



January, 2017

Dear TU Colleagues,

As we turn the page on 2016 and I prepare to commence my term as the Chair of the Massachusetts-Rhode Island Council, there is reason to be proud of what our chapters and council have accomplished, but it is no time to sit on our laurels.

Under the leadership of outgoing Council Chair John Troiano, the last three years have indeed been productive. We have continued to deliver on our commitment to the Red Brook project, protecting and restoring one of Massachusetts' best streams for sea run brook trout. Two new large conservation projects – Angeline Brook and West Branch North River (Crowningshield)– involved contributing significant funding that ensured that over 200 acres of land could be acquired and taken out of development through the use of conservation restrictions. Both projects align with TU's tradition of partnering with land trusts to help conserve and restore prime brook trout habitat. Many hands helped carry the load of negotiating the agreements, performing the physical labor, and raising the funds necessary to bring these projects to realization. I applaud the efforts of too many individual members to name, the chapters that organized various member efforts, and the work of the Council to rally a collaborative, all-inclusive approach to supporting these projects. I applaud John for navigating the Council through these challenging and rewarding opportunities.

The coming years will present new opportunities and challenges. President-elect Trump has been quoted as saying "Clean water, crystal-clean water is vitally important," a statement with which all can agree. Coldwater conservation is not a partisan issue, although depending on priorities, it can receive greater or lesser attention. If some of the President-elect's appointees are an indication, administration voices promoting development will be greater in number and volume than those promoting coldwater conservation. All sides of the political spectrum will need to be vigilant and vocal about our common interest in conservation and environmental protection. Regardless of our views on specific policies, we can and should remain committed to our ideals of coldwater conservation. Our mission and our actions remain simple and steadfast: to do the work of conserving, protecting, and restoring our coldwater fisheries and watersheds.

Toward that end, we as members and leaders of our chapters and the Council will need to be more organized, more effective, and work harder than ever before. The degree of difficulty of our work may become greater, but it also may evolve to being more locally based, rather than federally based. We need to work together more creatively and cooperatively than ever before, to be both a resource for and an influencer of decision makers and stakeholders in our work.

As Chris Woods put it in the most recent issue of *Trout Magazine* and on-line in his "Note to the TU Family" immediately after the election, "In the wake of a rancorous debate, many will want to walk around the battle-field and bayonet the wounded. Others will howl in the wind and talk of moving to

Canada. Resist both urges. Our work, our entire approach to collaborative stewardship—is more vital—more needed in this country than ever before.”

He is right – the election is over, a new year is here, and it’s time to get back to doing what we do – working with each other on the stewardship issues that mean so much to us.

The incoming council officers are committed to a number of ideals and actions, which follow:

- Fostering respectful dialogue. As circumstances change, our strategies may need to change. It is fair to expect much debate in the coming year(s), both amongst ourselves and with external audiences. We have to be driven by the idea that conservation is non-partisan, and our use of language must follow the idea. We can focus on the 80 to 90% of the issues on which we agree, and we can seek to persuade skeptics with dispassionate, science-based information.
- We will adapt the organization and functioning of the Council so that it can be responsive to the challenges ahead by:
  - Building out communication structures for both focused dialogue with chapter leaders and broad dialogue with all TU chapter members in Rhode Island and Massachusetts. This includes developing new practices for communication, using regular conference calls and other technologies when practicable.
  - Reconstituting structures, such as executive, finance, and communications committees in addition to our already operational Environmental Affairs Committee. The committees will be charged with specific missions and meet regularly.
  - Reviewing our 2013 Strategic Plan with an eye toward updating it to our current context and measuring our progress toward its objectives to assess what works well and what doesn’t.
  - Utilizing the great resource of our National Leadership Council Representative (Garry Crago) to ensure that the line of communication between TU National and the Council, and by extension, with the chapters as well, is open and fluid.
  - Developing strong relationships with TU staff working locally in the field in New England and in Volunteer Operations.
  - Extending our relationships with other environmentally minded organizations that share our approach, where symbiosis and synergy may be realized.
- Providing opportunities for TU chapter members to become involved at the Council level. Art Neumann, the founding father of TU famously said “Take care of the fish, and the fishing will take care of itself.” We believe that if we take care of our members, then membership will take care of itself. We will continuously look to provide opportunities for members to engage with TU in ways that have the most meaning for them, according to their abilities and resources.

It sounds like a lot of work, and it will be. But I also know from talking with council colleagues that we – our membership – possess the talent, energy, intellect and passion to be the organization that we want to be. We have funds to raise, lands to conserve, streams to restore, relationships to create, non-members to invite, children to nourish, dreams to fulfill, and a future to build. This organization means the world to me, and your involvement does, too.

Best wishes for the New Year,

*Mark Burton*

Mark Burton

Chairman

MA-RI Council of Trout Unlimited