

## A New Beginning for Wild Trout in the Saco River Valley



The members of **Saco Valley Trout Unlimited Chapter 299**, known as **The Saco Valley Anglers**, have resolved to discontinue its supplementary stocking program in the Saco River. This decision was made after lengthy internal debate and in accordance with Trout Unlimited national conservation policies. Collectively, we have decided to forge a new path forward in the Mount Washington Valley's cold-water fishery and work toward a goal of promoting wild trout and a self-sustainable fishery where ever possible.

During much of its history the original Saco Valley Anglers group operated as an independent and private organization. The original Saco Valley Anglers was founded in the early 1970's and from its beginnings the major objective of the group was to stock trout in our local rivers for recreational purposes. At that time, this practice was considered scientifically supported within the region and the most effective means to provide viable angling opportunities. The Saco Valley Anglers held annual fund raising events to raise money for the purpose of stocking trout in the Ellis and Saco Rivers respectively. These events traditionally had popular support in the Valley. As it is across the country, we recognize the debate as to stock or not to stock has always been in contention amongst our membership both past and present. As time has passed, and better scientific data has become available, it has become clear that stocking is a short-term solution to deeper conservation issues that we must confront. Our position and renewed alliances with Trout Unlimited National has solidified our current stance. In 2000 The Saco Valley Anglers stopped stocking the Ellis River in the belief that we were potentially doing more harm than good. At that time, the members decided to continue stocking the Saco River with Brown trout and have continued to do so up until recently. This immediately raised some concerns as National TU did not support the stocking of trout by its membership. In consideration of our renewed efforts to help better

our local cold-water fisheries, and concurrently protect our native brook trout populations, we feel this policy change is a necessary step forward.

Four years ago, Saco Valley Trout Unlimited Chapter 299 entered into a partnership with New Hampshire Fish and Game, to study and collect data on the presence of wild trout in the Wildcat River. Under the direction of State fisheries biologist, Dianne Timmons, our members have volunteered and helped with electroshocking and data collection on the Saco, Ellis and Wildcat Rivers respectively to assess the current state of wild trout. It is our hope that the Wildcat River will be included in the list of New Hampshire wild trout streams and given the protection that goes along with this designation. Two years ago, as a result of this data and the hard work of those involved, NHF&G stopped stocking the upper portion of the Wildcat above Jackson Falls, a natural barrier. Our efforts with this ongoing partnership gave rise to a renewed debate as to whether Saco Valley Trout Unlimited should be stocking trout. It was determined that in order to effectively promote wild trout conservation in our area this vestige of our past needed to come to an end on the Saco River as well.

In conclusion, Saco Valley Trout Unlimited Chapter 299 believes the following:

- Stocking can be detrimental to self-sustaining wild fish populations. Some of the smaller tributaries of the Saco River have documented populations of wild, natural, sustainable brook trout. By stocking large Brown trout, we endanger these fragile stocks of fish.
- The EBT has seen a rapid decline in habitat and prevalence and if not actively conserved, could potentially become extirpated within parts of our state.
- For the last two years NH F&G has continued to stock increased numbers of trout for anglers use. In 2017 NH F&G stocked approximately 14,500 trout and in 2018 approximately 16,250 trout in the Saco River.
- As a TU chapter we have been going against the policies of our own national organization. Although there are several “gray” areas that could be debated over ad nauseum, we feel we should be beyond reproach with compliance on this matter.
- As a TU chapter we wish to make a stronger commitment to the conservation and protection of our wild cold-water fisheries in New Hampshire where ever possible. Our hope is to realize the natural potential that exists within our state, and to provide as much support and information to advocate for this issue being brought to the forefront of our continued dialogues with our NH F&G Department.

We accept that this is a major change for our chapter; however, we must rededicate ourselves to do what is best for the rivers of the Mount Washington Valley. We also hope that by making this change that our NH F&G department will recognize that there is a new generation of anglers and conservationists committed to the preservation and replenishment of our remaining wild trout stocks and habitat. Please take note, we are here to stay. Thank you.