

Little River Chapter of Trout Unlimited Donates \$40,000 to Scholarship Endowment and Park's Fishery Department and



TOWNSEND, Tenn.—Thanks to Troutfest 2009 and a grant from Trout Unlimited's Embrace a Stream, two organizations in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park received donations totaling \$40,000 to help conserve and protect trout and aquatic resources and to continue educational efforts related to Brook Trout and water quality issues in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

The Great Smoky Mountains National Park Fisheries Department received \$25,000, which will be used for....

The Friends of the Smokies Scholarship Endowment received \$15,000 to continue to help pay for the fisheries' biology students to work in the park as seasonal employees. The scholarship fund is a joint venture between the Friends of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the Little River Chapter of Trout Unlimited and other interested parties. The endowment creates involved learning for the next generation of career conservationists, provides understudy of a scientific approach to environmental studies and application, enhances programs for volunteer groups, underwrites public awareness of necessary air and water quality issues, assists in the recovery of the native Southern Appalachian Brook Trout and their habitat, increases fisheries resources in workforce and specific aquatic life research, and joins with other like-minded groups for large scale impact of lasting results.

“The Little River Chapter of Trout Unlimited was created for the sole purpose of supporting the Great Smoky Mountains National Park Fisheries Department, and Troutfest has been our most successful fundraiser,” said Byron Begley, owner of Little River Outfitters and chairman of Troutfest. “This festival allows us to showcase environmental projects going on in the area and raise money to help protect the mountains we all love.”

Embrace-A-Stream is the flagship grant program for funding Trout Unlimited's grassroots conservation efforts that advance Trout Unlimited's mission of conserving, protecting, and restoring coldwater fisheries and their watersheds.

“quote here about the grant.....,” said Begley.

To date, with continued support from Troutfest, the Little River Chapter of Trout Unlimited and numerous corporate and individual contributions, as well as volunteer efforts, the scholarship fund has received more than \$2.2 million over the past 15 years, and 19 miles of Brook Trout Streams have been restored.

“The national park has more than 800 miles of fishable trout streams with wild rainbow and brown trout, as well as Brook Trout in the higher elevations—a fisherman’s dream,” said Herb Handy, executive vice president of tourism for the Smoky Mountain Convention and Visitors Bureau.

“Troutfest is not only a great event that draws people who are passionate about the area into our community, it raises money to preserve the streams that make our area unique and beautiful, which is essential to our continued success, both as a community and as a tourism destination.”

Troutfest is a yearly fly fishing exposition and fundraiser held at the Townsend Visitors Center, and it will be held on May 14-16, 2010. Fly tyers will demonstrate their skills for many types fly tying, such as trout, bass, panfish and saltwater. The event also features southern food and live bluegrass music. Fly fishermen will offer free seminars and share their expertise, and National Fly Tackle Manufacturers will have gear on site. Fly shops, artists, non-profit organizations and government fish and game agencies will also exhibit. Proceeds from this event are donated to Great Smoky Mountains National Park Fisheries Department, Friends of the Smokies Fisheries Scholarship Endowment or other youth educational conservation projects.

Trout Fest is sponsored by the Little River Chapter of Trout Unlimited, a nonprofit volunteer organization that is committed to protecting and restoring cold-water resources and watersheds in and around the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

For more information, please visit www.troutfest.org.

-END-

TroutFest 2009 and the Princes of Fly-Fishing Benefit the Brookies

By Gary Verholek, LRCTU gverholek@gmail.com

Imagine – the Three Tenors in music; Nicholas, Palmer & Player in golf; Mantle, Maris & Mays in baseball – then think flyfishing. That was TROUTFEST 2009 with Lefty Kreh, Joe Humphreys and Bob Clouser, reigning Princes of Fly-Fishing, holding court for a crowd of fly-fishers from across the region and as far away as Alaska. For good measure, add Stan Bogden, the craftsman extraordinary, delivering one of his highly sought reels for the fund-raising auction on Friday evening. Mix in some 40 highly skilled fly-tyers from around the region and notable professionals from a dozen national vendors, and you have the makings of an event that will forever be burned into an attending fly-fisher's memory. The crowd of several thousand provided validation of the magnitude of the event. But it was the money raised by the volunteers of the Little River Chapter of Trout Unlimited that will mean so much to the survival of the Appalachian Brook Trout of the Great Smoky Mountain National Park.

TROUTFEST - this was the 6th such gathering - is a fund-raising event for Brook Trout Restoration. The Little River Chapter of Trout Unlimited host TROUTFEST in Townsend, at the foot of the Smokys, to celebrate the environmental wealth of our region and help the Brookies. Begun as an Arts & Crafts festival, LRCTU added the theme of a Fly Fishing Exposition this year. The response was enormous, and both the attendees and the Brookies were the winners.

The expressed objective of TROUTFEST is to help the Fisheries Department of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park to restore native Brook Trout to mountain streams impacted by 1930s logging operations, which destroyed almost 50% of their original range. LRCTU has been working with Steve Moore, Supervisor

Fisheries Biologist, since the chapter was founded in 1993 based on a mission to support the GSMNP Fisheries Department. Since that time, LRCTU has raised funds for, and worked beside Park Service personnel in the field on numerous restoration projects. Steve Moore has noted previously that LRCTU efforts, through both labor and donations, have been equivalent to over \$3 million dollars of support for Fisheries work in the Park.

Over the previous five years, LRCTU has raised \$64,000 through the TROUTFEST fund-raising Auction and Banquet, all of which has been donated to the Park. The Friday evening events included an exquisite dinner and delicious desert prepared and served by Chapter members. Following dinner, a rousing auction was lead by auctioneer, Steve Samples. This year, Stan Bogden brought one of his handcrafted reels from his New Hampshire shop, donating it to our cause, and one happy attendee gladly paid \$2,800 for the reel. Interwoven with the live auction, Rufus King, LRCTU President, and Mike Stiehl, LRCTU member, orchestrated both a silent auction and a bucket auction of items made and donated by Chapter Members, artist, and other friends of TROUTFEST. Local and national vendors of outdoor equipment also donated many valuable items.

When initially envisioned by Joe Hatton, then LRCTU President, the goal was to replace a \$10,000 grant that had lapsed. Each year, the Chapter has exceeded that goal, and this year, due to the support of Chapter members, regional friends and national celebrities and vendors, the amount raised was over \$34,000!!!

The outdoors events held Saturday and Sunday were free to the public, including free parking, while a small entrance fee to the fly tyers tent was used to defray tyers'

travel expenses. There were some 40 fly tyers divided among four half-day sessions. They came from LRCTU, other Trout Unlimited chapters, Federation of Fly Fishers members, and from fly shops and streams across the region and the US. Many of the tyers have earned national reputations for their skills. They were tying everything from miniscule Midges to huge saltwater flies, and a plethora of patterns in between.

The Three Princes held an impromptu court at one tying table, only to have the session almost dissolve in laughter at their antics.



It started when Joe Humphreys, the Pennsylvania limestone stream expert, was tying small flies for trout. Lefty Kreh, who likes saltwater as much or more than fresh, sat down beside him. Then Bob Clouser, who is originated the Clouser Minnow for Smallmouth Bass, only to have the pattern spread across the piscatorial spectrum, joined the two of them. As the crowd surrounding the trio grew, it wasn't long before the jokes started flying and the laughter drowned out Joe's instructions. It was an experience the audience will not soon forget.

The Three Princes of Fly Fishing held seminars, casting demonstrations and book signings throughout the two days of festivities. Many attendees took advantage of the opportunity to receive a casting lesson from the best of the best, including small, limestone stream finesse techniques by Joe Humphreys, Smallmouth Bass techniques by Bob Clouser, and superb, near-effortless distance casting techniques

by Lefty Kreh. They are masters to behold. Their presentations were truly enlightening to the novice and experienced caster alike.



In addition to fine tyers, we have some fine casters of our own. This was demonstrated



in a Casting Contest for the attendees. The contest was a test of both accuracy and distance, simulating on-stream requirements typically encountered on many streams. Winners, Andrew

Still and Kris Maurer, took home prizes supplied by Little River Outfitters, the superb fly shop in Townsend.



Educational exhibits were on display in a large tent in the center of the parade ground. Booth occupants included Casting For Recovery, which supports breast cancer victims, and Project Healing Waters, which supports injured military, both of which use fly fishing to assist in rehabilitation. LRCTU and FFF displayed details of their program activities; Little River Watershed Association and the University of Tennessee showed the impact their program have on our

environment; the Fisheries Department of the National Park Service and the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency had displays describing the fisheries resources in East Tennessee. TWRA brought their fish tank, which mesmerized the youngsters...and some of us less successful fishermen.

Several food vendors supplied gastronomical delights to sustain the crowds. Arts and Crafts vendors exhibited their skills with outdoor themes, complimenting the TROUTFEST theme. Inflatable games, provided to entertain the younger set, proved to be a big attraction for families attending the outdoor event.

While TROUTFEST provides great entertainment and education for the public,

Gary Verholek
865-567-9801
gverholek@gmail.com

More photos (~250) available on request.

the LRCTU mission broadly supports the GSMNP Fisheries – *conserving, protecting, and restoring America's cold-water resources*. For the LRCTU, their efforts begin at home, on the streams in the Park. While it may not be possible to restore Brookies to all the streams in their original range, over 17 mile have been restored, and another 8 miles will be restored this year. The positive results illustrate the value of their efforts and the success of their approach. And why not have some fun while we're at it?

Thanks to tireless members and countless friends, TROUTFEST provides much needed support for the Brookies. Everyone involved can be proud; this is the VOLUNTEER State.