorite fly recipes on **page 8**. If you want to tie any of them, just scan the adjacent QR codes to link to his videos.

Drew YoungeDyke, the national communications director for Trout Unlimited and a Michigan-based fly angler, wrote a beautiful piece on wandering the Western U.P., to check out TU projects and catching a few brook trout along the way. You can read it on **pages 9-10**.

Finally, Jim Aitken needs a few good men and women. Actually, he needs 68 of them to help out at this winter's Ultimate Fishing Show and Outdoorama. What a wonderful way to spend part of your weekend at the MFFC tying booth helping kids learn to tie a wooly bugger.

Go to **page 4** to learn how to sign up.

## Michigan Fly Fishing Club Calendar

**12/6/23** Speaker Meeting; Todd Schotts, *Fly Tying. Then-Now-Forever*

**12/13/23** Board Meeting, Virtual

**12/20/23** Activity Meeting; Club Garage Sale

**1/10/24** Speaker Meeting, TBA

**1/11-14/24** Ultimate Fishing Show, Suburban Collection Showplace, Novi

**1/17/24** Board Meeting, Virtual

**1/24/24** Activity Meeting, Spence Vanderhoof, Fly Tying

**2/7/24** Speaker Meeting, TBA

**2/14/24** Board Meeting, Virtual

**2/18-23/24** White River Trip, Cotter, AR

**2/21/24** Activity Meeting, Tom Sewruck

**2/23-25/24** Outdoorama, Suburban Collection Showplace, Novi

**3/6/24** Activities Meeting, Scott Freeburg

**3/9-10/24** Midwest Fly Fishing Expo, Macomb Community College

**3/13/24** Board Meeting, Virtual

**3/20/24** Speaker Meeting, TBA

**4/3/24** Speaker Meeting, TBA

**4/10/24** Board Meeting, Virtual

**4/17/24** Activity Meeting

**5/1/24** Activity Meeting

**5/6-8/24** Old Member's Outing, Wawa Sum Lodge, Grayling

**5/8-11/24** Dick Schot New Member's Outing, Wawa Sum Lodge, Grayling

**5/8/24** Board Meeting, Virtual

**5/15/24** MFFC Club Banquet, Italian American Banquet Center, Livonia

Meetings are held at Clarenceville Middle School, 20210 Middlebelt, Livonia.

# NRC Considering Steelhead Harvest Restrictions

**By Michigan Trout Unlimited**

The Michigan Natural Resources Commission (NRC) is considering possible restrictions to steelhead daily harvest limits for specific segments of rivers.

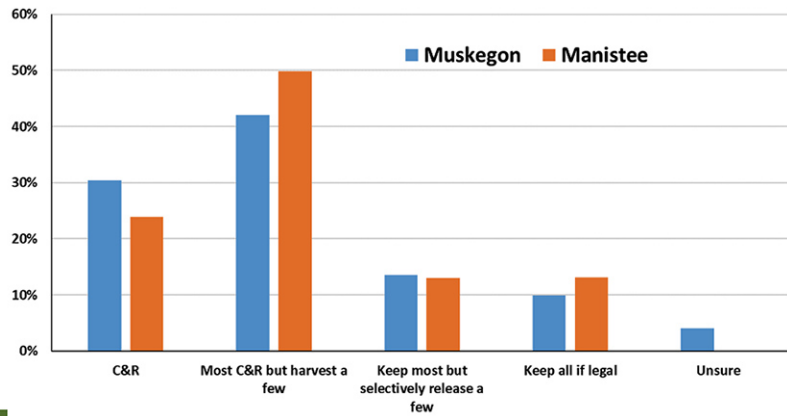
One fish per day bag limits, year-round on specific river segments constitutes the bulk of the proposed changes, but a different bag limit for wild versus stocked fish for the Pere Marquette River is also proposed.

Most of the debates of the proposed changes have focused solely on whether this is fair to harvest-oriented steelhead anglers, rather than a thorough and meaningful review of its need for steelhead populations.

Michigan Trout Unlimited has attempted to consolidate and share available information on our steelhead fisheries in hopes that interested steelhead anglers can be as fully informed on the subject as possible (scan the QR code for an indepth report on the issue).

While Michigan's monitoring and understanding of steelhead fisheries is lacking, available infor-

## Personal Approach to Steelhead Fishing – Creel Survey



mation does depict a declined fishery with reason for concerns. TU's philosophy includes the notion, "take care of the fish, and the fishing will take care of itself."

In recognition of the significant concerns present over steelhead fishery declines, TU is supportive of judicious restrictions on the harvest of steelhead and urges the DNR to develop more robust monitoring and research efforts needed for managing our steelhead fisheries.

If you are interested in steelhead and this topic, we urge you to:

Scan the QR code and read the document we have assembled with background information and the Bridge Magazine article on the issue.

Consider mailing your opinions to the NRC at [NRC@michigan.gov](mailto:NRC@michigan.gov).



MTU Background Information



Bridge Magazine Article

## The President's Message...

# And The Survey Says: We're Doing Good Things

By now I am sure everyone has noticed the Club survey accompanying the annual membership dues mailing.

The survey will now become annual as well -- you will see it each fall. Your feedback allows Club leadership to quantify members' opinions and input.

We have already received quite a bit of exciting feedback, everything from a big circle with a smiley face to a diatribe about things to be fixed.

We have learned Club members look forward to casting in the gym, get frustrated with technical broad-

casting issues (don't we all!), suggest new and interesting outings (Yes please!), love things that we have to offer, are interested



Sybil Hunter

in volunteering, seek information on specific issues (outings, email, conservation), and share their general input about meetings.

Going into the holidays, follow-up calls will be rolling out. Your voice is being heard and valued.

The bottom line is that your input matters!



Thank you for taking the time to fill out the survey and return it. If you didn't this year, there is always next year!

This is a dynamic way to serve our membership better. Can we "fix" everything? Realistically, probably not but your feedback helps us strive for excellence.

Together, *we are* the MFFC. Tight wraps and happy whip finishes,  
Sybil

## Michigan Fly Fishing Club Board of Directors Meeting October 11, 2023

### Roll Call

Meeting called to order 7:37 p.m.

*Present:* S. Hunter; K. Lipp; J. Deputat; B. Green; J. Aukee J. Aitken; N. Tabaka, J. Eriksson; J. Bada.

*Absent:* B. Strachan.

**Approval of Agenda** – Agenda from 10/11/23 approved.

**Approval of Minutes** – Meeting-minutes from 9/13/23 approved with an amendment.

### Officer's Report

**President:** S. Hunter

- Kathy Oehring to go to Michigan Gaming Commission Training in Monroe.
- Whatsapp encrypted software application to connect with other fly fishers is set up to start in September.
- Keep The U.P. Wild – we show up on their website as a supporting coalition. 400 organizations have joined.
- Contacted by someone to make wooden barrettes and another vendor with fly fishing clothing, passed their contact information on to Joe Sprys.
- Old member outing cost TBD.

**Vice President:** K. Lipp

- Approval of Reports – per Robert's Rule Board minutes are approved, all other reports are accepted by the presiding officer.
- Timely posting Board meeting info to Board drive – EOD Friday prior to the upcoming Board Meeting.
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Board Meeting.

- Expo no price increase, Joe reaching out to vendors.
- Kevin in needs someone to head up security for the expo.

**Treasurer:** B. Green

- Current month's treasurer's report presented and approved by board.
- We are still tracking to our forecasted budget.

**Corresp. Secretary:** J. Bada

- 4 eblasts; 368 contacts; 68% open rate.
- Upcoming speakers: November Cleyo Harris, DNR Biologist; December confirming availability; January either Josh Greenberg or Gates Lodge staff; February Lance Evans or Gates Lodge staff; March TBD; April TBD; May banquet speakers Dirk Fischbach; June TBD; July TBD; August TBD
- Any assistance required?

**Membership:** J. Deputat

- 508 renewal letters mailed July 24, 2023. 407 current active members. 47 former members 2022. 54 former members 2023.
- Member surveys mailed to 407 current members. 129 surveys returned to date.
- As of October 8, 2023, 288 members paid by check (88%)

**New Business**

- Jerry Deputat presented his membership survey findings

**Old Business**

Nothing to report.

**Adjournment: 9:09 p.m.**

## 2023-2024 Officers

**President:**  
Sybil Hunter  
*president@mffc.org*

**Vice President:**  
Kevin Lipp  
*kjlipp@gmail.com*

**Corresponding Secretary:**  
Jon Bada  
*correspondence@mffc.org*

**Recording Secretary:**  
John Eriksson  
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**Treasurer**  
Barry Green  
*treasurer@mffc.org*

**Membership**  
Jerry Deputat  
*membership@mffc.org*

**Immediate Past President:**  
Bruce Strachan  
*bruced0402@gmail.com*

## At-Large Directors

**Jim Aitken**  
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**John Aukee**  
*j.aukee@yahoo.com*

**Norm Tabaka**  
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## Hatch Editors

**Sybil Hunter** Submissions  
*evening.hatch.mffc@gmail.com*

**Jim DuFresne** Production  
*kidven@aol.com*

## Webmaster

**Sybil Hunter** Club Webmaster  
*sybilsvpemail@gmail.com*





Where's the head? Project Healing Waters-Ann Arbor spent three days fishing the Muskegon River in October as guests of OakHeart Lodge. This Chinook was enticed by an egg-patterned fly and was so big the lens wasn't wide enough to include its head in the photo. MFFC is one of the sponsors for this chapter of Project Healing Waters.

## Be a Volunteer & Spend a Day Teaching & Tying Woolly Buggers

By Jim Aitken

We are just getting into fall, so it is time to start thinking about helping out at the Ultimate Fishing Show and the Outdoorama.

The Ultimate show begins Jan. 11, 2024 at the Suburban Collection Showplace in Novi. The signup sheet is now activated and can be found at [volunteersignup.org/H4ERD](http://volunteersignup.org/H4ERD).

We need volunteers to fill 68 time slots to help kids tie a woolly buggie and to welcome visitors and promote the MFFC and our upcoming EXPO next March. Contact me ([dznyvm@comcast.net](mailto:dznyvm@comcast.net)) or Dave Nowicki if you have any questions.

### Ultimate Fishing Show

**When:** January 11, 2024 @ 8:00 am - January 14, 2024 @ 5:00 pm

**Where:** Suburban Collection Showplace, 46100 Grand River Ave, Novi, MI

**Summary:** As part of outreach and education for the MFFC, we staff an activity booth at The Ultimate Fishing Show where Club members teach young participants to tie

## DNR Stocks a Million Fish in 2023

More than 269 tons of fish, eight different species, plus one hybrid, and a total of 9,335,410 individual fish – it all adds up to successful spring and summer stocking efforts by the Michigan DNR and some great fall fishing for anglers.

Stocking is no small task. Over the course of 2,233 hours and more than 89,000 miles, DNR fisheries crews in 17 specialized trucks took 375 trips to stock fish at 705 sites.

"We had excellent spring and summer stocking seasons that will bring significant benefits and fishing opportunities to Michigan anglers," said Ed Eisch, DNR fish production manager. "With the hard work and dedication of our staff, healthy, high-quality fish were reared and delivered to stocking sites in excellent condition. The numbers produced and stocked were right on target for most areas."

The number and type of fish produced varies by the hatchery, as each location's ability to rear fish depends on the source and temperature of the rearing water. In Michigan, there are six state and two cooperative hatcheries that work together to reduce the species, strain, and size of fish needed for fisheries managers. These fish must then be delivered and stocked at a specific time and location to ensure their success.



A DNR fish-stocking truck near the mouth of the Swan River in Presque Isle County where 385,765 fish were stocked in 2023.

Woolly Buggers for fishing, and guide them through fly rod casting on the pond. Volunteers needed.

### Outdoorama

**When:** February 22, 2024 @ 8:00 am - February 25, 2024 @ 5:00 pm

**Where:** Suburban Collection Showplace, 46100 Grand River Ave, Novi, MI

**Summary:** As part of outreach and education for the MFFC, we staff an activity booth at Outdoorama where Club members teach young participants to tie Woolly Buggers for fishing and guide them through fly rod casting on the pond. Volunteers needed.

## Welcome Newest MFFC Members

Updated new members since October edition of *The Evening Hatch*. Contact information is available on the current membership roster.

Lynda Dowding, Jackson  
Sophia Brueckner, Howell



# Silver Salmon *Worth Their Weight in Alaskan Gold*

**I** By Keith Burba  
I recently completed my sixth trip to Alaska fishing for coho salmon and am already planning next year's trip.

Fishing for cohos hasn't always been at the top of my fish list. I haven't caught one in the Great Lakes since I was in grade school, aboard a Lake Michigan charter with my father, in between bouts of losing my breakfast. I had no idea what was going on until someone yelled "FISH ON!"

Some 40 years later, I found myself in Alaska for the first time, battling *Oncorhynchus kisutch* once again, but this coho was in the interior of Alaska. It could be argued successfully that my salmon knowledge



Keith Burba

was no further along on the Talkeetna River than it was from that day on the Lake Michigan charter. Yet, there I was landing coho. That second, and more successful, outing transitioned into a passion for Alaskan coho.

In 2016, I headed to Alaska for that fateful August trip and followed my usual pre-trip scouting ritual. I scoped water options with digital mapping software, coordinated lodging options, and found some places in Anchorage that looked "fishy." When I landed, I picked up some local knowledge from local fly shops around Anchorage. That certainly would have helped...if I was fishing in Anchorage.

As it turns out, I was 100% correct on the "fishiness" of that creek I spied right behind my strategically chosen hotel. It was loaded with spawned-out sockeyes. I was failing at this fishing adventure.

I had to draw up another plan -- and fast! I checked out Ship Creek in downtown Anchorage and immediately knew this popular fishery wasn't for me. It was shoulder-to-shoulder "combat" fishing, not the experience I was seeking.

I was frantically calling through my contact list of friends, co-workers, and relatives to get my fishing plan back on track when one guide knew "a guy" who had an open seat in his boat for a week-



Not the largest Alaskan salmon but cohos are beasts.

end float.

I packed a bag, made a hasty lodging reservation, and 24 hours later found myself with a spin-fishing guide and some of his cruise ship clients in the Mat-Su Valley north of Anchorage. I had no idea where we were going, but he was giving me a lift to where he was taking his clients, and that was all I needed to know.

The ride up the Talkeetna River at daybreak was similar to riding on liquid concrete. I quietly wondered "How could there fish be here?" I was told it takes a coho four or five days to make it that far upriver from the Pacific Ocean. After 30 minutes or so, we beached the boat at the mouth of a gin-clear creek, where luck appeared to be on my side.

I was excited to see hundreds of fish right at my feet and began casting. Quickly a slab of silver slammed my pink and purple Dolly Llama fly. I actually saw the violent take and heard the drag sing its sweet song.

That fish had me; it wasn't the other way around. I was just along for the ride at that point, and already I knew I was hooked on cohos — apparently more so than the salmon was. I can still see that salmon breaking off the first Dolly Llama I tied on.

I limited out on coho that day and I was introduced to the omnipresent and powerful chum salmon. I chalked all



Keith Burba and an Alaskan coho salmon

*Continued on page 6*

# Not the Biggest But a Battler; Fun-to-Catch Alaskan Coho Salmon

Continued from page 5

that up as a success and felt gratitude for the knowledge gained.

## On to Southeast Alaska For a Trip to Coho Heaven

Now I head to a not-so-secret-spot-any-more in Southeast Alaska every year with a group of friends I met through Project Healing Waters. Ours is now a DIY (do-it-yourself) trip. We rely upon each other's experiences to plan better outings.

We have to carefully consider baggage weight for airline flights to Alaska and bush plane flights to our final destinations. I have become an expert in packing everything I need for two weeks of salmon fishing into a 38-pound airline bag and am ever mindful that bush planes also charge by the pound.

Oh, don't forget the fish you want to take home are excess baggage too; there is no other shipping option.

While not the largest of the salmon family, Alaskan cohos are beasts. They spend most of their adult lives cruising the Pacific Ocean and then somehow find their way back to the water where they hatched.

Alaskan cohos are terrific fighters, very acrobatic, and will test you and



*Alaskan cohos are terrific fighters, very acrobatic, and will test you and your equipment.*

your equipment. While the fish we target weighs in at the 8 to 14-pound mark, we consistently catch them in the 10 to 12-pound range. Some cohos are smaller, some are larger, but more often than not, it's the latter that makes it into the freezer.

I generally will net a coho for every three hooked; that is not counting the dozens of pink salmon caught every day. Pink salmon are also powerful fighters, but this is the only two weeks out of the year, I'd rather not catch pink after pink after pink.

Over time, I adjusted my gear list for battling these bruisers. At a minimum, I take two 8-weight rods. I have not broken a rod yet and have fished the same rod since 2016, but three rods were broken this year — cohos, pinks, and chums challenge rods.

And while rod choice is probably top of the list, I have learned over time that reels and lines deserve an equal level of consideration.

I always take three spools with lines that will cover every scenario. My primary reels are 3.5 inches and you wouldn't be out of place with a larger arbor reel. Cohos are built for speed and will come at you without fear. You need to pick up line quickly in those situations.

My primary setup starts with

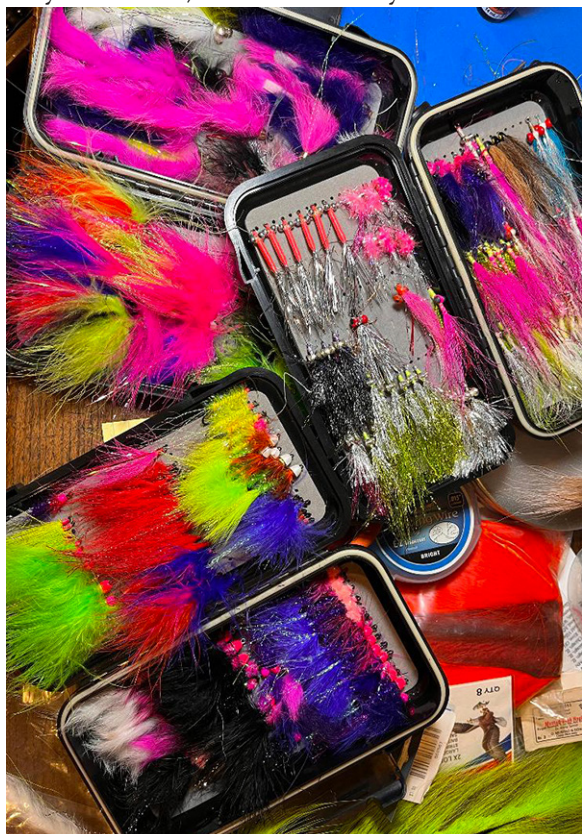
30-pound Dacron. My favorite line is one where I can swap out the last 15 feet for just about any configuration. I swap out floating, intermediate, or sinking tips in just a few minutes and appreciate the flexibility.

This year's trip began with low water conditions so I fished with 6 or 7 feet of fluorocarbon at the end of a floating line tip. After a couple of days of rain, the water came up three inches and the river's personality changed completely; a sinking tip was needed to get a fly down to the cohos.

The decision to use a weighted or unweighted fly seemed to be an endless exercise in stream-side physics calculations to figure out what was best. But in the end, I used whatever I had the most of. I tied Clousers, marabou intruders, egg-sucking leeches, a few random flies, and a handful of bunny leeches.

By the last day, you're likely using whatever flies are left in your fly box because I don't think fly choice matters much. I am convinced the presentation matters more than the differential colors or action. One day I swung streamers while an angler from Idaho was tight-lining clown eggs next to me. We were both successful despite the different approaches.

If anything, these Alaskan trips have led me to believe a coho fly needs to be big with shocking colors and heavily weighted. Mandatory colors were ei-



*Keith Burba's fly boxes for his coho adventures in Southeast Alaska.*

*Continued on page 12*

# Charlie Craven: A Million Flies and Still Tying

By Jim DuFresne

Charlie Craven – most of us know him as the fly-tying columnist for *Fly Fisherman Magazine* – was on a camping trip in Colorado with his family in 1979 when he discovered the joys of fishing. And then promptly lost most of the lures in his father's tacklebox.

On the drive home, his father casually mentioned that if Charlie learned to tie flies, then he could lose his own tackle, and for his birthday that year, gave him a fly-tying kit that “I was immediately enamored with.”

Craven was eight years old when he tied his first fly, 12 years old when he began commercial tying. Now he's 52 years old and still hasn't stopped tying.

That is a lot of whip finishes.

“I tie almost every day, but not commercially,” said Craven. “What I call commercial tying was back in the day when it was a full-time gig for me. That was a whole different world. Now I'll do some custom orders for the shop, but nothing at all like what I used to do.”

What Craven does now is “store stuff” along with designing flies for companies like Umpqua, producing videos for his YouTube channel, and overseeing the store's website . . . not to mention writing books, hosting tying clinics, and traveling the show circuit in the off-season, that has included



Charlie's Fly Box, a fly fishing store in Arvada, CO.



Jim DuFresne

MFFC's Midwest Fly Fishing Expo in the past.

Do you ever go fly fishing?

“I don't get to fish as much as I would like to and certainly don't get to fish as much as I used to,” said Craven. “But I would also say probably nobody does.”

Craven is on the water roughly 50 days a year, usually part of extended, well-planned trips. Most of his time is devoted to Charlie's Fly Box, his 5,000 square-foot store located on the south side of Arvada, Colorado. Since moving from a much smaller storefront in historic Olde Town Arvada, sales have almost tripled in the past four years; the reason Craven can be found in his store, often helping customers, four days a week.

But not on Wednesday.

On Wednesdays, he's at home focusing on his first love: tying flies, writing about them, video taping them and occasionally even selecting a few for an upcoming float.

Always tying. Especially on Wednesday.

“If all the fish died tomorrow, I'd still tie flies, that's just something I enjoy doing,” Craven said. “If you fish, you're going to be a better tyer. And if you tie flies, you're going to be a better fisherman, hands down.”

“Tying gets you more into fishing. You'll know more about bugs, understand what the fly's purpose is, what it's built to do, and be able to make adjustments easier (on the water).”

Craven is a very knowledgeable angler because he's tied an awful lot of flies.



Charlie Craven in his store, Charlie's Fly Box.

A few years ago, Ross Purnell, publisher and editor of *Fly Fisherman Magazine*, was curious how many flies his columnist had tied in his life and punched some numbers on a calculator. Purnell decided Craven had probably tied “somewhere around a million flies.”

“Yeah, let's say 3,000 to 5,000 dozen (a year) for 28 years of commercial tying, that's probably close,” said Craven.

Craven believes two of the most important developments in fly tying since he began tying is the increased use and, more important, acceptance of synthetic materials, especially foam, and the explosion of how-to-tye videos on the internet.

Foam is easier to obtain, more affordable, simple to cut and shape, and often results in a more durable fly. Watching a video and replaying the last step before moving on greatly improves the learning process as opposed to starting at a recipe with a sentence or two of

*Continued on page 8*

# Five Favorite Flies from Charlie Craven

Here are four Charlie Craven originals plus his variation on the parachute Adams. Scan the adjacent QR codes for his how-to video for each fly or this QR code for all his tying videos.



Charlie Craven's  
Video Channel



## Baby Gongga Streamer

**Craven:** This is my Baby Gongga, my favorite streamer to fish. It's a small articulated fly. A lot of big articulated stuff works but gets a lot of follows and not always gets eaten so I wanted to start playing with something that was a little smaller.



JUJUBEE MIDGE



## Charlie Boy Hopper

**Craven:** There are not a lot of hoppers in the world that you can tie in two or three minutes but this is one of them. Super durable, super easy to see as it sits up high on the water.



## Jujubee Midge

**Craven:** One of my favorite patterns is the Jujubee Midge. I developed this one years ago while guiding in Cheesman Canyon on Colorado's South Platte River. The two-color Super Hair abdomen creates a striking ribbed effect and the Fluoro-Fiber wing case produces an attractive halo around the thorax. A simple fly for sure, but with a definite edge.



## Two-bit Hooker

**Craven:** This is one of my favorite patterns ever and I can honestly say it's one found on the end of my tippet most days. It was designed to be fished, on a dropper under a dry fly, but I also use it in a two-fly rig when I have to get dirty.



## Parachute Adams

**Craven:** The Parachute Adams is without a doubt, one of today's most popular patterns. The tying sequence here also shows my method for tying in and wrapping a parachute wing and hackle. It is a bit different from most others and, I think, a vast improvement.



## Craven's Advice: Learn the Basics of Tying and Then Fish Those Flies

Continued from page 7

instructions or tips.

"I've been tying in fly shops since I was 12 years old and back in the day everything was natural," said Craven. "Now there are a lot of times when I'll design a fly and it's not until I'm done that I even realize it's entirely synthetic."

Both make it easier to learn the basics of how to tie flies. And that's the key; start by mastering basic techniques.

"We have guys come into the shop and say, 'I fish a parachute Adams, and that's what I want to learn to tie,'" said Craven. "And so, you get guys starting in the middle, and that's really hard, and they either suck at it or they drop it because they never get very good at it."

"If you start at the beginning with



simple stuff and learn the techniques, you will have a much better success rate."

You don't have to be a Charlie Craven to tie flies that catch fish. You just have to tie flies and then fish with them.

This is what Craven religiously preaches in his clinics, on his YouTube channel, and in four published books, beginning with his first title in 2008: *Charlie Craven's Basic Fly Tying: Modern Techniques for Flies That Catch Fish*.

Just keep tying. And fishing. It will come. Faster than you ever thought.

"You can catch a fish on the biggest piece of shit in your fly box," said Craven. "We give fish way too much credit. Fish are dumb; fish are easy to catch."

"We tie flies for us. When I design a fly, I'm trying to solve a problem to make (fly fishing) easier. It has to be more durable or float better or sink better so you're not having to maintain the fly to keep it dry or add more weight to get it down."

"But a hare's ear tied by anybody will catch a fish if it is reasonably proportioned. If you're tying flies and not using them, then you can't get excited about fly tying or fishing. That's absolutely the case."

Says the man who has tied a million flies.





# TU in the UP *Helping Trout & Anglers Find Less Stress Upstream*

**By Drew YoungeDyke**  
**Trout Unlimited**

**U**pon crossing the Mackinac Bridge into the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, I exhaled and slowed a bit. The speed limit drops from the Lower Peninsula, but so does the pace of life as the highway crosses through friendly small towns and across seemingly countless trout rivers and their tributaries.

I was driving west to tour some TU restoration projects in Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula, and since some of the project sites were still open for fishing, I packed along my 4wt Douglas Upstream fly rod.

The bridge – the most iconic piece of infrastructure in the Great Lakes – opened upstream habitat for “trolls” like me, as Lower Peninsula residents are known in the U.P. (we live “under” the bridge).

And while we generally consider infrastructure to encompass bridges like the “Mighty Mac,” it’s the infrastructure of small dams and culverts under road/stream crossings that act as aquatic organism passage barriers and keep trout from accessing upstream habitat when warmer downstream water increases their stress. It seems appropriate, then, that it’s federal infrastructure funding that is fueling the restoration of these streams to provide cooler habitat for trout and increased flood resilience for rural communities.



Road and stream crossings often have culverts like this that restrict upstream access for aquatic organisms and most importantly trout. Trout Unlimited photo.



A fall brook trout from the East Branch of the Ontonagon River. Trout Unlimited photo.

## Reconnecting a River

In the Ottawa National Forest (ONF), TU has several projects completed, planned and underway in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) through a \$40 million national partnership funded through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law of 2021 and the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022, and building upon years of partnership before that.

Sarah Topp, U.P. stream restoration manager for TU, shared the GPS coordinates of several projects with me to tour on my travels across the peninsula.

These included multiple culvert replacements and small dam removals on tributaries to the Ontonagon River.

One such project was on the East Branch of the Ontonagon River, a Wild and Scenic River. The East Branch runs through the ONF, crossing M-28 in Kenton, and is part of TU’s Western U.P. Wild Trout Priority Water. It’s also designated as Type 3 trout stream by the Michigan DNR, open year-round north of M-28.

Trout Unlimited teamed with the USFS to remove remnant dam pilings here in 2021, reconnecting 20 miles of habitat. Further upstream, TU is planning to remove the Lower Dam of the East Branch of the Ontonagon, which began with a request from the Fred Waara TU Chapter in Marquette. Together, these projects will reconnect all 67 miles of the East Branch for the first time since 1965.

The impacts of these dams on trout habitat have been recognized by fisheries biologists for decades. In 1985, Raymond P. Juetten, former Michigan DNR Fisheries Biologist, wrote about the Ontonagon watershed in Trout Streams of Michigan, published by Michigan United Conservation Clubs:

*The East Branch from Spring Lake to Lower Dam Impoundment was once prime brook-trout water. Heavy siltation caused by the many old beaver dams and Upper Dam Impoundment makes it presently unsuitable, though, for trout production. These blockages probably warmed the river here, making it more suitable to warmwater species than trout. The silt covered many trout-spawning areas, and the brook trout disappeared.*

*Continued on page 10*

# Trout Unlimited: Working Hard to Restore Brook Trout Streams

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## Fishing a restored stream

I entered the river at the USFS access site in Kenton, downstream from the dam removal pilings on the north side of M-28. The vegetation was thick along the streambanks, and I ducked under several branches until I came to a small pool with a perfect foam line flowing through it. It looked trouty. Not seeing any rises, I rigged up a dry-dropper with a tungsten hotspot pheasant tail nymph under an elk hair caddis. No dice.

I heard splashing coming from upstream and thought maybe another angler was following me, but I figured an angler would call out if he or she had seen me. Was it a bear, maybe? I've had that encounter before and looked for exit routes along the streambank. The splashing resumed, and a doe stepped around the bend into view, curious what I was doing in the stream.

"Sorry, I'm fishing this hole," I told her, and she darted off into the side brush. I heard her re-enter the river downstream of me. "Snaking the next hole," I thought, "I'd better make this one count."

I tied on a soft hackle tunghead pheasant tail under the elk hair caddis and drifted it along the foam line. I felt the tug, set the hook and stripped in a beautiful little brook trout to my net just as it spit the hook and escaped through a gap in the netting.

Thrilling. I tied on an olive muddler minnow, stripped it through the hole just under the surface, and watched another brookie, about eight inches, chase it down like a pike and strike it with



*A brook trout escaping upstream in the the East Branch of the Ontonagon River. Trout Unlimited photo*



similar aggression. I landed it cleanly this time, took a photo, removed the hook, and released it.

In the moment I beheld it, I was struck as I always am by the beauty of the wild native brook trout in its fall spawning vibrance – golden belly and orange fins tipped in white, the unrestrained vermiculation on its back like a treasure map to something profound yet unknowable and the angelic blue halos around its red spots. Time seems to stand still when there's a wild brookie in the net.

By this time a few small rises were beginning to pop along the foam line, so I tied on a Betty McNault in deference to Robert Traver – pen name of John D. Voelker – who fished these parts with a Parachute Adams and Betty McNault and whose Trout Madness is a seasonal devotional for me. A strike, but no take. I tried a Parachute Adams. Same result. Finally, I tied on a small

Griffith's Gnat – named for TU founder George Griffith – and hooked a tiny, four-inch brookie.

After releasing it, I decided it was time to get back on the road to head home in the opposite corner of the state in Ann Arbor. Waders off, driving on, I reflected on how I felt catching the three brookies just downstream from a TU restoration project, knowing that they'd soon be able to get even farther upstream to the headwaters of the river. I felt at peace, satisfied and grateful: less stressed.

I felt like a brook trout escaping upstream.

*Drew YoungeDyke is the national communications director for Trout Unlimited, a fly angler and fly tyer, an outdoor writer, and a dad. He was born, raised, and lives in Michigan and graduated from Michigan State University and Michigan State University College of Law.*



**A Betty McNault:** "So I tied on a Betty McNault in deference to Robert Traver – pen name of John D. Voelker – who fished these parts with a Parachute Adams and Betty McNault and whose Trout Madness is a seasonal devotional for me." Drew YoungeDyke

## What's Happening? MFFC WhatsApp

Want to hook up with other Club members to fly fish? To connect through encrypted messaging on the MFFC WhatsApp account, contact Sybil Hunter at [president@mffc.org](mailto:president@mffc.org) or Gil Herman at [gilbertherman@comcast.net](mailto:gilbertherman@comcast.net).

Peter Albertson's

## Conservation Corner

### Growing Momentum for Removing Old and Obsolete Dams

Removal of old dams no longer used for power generation has become an important issue due to rising Great Lake water temperatures.

Scan the QR codes to read the full articles. If you have questions or concerns, please contact me; Peter Albertson: 248-921-9103 or palbertsontsp@icloud.com

**Bridge Magazine:** From the Bridge Environmental Watch:

In the quest to defend Michigan's rivers against climate change, government officials and fish advocates are increasingly zeroing in on a simple strategy that can lower temperatures by several degrees, and open up miles of new habitat: Removing dams.



It's a sometimes controversial technique that's gaining renewed steam in Michigan thanks to tens of millions in new state and federal dollars, rising costs to maintain Michigan's old and obsolete dams, and a growing understanding of their environmental drawbacks.

**DNR News:** The Michigan DNR is offering more than \$1.5 million in funding for a variety of activities tied to improving state fisheries and aquatic resources, including dam removal and repair.

Distributed through three themes – aquatic habitat conservation, dam management, and aquatic habitat and recreation in the Au Sable, Manistee and Muskegon river watersheds – Fisheries Habitat Grant funding is available through an open, competitive process to local, state, federal and tribal governments and nonprofit groups.



*A fly angler fishes in front of the Brown Pond Dam on the Boardman River. The dam has since been removed.*



*A Fisheries Habitat Grant funded the removal of Bald Mountain Dam to enable fish passage to a tributary of Paint Creek, a popular trout stream in Oakland County, Michigan.*

**FERC:** The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) terminated Boyce Hydro Power, LLC's licenses for the Secord, Smallwood, and Sanford hydroelectric projects on the Tittabawassee River in Michigan for failing to meet the obligations of its licenses, due to its loss of project property in condemnation and bankruptcy proceedings.

Four Lakes Task Force, a nonprofit organization, now owns the real property associated with the projects and is coordinating the safe repair and management of the facilities with the Michigan Department of the Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE), in cooperation with FERC staff.



Heavy rain on May 19, 2020, caused high inflows in the Tittabawassee River, resulting in the breaching and failure of the Edenville Dam, the license for which the Commission had revoked for Boyce Hydro's failure to comply with safety directives and other license requirements. The right embankment at the FERC-jurisdictional Sanford Dam also was breached during the high flows.

## Keith Burba: Hooked on Coho

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ther, black, pink, white, or purple. No other options should be considered. The single material permitted: rabbit strips, again heavily weighted.

This year, the game-winning fly was completely unexpected: a fly that had all the materials stripped off by Coho teeth and simply was left with silver tinsel on a No. 2 salmon hook. I watched that fly land more than a dozen Cohos over two days until it was lost to a rock.

The water was exceptionally low and clear in 2023 which afforded me a front-row seat to observe salmon behaviors.

Once I hit my self-imposed limit of keepers for the trip, I set out to observe and experiment by sight-fishing for cohos, something not often possible where we fish.

I could clearly see my fluorescent fly swinging across the entire pool, watching it bump off heads, skim backs of dozens of cohos, and then, if everything is aligned, I'd see a brief instance of white (open mouth) before my fly disappeared (inhaled). If that hook was not set in that instant, I'd see another flash of white and my fly would re-appear — with not a single indication from my line it ever paused.

Like many anadromous species, Salmon are more likely to strike out of aggression so stripping/swinging streamers is a very conventional tactic. I tried some salmon poppers and can report a 0% success rate.

### Heading Home With Alaskan Thoughts

I head home from each Alaskan trip looking out the window of our bush plane, thinking I have figured out cohos,



*Keith Burba with his Alaskan gold from Southeast Alaska.*

that somehow I “won.” Then I spend the winter tying better flies, considering different clothing options, recalling what line combinations worked, which ones didn’t.

Then I arrive in Alaska for my next adventure and realize that most of what I learned last year was for, well, last year. And the experience begins all over; spending two weeks cold, probably wet — but never miserable — learning again what I need to do to hear that drag sing.

I am hooked on coho.



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