



March 2005

The *Conservationist*

Potomac-Patuxent Chapter

www.pptu.org

Wednesday, March 16

The Shad Fad

Shad are a hot fish right now. Those of you who have plied waters of the Potomac or Susquehanna during the spring know this to be so with both the prolific, Jordanesque hickory and the bigger, hook bending American shad. From the Delaware in New York to the St. Johns in Florida to even the mighty Columbia on the left coast. Up these and other rivers they come to spawn in big numbers, hard-charging, hard-fighting ocean fish, eager to take a fly under the right conditions.

Even the traditional trouters among you are taking note. More and more pieces on shad fishing are creeping into the fly fishing press and praising its virtue. What is it *about* these fish that is creating such a buzz?

Come to our next meeting to find out. We'll have Jim Cummins, Director of Living Resources at the Interstate Commission On The Potomac River Basin to give a slide show presentation on the Potomac River shad fishery. Jim has headed up the Commission's efforts to restore American shad in the river. Those efforts are just starting to bear fruit and American shad returns are projected to continue growing in what is shaping up to be a major conservation success story. 4lb to 7lb fish are just around the corner and in numbers not seen in a long time!

So if you find yourself sinking into the couch on the 16th and popping open a frosty one, get up, shad off the TV and come learn about this silver gamester that is currently all the rage in fishing circles. †

—*Sebastian O'Kelly*

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

I just returned home from the first Mid Atlantic Council (MAC) meeting of the year. The meeting was held at the State run Millpond Cottage on the Gunpowder River and was attended by chapter representatives from around the state. Our chapter was represented by several people who have both new and long standing association with the MAC.

The agenda was quite full and dealt with a number of issues including: the Inter County Connector (ICC) project and its' impact on the Paint Branch fishery; the establishment of a new youth fishing camp in Virginia (see article on page 3); the establishment of a committee to participate in the Eastern Brook Trout Initiative whose purpose will be to preserve and protect brook trout fisheries in the northeastern part of the country; the involvement of local TU chapters in helping our military men and women recovering in Walter Reed hospital become familiar with fishing; a review of federal and state legislative activities of concern to TU Chapters in Maryland and a number of other issues that we have been monitoring for some time.

For those unfamiliar with the MAC (a regional council) it's a key link in the national structure of TU ?

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Meetings

Time and Day: 7:00 PM, Third Wednesday except December, June, July, and August

Place: Margaret Schweinhaut Senior Center, 1000 Forest Glen Road, Silver Spring, Maryland

Directions: From Capitol Beltway: North on Georgia Avenue (Rte. 97). First right onto Forest Glen Road. Pass Holy Cross Hospital and go across Sligo Creek Parkway. The Center is on the right.

The Conservationist

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Contributions in the form of clip art, articles, conservation activities, trip reports, letters, fishing and conservation news, tying tips, book reviews, and essays about trout fishing should be sent to the Editor as plain text in the email body or Microsoft Word attachments. Authors should also include their phone number and a brief descriptions of the attachments. The deadline for submissions is the twelfth (12th) day of the month prior to the month of publication

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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

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providing an important tie between the distributed local chapters and the national organization.

In an earlier newsletter I made mention of a newly issued Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) issued for the proposed ICC project. I also mentioned the glowing accompanying press statements and was hopeful that the quality of the document reflected the optimism of the press releases.

We have reviewed the DEIS and have testified at a public hearing in which significant inadequacies in the DEIS were identified. Furthermore we have monitored the internal reviews being conducted by various state and county agencies and are concerned that those agencies and departments whose business is parks and environment are not being sufficiently involved in the process.

After all, these are the offices who know something about the threat potential of this type project to the Paint Branch fishery. It is becoming alarmingly clear that the "fast track" nature of this process means 'hear no evil, see no evil'; this is certainly not the type of conduct we in Montgomery and local counties expect from our elected officials. (Many of you are aware that our chapter was originally founded to protect the Paint Branch fishery). We did not comment on the traffic mitigation provisions in the DEIS, but note that other groups more knowledgeable in transportation have rejected the options offered and have proposed new options that actually reduce traffic congestion. Other environmentally sensitive organizations are involved in reviewing this document also.

It behooves each member of the chapter to monitor this activity and participate in some manner. The Paint Branch is a beautiful but very delicate ecosystem and holds the only naturally reproducing trout waters in Montgomery County. It would be a sad commentary on the environmental conscience of this county to allow this fishery to be lost because of a poorly designed highway project. We should be willing to work with the appropriate government offices to ensure a good project; to do that requires the attention of all of us on this project. †

--Lou Boezi

New Youth Fishing Camp Established

The Mid Atlantic Council and local TU Chapters have been working to establish another youth fishing camp opportunity for our younger TU members. Historically PPTU youth have visited the camp held yearly in Carlisle, Pa. This year we are supporting the new Virginia Camp. The Board of PPTU recently approved a modest contribution to support this new venture. We will provide a direct \$200 donation to the camp operation and an additional \$375 either divided as partial tuition payments for each PPTU member that is accepted to the camp or, if no applications are accepted, as an additional payment to support camp operations.

The camp will be held on June 26th-July 1st at Syria, Virginia. Any high school student, male or female, may apply to attend. Twenty campers will be selected, largely on the basis of their brief application essay on "What I hope to get from the camp". The total cost for attending the six-day, five night camp is \$375. To apply, go the camp web site at www.tucamp.org and either apply online or print an application form and mail it in.

Any youth member of PPTU that is successful in gaining acceptance to the camp should notify Lou Boezi the Chapter President. Depending on the number of our chapter members accepted we can provide either a full scholarship, if only one student is accepted, or a partial scholarship of an amount equally divided between the successful applicants, from the \$375 set aside by the Board. †



—Lou Boezi



**** Inclement Weather Notice ****

The next Chapter meeting is Wednesday, March 16. In case of inclement weather and the possibility of cancellation, contact any member of the Board (see p.2) the afternoon of the monthly meeting OR watch the PPCTU list serve.

Tackle and Tactic Tips

Last month I discussed how to wade. This month, I thought a discussion on when and where to wade might be useful for some fishers.

One of the first considerations in wading a stream is where to go. Besides the obvious admonition to go no deeper than the top of your waders, there are other considerations. Trout are territorial, particularly browns. If you moved your or a neighbor's dog to another yard already occupied by another dog, there is going to be a turf battle. Same for the brown trout. Flush a brown and he is likely as not to at least go past another trout holding in the stream. Now you have distracted at least two trout, neither of which is interested in feeding on anything for at least a few moments. Where do most trout want to hold? Where there is a good likelihood of food going past. As in the Army, the best place to be is in the chow line. So, where do we want to wade if we are given the option? Where there is less likelihood of food drifting over the trout or where they might be holding.

Insides of bends have almost invariably a reduced amount of food drift. Behind a log or live tree that is laying out from one bank and intercepting the drift line is another area with little or no food. Water depth is sometimes important, too. Fish will tend to avoid shallow water (e.g., less than a foot), except when there is an abundance of food and some competition from the number of trout in that section. Deeper water (over 2' deep) is usually more secure to the trout. When the sun goes down, trout may move into these shallow areas if the food supply is attractive to them; the trout may not leave this shallow feeding area until the next morning when the sun gets overhead or a fisher wades too close

The flip side of this issue of where to wade is that the choice may make normal casting very difficult. Right-handed casters will find going around a bend to the right is not always a good thing. The back cast may line up with the overhanging trees and shrubs. Eventually, all good fly fishers must learn to accurately cast with the rod moving parallel to the water on either side of the body while facing the target.



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ICC Update

Everyone who lives in the metropolitan DC area is well aware of the traffic congestion that plagues us all. Proponents of the Intercounty Connector, the proposed east-west highway connecting Montgomery and Prince George's counties, are quick to cite traffic congestion as justification for building the ICC, despite its well-documented severe and unavoidable impacts to the natural environment. These impacts include the naturally reproducing trout population in Paint Branch and upper Rock Creek, both Use III streams, and the put-and-take trout fishery in the Northwest Branch. Unfortunately, the results from the traffic studies are controversial, with most concluding that the ICC would not relieve this traffic congestion, and would actually make traffic congestion on local roads worse.

To date opponents have not had much of an alternative to offer, and so the public largely accepted the ICC and inevitable. Recently a new, independent study found four practical, cost-effective alternatives that actually perform better than the Intercounty Connector (ICC) on most measures, including reducing traffic, air pollution and overall cost. The report was sponsored by regional and national environmental, transportation and smart growth groups and conducted by Smart Mobility, Inc., a nationally recognized traffic modeling firm. The report is available at several Web sites including www.savecommunities.org/iccalternatives.html for more information.

Separately, the Maryland General Assembly's analysis arm called into question the plan to pay for the ICC. Maryland's plan to pay for the ICC largely with bonds could add \$500 million to the price tag and tie up nearly a quarter of the federal highway dollars the state receives. The plan includes a high reliance on debt, with 92 percent of the costs being financed through bonds.

Almost half of the project would be financed through bonds paid for with money pledged from the state's future federal highway dollars over 15 years, according to the financing plan. That would commit 24 percent of the state's annual federal highway dollars ?



during those years, the report found. State law now limits debt payments to 13 percent of annual federal highway dollars. These findings are summarized in a report by the Department of Legislative Services' Office of Policy Analysis. †



—David Dunmire
Paint Branch Chair

Stream Safety

Everyone needs to be careful of falling in the water at this time of the year and getting hypothermia. March and April can still be dangerous if one gets soaking wet while far from a warm car. Sport shops carry small packets that can generate a good deal of warmth; carry a few with you until the late spring.

Don't forget to throw your wallet and your cell phone into separate zip-lock bags before your step into a stream. As one last tip, please mark your fly boxes with your name and phone number or address. I have found several boxes over the years and been able to return only one.

You can use gummed address labels covered with transparent tape on the *inside* of the lid (to prevent wear) or some other means to mark them. Otherwise, I do appreciate your leaving your fly boxes along the side of the stream or in the parking lot for me to find. †



—Jay Sheppard

Mailing Label Changes

Last month we took a little survey. Our members were not using the labels we place on the newsletters to be reminded of their expiration date of their national TU membership.

Less than 1 in 6 respondents used our labels for this information. We estimate that our volunteer database managers had been spending about 8 man-hours per year to keep that information updated. That is a day of fishing! You will now note that, except for Life members, we only note if you are a TU member assigned to our chapter by placing "NTU" on the top line of your label. Renewal notices are sent out from the national membership services department several months and several times. †

Lies, Damn Lies and Releases

Twelve members from the Chapter traveled to Central Pennsylvania over the October 15-17th weekend. We fished Fishing Creek, Penn's Creek, Spring Creek and Spruce Creek. Once again, Jim Keil graciously provided the accommodations at his father's hunting club in the hamlet of Neffs Mills for a minimal charge.

Except for the Little Juniata, flows on all of the streams were well within fishable limits. The air temperature ranged in the low to mid 50s for a high and skies were overcast with occasional light rain showers for virtually the entire weekend. Sundry beadhead nymph patterns took trout on Penn's Creek on Friday and several anglers resorted to egg patterns to take trout on Fishing Creek on Saturday. Assorted blue-winged olive dries, emergers and soft hackle patterns took very cooperative trout on Spring Creek both Saturday and Sunday, courtesy of the Benner Springs Hatchery and Hurricane Ivan, which flooded the hatchery earlier in the year and allowed an estimated 100,000 brown, rainbow and brook trout to escape from the hatchery and into Spring Creek.

Eight members from the Chapter traveled to Long Island's Connetquot River on November 1st to fish among the blue-blooded haunts of the Southside Sportsman's Club, which has begun to show its age but still provides one with a sense of its former grandeur. Weather conditions were quite pleasant with sunny skies and an air temperature in the low 60s. Arriving early in the morning, the group essentially had the stream to ourselves and each person was allowed to sample several beats. Although somewhat less than challenging, the fishing proved to be very rewarding to each angler, who landed between 20 and 40 trout per person for the day... with several that were well over 18 inches. Unfortunately, many of the larger brown and brook trout appeared exhausted, no doubt a result of their recent spawning activity, but the scrappy rainbows put up better fights.

Weather permitting, the next outing will be for wild rainbow trout on the Falling Springs Branch in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania in late March. If you are interested in this outing, please see me at the March 16th meeting. †

—Joshua Forster
Outings Leader

Patuxent Report

In late February and very early March, we were scheduled to stock almost 2000 brown trout and 1250 rainbow trout in the upper Patuxent Special Area (i.e., stream above RT 97 that forms boundary of Howard and Montgomery Counties). By the time you receive this in the mail, those fish should be interested in playing with a fly or lure. Just keep the presentations slow: these trout never had to 'catch' moving food before and may be very shy about striking anything besides a dead drifted nymph.

Please mark your calendar right now for Saturday, April 2, for the Patuxent River State Park cleanup. Meet at 8 AM at the Izaak Walton club house on Mullinix Mill Road just east and north of Long Corner Road (this is a couple miles east and north of Damascus). Bring a heavy duty rake, waders, and work gloves. Lunch will be provided at the end of the morning by the IWLA. You can go fishing in the afternoon, as the last stocking of the stream will usually be during that week preceding. Our T.U. members will be divided and cover the stream under and around all the bridges for trash. This is a great activity for the family! The cleanup is in conjunction with a similar effort all along the river down to the Bay on this date. Other local groups will also participate in this park's cleanup; there are many unauthorized dump sites scattered around the park. Several truck loads of debris have been removed every spring following this event. Please help! †

— Jay Sheppard

Tackle and Tactic Tips

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Roll casts may also reduce the problem of getting a fly to the target while wading where you expect the fewest trout. It does little good to wade through a good section of water where a lot of trout are (actually, were!) holding just so you can make your cast in an easy manner. In this latter case, a fisher may make the casting easier but may have fewer trout within casting range that are still interested in maybe taking a well presented fly. So wade softly where there are few trout and carry a long rod with a good fly! †



— Jay Sheppard

My Letort Leviathan



One of the most challenging and arguably once one of the finest spring creeks this side of the pond, the Cumberland Valley's Letort Spring Run in Carlisle, Pennsylvania has humbled many a proficient fly-fisherman. With a reputation for a strain of large wild brown trout, originally stocked in what may be an apocryphal story for a visit by then President Herbert Hoover, the *salmo trutta* of the Letort are known for being spooky and highly selective. Tell any fly-fisherman in the world that you've fished the Letort and he/she will immediately recognize the name.

But the Letort's well-deserved reputation also rests on the complexities of deciphering its multiple currents and its deceptive first impression as a languid moving limestone spring creek that helps foster a fleeting sense of contempt amongst novice anglers.

After a few experiences casting the ubiquitous Catskill dry fly or a standard wet fly pattern on the Letort, one is no longer surprised to learn that most of what revolutionized fly-fishing in the 1950s and set American fly-fishing apart from its British progenitors was originally developed on this stream.

The introduction and use of terrestrial insect patterns (e.g., ants, grasshoppers, beetles), which heretofore had gone ignored or unnoticed by the British and their American adherents such as the Father of American Dry Fly Fishing, Theodore Gordon, were developed on this stream by fly-fishermen such as Vince Marinaro, Charlie Fox, Ed Koch and Ed Shenk. Much of what is known today about fishing technical water, special tactics (i.e., long leaders narrowing down to 6x and 7x tippets) and minutia (i.e., very small, size 18-32, mayfly patterns), were also popularized on this stream. Prior to this, what Americans knew about stream entomology had largely been handed down by the British, which was essentially limited to wet flies and large (size 10-14) mayfly patterns that imitated British aquatic insects and thus held little relevance to the aquatic insects of North America. What resulted then from the collaborative experiences of Marinaro et al., are probably two of the ?

most influential books on fly-fishing to be written in the last 50 years, Vince Marinaro's, A Modern Dry Fly Code and In the Ring of the Rise.

As mentioned, the Letort is, or rather was, known for very large trout. One of the things that got me started in fly-fishing five years ago were the stories I'd read about large wild brown trout of thirty inches and ten pounds or better landed on the Letort in the 1950s and 1960s. But as one gets older, large becomes a relative term. And it is in this sense that it's unfortunate that the Letort has fallen on hard times in recent years. Rebounding from an insecticide spill in the watercress beds in the headwaters of the left branch in 1981 that killed untold numbers of trout and aquatic insects, the primary trouble today is a widening of the stream that prevents the stream from flushing out silt, which, in turn, blankets the gravel bed spawning habitat and the rock cover so essential for a healthy fishery. The problem has gotten so bad that in 2003 Letort veteran Ed Shenk commented that if he had to grade the stream on a scale of one to ten, he'd give it a two.

Undaunted by such comments and tales of the stream's recent traumas, and armed with the knowledge obtained from the pages penned by Vince Marinaro, I set out last summer not to repeat my humbling first experience on the Letort earlier in the year.

Arriving early in the day, I fished the Marinaro's Meadow section of the Letort on Saturday, July 10th, from about 8:30 AM until 2:00 PM. Water temperature was a bit cool for wet wadding at 54 degrees, but I figured I wasn't going to get in the water in any case if the trout were at all cooperative. Skies were partly cloudy with an air temperature in the mid eighties and a slight breeze that provided some occasional relief from the summer heat. Remembering what I'd learned from Marinaro on terrestrials and with fond memories of recent summer success on the Savage only weeks earlier, I tied on a cicada pattern just to see if I could solicit some interest. Shortly afterwards, observing the absence of surface activity, I quickly switched to a Larry Coburn cressbug pattern and weighted it, as I'd been told, so it would drift about six inches from the bottom. But this effort was only rewarded with a few follows when I was fortunate enough to get a proper drift. ?

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Determined not to repeat my earlier unsuccessful effort, I then switched to an orange scud pattern with equally inauspicious results.

Around 11:30 AM, I met Rod Cross, the former president of the Falling Springs Chapter of TU, who entertained me with stories of Vince Marinaro and Charlie Fox for about a half hour. (He is one of the one's responsible for the monuments to Marinaro and Fox at the TU parking lot off of Spring Garden Street in Carlisle.) He suggested that I try a size 16 black fur ant, since he had caught two browns at the I-81 bridge earlier in the day on this pattern. Other than this gentleman and one other fly fisherman who fished the stream only briefly, I had the meadows section to myself that day. No doubt a reflection of the diminishing reputation of this once legendary limestoner. After lunch, I tied on a size 16 black fur ant and sight fished to several browns that continued to feed on the bottom.

Just when I began to wonder if this second trip to the Letort was going to end like the first unsuccessful trip in March, I caught a glimpse of a nice brown under the far bank at Hagn's Letort Log mailbox. This trout was positioned higher in the water column about eight inches below the surface. By this time, I'd yet to see a trout rise all day. But remembering the Dry Fly Code, I switched to 7x tippet and a size 20 cinnamon parachute ant. Reasoning that by presenting the fly in a little niche in the bank about two feet above and to the right of the trout's position, thus allowing the current to take the fly down and diagonally across the trout's lie all the while holding the rod tip high to prevent drag from the midstream currents that the fly line would have to be cast across, I hoped I might coax this opportunistic trout into taking my offering by providing it with only a moment to inspect the pattern as though the ant had just fallen from the bank.

It proved to be sound reasoning... for on the second cast to the niche, I watched as the brown dropped back just a few inches, turned perpendicular to the flow as the ant drifted down and diagonally across the trout's window to witness a simple rise form. Then, looking directly into the trout's white mouth I saw the parachute ant disappear and I was suddenly into a 16-inch brown (see photo). Stripping in line quickly and applying lateral pressure, I hoped I wouldn't lose the trout ?

In the watercress. Realizing that I would have to get into the stream to land the trout, I stepped in at the worst possible moment as I was alerted to the trout's downstream run in the direction of some submerged cover by the singing of my reel. Providing some slack and allowing the trout to back out of the brush, I brought my Letort Leviathan to hand after playing it for several more minutes. Although it wasn't nearly the size of the behemoths of the 50s and the 60s, it was my first Letort brown, and the fact that it was a goodly size fish caught on a small terrestrial pattern made it all the more poignant.

After reviving and releasing the trout, I marked it in Marinaro's words as, "one noble battle won" (the 7x tippet was abraded quite badly from the run in with the brush downstream) in Hagn's Letort Log, and then decided to call it a day and head home. On the drive home, as I waxed philosophically into piscatorial hyperbole, I was reminded of the stories I'd read about the decline of the Letort as a destination fishery. Although it may be true that its glory has since been eclipsed by more popular waters elsewhere, I was grateful to those predecessors who through their stewardship, observation and angling innovations, had afforded me the opportunity to partake in something of the history of our pastime on a stream that was quite capable of producing a diminishing but still respectable quarry. †



— Joshua Forster



A Hard Days Work Joshua landed this 16-inch Letort brown caught on a small terrestrial pattern and 7x tippet .



ADDRESS CHANGED?

If you move, please take a moment and advise us with a post card as to your new address. Likewise, we would like to know of any changes to your email service. Last January we had to cancel the monthly meeting on very short notice due to the snow storm that day. We would like to use email to help alert our membership of such events. Email saves the chapter on postage and paper costs for other informational mailings, too. We can assure you that we will not be selling our modest list to any spam artists! Our membership database is totally separate from the National TU list; any address changes sent to the latter office may take a couple of months to be reflected in your mailing label for the Conservationist.

Membership

THE POTOMAC-PATUXENT CHAPTER of Trout Unlimited has two membership categories: **Regular or Family** (\$15/year assessment) or **Student** (free). The Chapter operates on a September-to-September basis. The assessment is totally separate from Trout Unlimited dues. Send correspondence, change of address, or assessment payable to POTOMAC-PATUXENT TROUT UNLIMITED, PO Box 2865, Wheaton, MD 20915.

Chapter and national TU expiration dates are indicated in the mailing label as PP-0905 or NTU-0905.



Return Address:

Potomac-Patuxent Chapter TU
P.O. Box 2865
Wheaton, MD 20915

April Raffle and Silent Auction

At our April 20 meeting at 7 pm, we will have our annual raffle and silent auction. We will ask those attending to purchase one \$5 raffle ticket which will provide you with an opportunity to win our door prize, an Orvis 5 weight 9 foot fly rod. This event will be your opportunity to get a complete fly-fishing outfit, rods, reels, waders, wading boots, landing nets, vests and other equipment at bargain prices. And don't forget the bucket raffle which also is loaded with goodies.

We'll also be selling tickets for the Grand Raffle which consists of 3 great prizes. **1st Prize** is a trip for two to West Branch Angler and Sportsman's Resort, Deposit, NY. Enjoy two days of guided drift boat fishing or one day of drift boat fishing and one day of fly-fishing school. Meals, tips and 3 nights stay in a deluxe cabin on the West Branch of the Delaware. **2nd Prize** is a float trip for two on the Potomac provided by Mark Kovach's expert guide services and includes lunch and tip. **3rd Prize** is a Pentax Optio 43 WR, 4 megapixel, water resistant digital camera, 2.8 X optical zoom, 4 X digital zoom.

Sorry no credit cards but we do take checks or cash. Remember all proceeds are used to support our conservation efforts and youth programs.

—Bob Serrano

FIRST CLASS MAIL