

## President's Message

By Mike Beachy

I wish I had some outstanding information to pass on or a big announcement to make about all the wonderful up and coming events that are available for our membership but I don't. It has been a particularly difficult year trying to deal with the Covid pandemic restrictions. Even though trout fishing is basically a solitary sport our chapter events are social. That leaves us in a quandary- we are a trout group that cannot gather.

Despite the Covid restrictions LECTU has been continuing to meet in small numbers in a member's basement. The Middlebury Library, where we were meeting, is now open however they have not opened their meeting rooms. We are still viable and in operation just restricted.

One thing that has not changed or been affected by Covid is the Little Elkhart River itself. The river is open for trout fishing and the trout are still there.

The trout don't care about political turmoil, protests, pandemics or anything else that throws a wrench into our lives. The trout live on!

After the year we just went through I believe everyone could use a little normalcy. I'm not talking about the "new normal" I'm referring to the "old normal". I'm talking about leaving to go fishing and making sure I have all my fishing gear and not worrying about carrying a facemask in my pocket "just in case". A trout stream can give that old normal back if only for several hours and it can be the mental break we all should be taking advantage of.

Spring has arrived. Soon the woods and river banks will be budding out as the sun warms and new growth begins again. LECTU is still here and still working on making the river and the trout fishing better. Hopefully the Pandemic will wane and we can emerge from out of the shadows.



## Hunting Seasons/Voluntary Closure of Access

LECTU has strived to work as a liaison between the trout sport fishing public and the private property owners along the Little Elkhart River. This is something that in this part of northern Indiana, where the Little Elkhart River is located, has not been a big issue. Other parts of this country and certainly in other parts of the world, this is an issue. In this country you can still come

home from work, grab your fishing rod and head out to catch some fish in a local river or lake. It is not like that in many parts of the world where natural resources are owned by the property owner and you have to procure, trade or pay for the opportunity to fish.



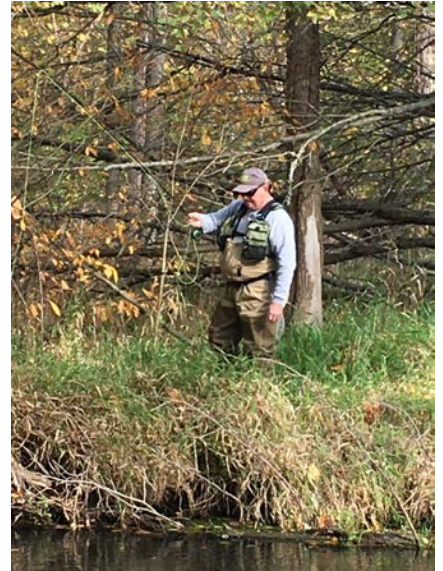
In Indiana the State owns the “river”. It owns the fish in the river and sets the rules of how many and what size and all that. The property owner owns the dirt under the water and pays property tax on that dirt either half way across the river if the property line is the river or all the way across if he owns both sides of the river. Since the Little E is not a designated “Navigable Waterway” the property owner holds all the cards when it comes to allowing a fisherman access to the State-owned River that flows over the property owner’s land. If he owns on both sides of the river, he has full right to prevent you from fishing on his property since

you would have to stand on his property to do so. I would guess that 98% of the Little Elkhart River flows across private property. This is a real concern of mine and should be everyone’s.

The reason it is not a big issue here is because we live in a time warp...well kind of. The majority of the Little Elkhart River flows through western LaGrange and eastern Elkhart Counties. What is special about this area? It holds one of this country’s strongest hard core, old order Amish communities remaining. I grew up here and I have seen the Amish progression slipping generation after generation. The Amish are very friendly and as a rule non-confrontational. Locals know that and understand it without really thinking about it. The Amish are amicable to trout fishermen and are accustomed to seeing them especially in the spring. Outsiders coming to an Amish farm to fish the Little E from a different region with a different mentality may sway some of our Amish stewards to rethink this whole trespass allowance issue.

LECTU worked closely with the property owners in the Catch and Release section of the river prior to and during the establishment of the Catch and Release rule change in 2006. The property owners

were concerned about fishermen being on their properties during deer season, October, November and December. Our answer was to voluntarily close the properties for trout fishing during deer season. It was an easy fix since not too many trout fishermen utilize the river during those months. A new issue has arisen now that wild turkey populations have exploded and hunting them has become popular. The issue is that the opening of Spring Turkey Hunting Season is Wednesday April 21 and the opening day of the Indiana Trout catch and keep season is Saturday April 24. The State of Indiana will have stocked the Little E with the hatchery rainbows to entice every "want to be" trout fishermen off the couch and into hip-boots in an effort to get his share of the hatchery rainbow fish.



The property owners in the Catch and Release section near County Road 43 wish to have their properties closed for spring Turkey season. LECTU will have a sign posted at the bridge to warn fishermen to stay off these properties until after May 9. I am worried that there is a real potential for problems to arise between the property owners who want to hunt their land, as they rightly should and the trout fishermen who want to peruse the hatchery trout that the State has provided from trout stamp sales provided by those sportsmen. The property owner holds all the cards when it comes to access. It will only take one big argument between a fisherman and a landowner to start to see No Trespassing signs start popping up. In the past if the DNR saw No Trespassing signs posted at a bridge they would not stop the rainbow trout stocking truck and would proceed to the next bridge. This is not a good situation since we want the rainbow trout planted.

The Amish community is pretty tight. As a trout fisherman I want to see the stream remain open and the property owners happy. That may be a soft and fluffy view and I don't know exactly how much we can do to prevent our little time warp from complete collapse. Then again who do we think we are trying to stop something that may never become an issue.

I do credit the Little Elkhart time warp effect to the reason this little trout stream has survived all these years. The Amish up here farm with horses. It is really something to see. The good part about it is that the Amish farmers do not encroach on the stream banks, do not heavily fertilize and do not irrigate their fields by removing several million gallons of river-groundwater. The river has suffered degradation in the past but with a little help has recovered nicely. U- wittingly the Little Elkhart River was saved by the Amish.

The top half of the Catch and Release section County Road 43 through Wilbur Yoder's meadow will be voluntarily closed to trout fishing April 24 thru May 9 for Spring Turkey Hunting. This same access at CR 43 is closed for Deer hunting season October 1 thru early January next year.

Hopefully everyone will behave themselves this opening day, no fishermen will get shot and no property owners will have their turkey hunt spoiled by a woods crunching trout fisherman.

## Wood Duck Houses



Members of LECTU installed a half dozen wood duck boxes along the Little Elkhart River in February in anticipation of the spring migration. Anyone who has spent time trout fishing the Little E can tell you there are a lot of woodies screaming up and down the river. Over the past several years the population of this beautiful little duck has grown.

Mark Holcomb, who has ties with Indiana Ducks Unlimited, hooked our Chapter up with a fairly significant pile of wood duck houses that were fabricated by a Girl Scout Troop as one of their projects. Mark Organized a small group of members to install the boxes in some low wet areas about the mid-Catch and Release section.

We will be on the look-out for more wetland areas to install more boxes in the future. Although birds do not really fall under a Trout Chapter's responsibility, we saw a need, we are a conservation organization so we took care of it in a cooperative effort with the Girl Scouts and

Ducks Unlimited. Doing good deeds is what we are all about.

## Three Ages of the Fisherman

By Mike Beachy

"The ancients wrote of the three ages of man; I propose to write about the three ages of fisherman. When he wants to catch all the fish he can. When he strives to catch the largest fish. When he studies to catch the most difficult fish he can find, requiring the greatest skill and refined tackle, caring more for the sport than the fish." This statement was written by Edward R. Hewitt in 1948.

Hewitt was correct in his statement although I don't believe many fishermen bother to achieve the third level. Level one, wanting to catch all the fish one can. This brings up the image of kids fishing off the dock on a lake filled with bluegill. Once they start to catch them, they want to catch them faster, it gets hard to keep the hooks baited and remove those fish hooked. It is tough for kids to stop fishing once they begin catching them. Kids want them fast and now and they can't wait to tell someone how many fish they caught.

Level two, striving to catch the largest fish. I believe all fishermen get sucked into this size matters thing. I can't tell you how many times I'm greeted while fishing "How'd you do?" only to answer "caught fish but nothing of any size". What the heck is that? Small trout don't count? I'm sure taxidermists generally bring the largest fish and I'm sure most anglers prefer larger fish to smaller fish. I guess Hewitt is probably correct that once a fisherman can catch fish he generally wants to get the largest one he can.

Level three, going after the most difficult fish and staying true to the sport. I have been captivated by trout before, trout in difficult places and situations that seem nearly impossible to present a fly in order to catch that fish. I am a slow fisherman anyways but I have been known to spend a long time on one trout in an effort to challenge myself.

In the spring of 2018, I was trout fishing the South Platte River in Colorado. It was the second day of trout fishing the same section so I had the trout dialed in and was having a pretty good day. The trout were doing what they were supposed to do, eating what they were supposed to eat, feeding where they were supposed to feed so all was good in my world. Towards late afternoon there was a Blue Wing Olive hatch that brought up a bunch of trout eager to eat the emerging duns. Catching was going well at this point and it seemed like trout were everywhere. That is when I noticed a nice trout feeding along the far bank. It was rising at regular intervals always in the same spot. The spot where the trout was holding was about 4 to 6 inches from the opposite shore where grass and willows protected the trout. The fish was about 50-60 feet away from me in a section with very little current. The duns were being blown over to shore as they sat on the water surface drying their wings. Between myself and the trout was the main current so as soon as my fly line touched the surface of the river it would begin to drag and that resulted in many dry fly refusals.



For some reason this fish captivated me and I became possessed with figuring out how to catch it. I spent the last several hours working the fish from different angles, different types of cast, different fly patterns. I tried everything but dynamite. I would make a bad cast and put the trout down for a while before it started feeding again. I finally realized that the day was gone. It was getting dark and the trout were still feeding. I just could no longer see my fly. I had failed. I spent all that time and effort and never did catch the trout.

The next day I fished a different section however the entire day I kept thinking about that trout and why the fish had not eaten my fly. I figured out how to make a cast that would stay in the trout's feeding window for about 4 to 8 seconds before it would get pulled out by line/current drag and that should be plenty of time if I timed it with the consistent feeding nature of the trout. I figured that my

problem was that those good casts came way too late in my learning curve and that by the time I perfected my cast the trout had already gotten wise to the fake bug thing and wouldn't eat. That day I quit fishing early in order to return to the section I had been on the days prior just to get another shot at that bank feeding trout. I got back to the place the trout lived and sure enough it was there in the exact same spot feeding just like yesterday.



I got myself lined up to make my cast. I made my cast and realized it was not going to be a good one so I pulled it to land short of my target then once it passed the trout, I lifted the fly as not to spook the trout or inadvertently have a different trout come up and eat my fly and alert the one, I intended on catching. My second cast was right on the money and the trout sucked down my dry fly. I set the hook and landed the fish. It ended up being a pretty nice trout however I didn't know it prior to catching it. I released the trout after a signature selfie and waded out of the river done for the day. There was a guy fishing up river from where I had been that I had not noticed and he called out to me "That's It? You make two casts, catch a big trout and now

you're leaving?" I had to laugh. So, I walked up to him and told him about the day before and how the trout had captured my thoughts and how I had to take a second shot at it, while the trout was fresh.

I don't believe I was attempting to attain any kind of Zen fishing level by going after that trout. I was possessed with catching it because I knew that I could do it given another opportunity. I also knew that I was at the end of my vacation and if I didn't go for it that day my opportunity would be gone forever. I don't know what would have happened had I not been successful. I probably would still be standing out in the middle of the South Platte River mumbling something about a parachute mid-air stack mend.

## **Covid 19 "Killer of all things fun"**

by Mike Beachy

I am not going to write another story about Covid 19 but it has sure screwed everything up over the last year and continues to affect our Chapter.

We are NOT going to hold our annual Spring Outing again this May. Middlebury Parks are not as of yet taking reservations for the city parks where we hold our Outing and cannot assure us that that will happen in time for us to plan the event. There is a lot of planning and organization that goes into pulling off the Outing and with no guarantee that "things" will return to normal by early May we decided to not attempt to hold the Outing. Last year we were ready to go when we were shut down by restrictions at the last minute resulting in the cancelation of the event. Trying to get the word out was almost as much work as planning it all out.

We considered alternatives to the Outing possibly doing something “on line” or maybe a fall event and decided the best alternative was to simply wait until the spring of 2022 to return to our Annual Spring Outing.

We decided to NOT hold our annual fly rod raffle for 2021. This raffle was known as the Adopt-A-Trout rod raffle with proceeds going towards stocking brown trout into the Little Elkhart River. The reason for this is because we generally sell a lot of raffle tickets when LECTU attends fly fishing shows. The vast majority of the fly shows this past winter were cancelled and without the proceeds from those shows we could not merit purchasing an expensive raffle prize, printing tickets, mailing tickets to our membership. There are fees and a lot of hoops that you need to jump through in order to hold a raffle fundraiser with the Indiana Charitable Gaming Commission. Since LECTU has enough money in our Brown Trout Stocking fund to purchase brown trout for 2021 we decided to postpone the Adopt-A-Trout fundraiser for this year. Financially without the Outing and the fly shows it simply was not profitable enough to hassle with.

## Brown Trout Stocking

All things are a go for the purchase and planting of brown trout into the Little Elkhart River by LECTU. LECTU has been introducing brown trout into the Little Elkhart since 2008. There were a couple years there when brown trout were not available for us to import into Indiana but for the most part this has been an annual event.



For 2021 LECTU has 1000 brown trout ordered from Crystal Springs Trout Hatchery in Muskegon Michigan. The trout are expected to be larger than the 10-inch browns we normally receive. Apparently, Crystal Springs' orders for brown trout during the pandemic were low due to Covid restrictions on many of Michigan's private Trout Clubs. As a result, Crystal Springs has an over abundance of larger browns that he would like to get rid of so LECTU gets to reap the benefits.

500 of those brown trout will be planted into the Catch and Release section of the river with the remaining 500 being planted downstream in prime trout habitat. The stocking will occur sometime in May. Volunteers will be needed to assist bucket the trout from the truck to the river. If you would like to help stock brown trout into the river contact Nick Christofeno for further information. (n.christofeno@gmail.com).

The brown trout seem to be holding up well. The water level has been very low from about September through March. The brown trout spawn around mid-November in the Little E and because of the low water spawning redds were easy to observe and the numbers were outstanding. Hopefully this will equate to a good natural reproduction year for our resident browns.

# Tree-Hugger

by Tom Vanderputten

As most of you are aware, Trout Unlimited was established in 1959 along the banks of Michigan's Au Sable River by a group of 16 anglers who were interested in protecting trout in that and other popular fishing rivers. The premise was simple. Take care of the waters, and the trout will take care of themselves. Today Trout Unlimited is an organization of over 150,000 people with local chapters in every state which includes LECTU (Little Elkhart Chapter of Trout Unlimited) our chapter. Today TU stands for Protecting, Reconnecting, Restoring, and sustaining our cold water resources. TU works to protect important habitat, and reconnect degraded waterways and restore trout populations.

Unfortunately many people don't remember, and are unaware just how bad our major rivers and streams had become in the 1950s and 1960s. There were no environmental regulations, and pollution was rampant. Anyone seeking to protect the air, water, and forests was given the derogatory term of tree-hugger. Most people at that time were very complacent about the need for changes. It took a major event to wake everyone and start actions needed to restore the waterways. That event happened on June 22, 1969. An oil slick on the Cuyahoga River near downtown Cleveland Ohio caught fire. The resulting news coverage about a river itself catching fire was the catalyst to finally get people to understand how badly the pollution had become.

Three years later on October 18, 1972 the Clean Water Act (CWA) was enacted. This was Federal Legislation with the goal to improve wastewater treatment, and maintain the integrity of wetlands. There were major amendments invoked in subsequent years, including the CWA of 1977, and the Water Quality Act of 1987. Over thirty years later the result is the near universal improvement of our water and waterways. This includes the partnership of TU and other national conservation groups with local, state, and national agencies to continually improve and monitor the air, water, and forests.

While working for the company from which I eventually retired I was directly involved in one of these efforts. The company was a specialty trailer manufacturer located in Nappanee IN, and among my responsibilities I was the compliance officer for all the national, state, and local regulations. This list included IDEM (Indiana Department of Environmental Management). One of the IDEM regulations was known as the GroundWater Runoff Act. This was an act regulating the exterior storage of raw materials, and other manufacturing components which when exposed to rain fall could leach waste into the runoff and eventually into rivers and streams. The manufacturer was required to take quarterly water samples after a rain





event. The sample was then to be analyzed by a laboratory and the results submitted to IDEM. Toxic runoff was illegal, but each manufacturer was permitted by license to be able to allow an amount of what was considered normal waste runoff (for instance rusty equipment). My company and I decided this was not a good enough effort to prevent waste water runoff. We applied for and received (only after three inspections and considerable effort to limit our exposure to zero) a Five Year WasteWater Exemption. This meant our company has zero waste water runoff, and we did not have the cost of quarterly runoff analysis. This was a major Win-Win for the company and the environment, and although I am now retired I still consider this one my major accomplishments.



Unfortunately not everyone remembers the past, and is willing to work to protect the advances made since the dark days of the 1950s and 1960s. Recently the Indiana Senate passed Senate Bill 389 by a vote of 29-19. This is a bill to repeal the wetlands act that Indiana enacted in the 1990s. The act would remove any environmental protection from wetlands not directly connected by water to a stream, river, or flowing waterway. In other words stand-alone bogs and small non-contiguous small water areas are not considered worth protecting. This ignores the science behind all wetlands operating as natural filters and environmentally necessary. The Nature Conservancy is leading the efforts to defeat this bill in the Indiana House of

Representatives. We need to stop the repeal

and protect Indiana's precious wetlands. I know from personal experience that business and the environment are not mutually exclusive. They both can exist together and prosper. I am a proud member of TU, and proud to be called a tree-hugger.

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