



History of the National Leadership Council

By Larry Harris, Duke Welter and Tom Anacker

There is a plaque marking the birthplace of Trout Unlimited on the Au Sable River in Michigan. It states in part: “Trout Unlimited is a National conservation organization dedicated to the preservation of trouts and their environment and the perpetuation of the fine sport of trout angling”. Since 1959 the mission and vision of TU has focused on protecting, conserving and restoring trout and salmon watersheds. The early reference to trout angling these days is sometimes forgotten, but remains the “hook” that often brings in new members and keeps all of us in touch with the resources we work hard to protect.

Today, TU has grown in both membership and staff which has greatly improved our capacity to accomplish effective conservation work. We have vibrant and committed chapters and councils across the country leading the way on the local front. Recent surveys indicate that many new members now join TU because of our conservation activities. This growth and the increased scope of our conservation work necessitate good communication between the grassroots and TU National. This is the story of how the NLC has evolved to strengthen our role within the TU organization.

Prior to 1992 the Board of Trustees of TU consisted of 100 grassroots members. This format served the organization in its early stages of growth, but to more effectively carry out the protect, conserve and restore mission, a restructuring was necessary. So the **National Resource Board (NRB)** was established as the connection between the Grassroots and National TU. Each State Council selected a Director to serve on the NRB and there were 10 Regional Vice-presidents appointed, the latter group reporting to the Board of Trustees (BOT). The BOT also had At-Large members whose primary role was to raise money to support the growing body of work carried out by TU staff. The function of the NRB was to establish the National Conservation Agenda (NCA), which was identified during meetings with NRB members in their region. After a ten-year run and the continued growth of the TU organization, the NRB format needed to be retooled. TU leaders believed that there might be a better way to have the grassroots involved in the development and implementation of NCA.

In 2001 an outside consultant was engaged to study TU and the NRB and after many interviews, came up with a new organizational format: The **National Leadership Council (NLC)**. The TU By-Laws changed the role of this new leadership group to:

- To develop and amend, as needed, the Corporation’s National Conservation Agenda (NCA) and set priorities among issues included in that agenda.
- To implement the NCA at all levels of the organization
- To work on improving and increasing the organizational capacity of TU

During this restructuring, 10 Grassroots Trustees were added to the existing group of At-Large Trustees on the BOT. Two of the new Grassroots Trustees positions were filled by the officers of the NLC – the NLC Chair and NLC Secretary. In addition to serving as NLC officers and Grassroots Trustees, these officers sit on the Executive Board of Trout Unlimited, and serve roles in leadership of the NLC. Each State Council selects a NLC member to represent them at National TU. This individual is responsible to communicate information about National activities and policies back to their constituents.

The new organizational structure was approved in 2002, and leadership set out to accomplish the goals set forth above. Two types of NLC Workgroups were established to address those goals: Organizational and Conservation. NLC members are asked to serve on one Organizational and one Conservation workgroup of their choice. In addition, the New Initiatives Workgroup was established to serve as the nomination committee to nominate NLC officers, Grassroots Trustees and Embrace A Stream Committee members, and to review and provide suggested amendments to the NCA. The NLC as a whole then votes on the NLC officer nominations and the NCA at the Annual Meeting. The vote for the Grassroots Trustee nominees is conducted at the Annual Membership meeting.

After the current Strategic Plan was approved in 2008 the New Initiatives Workgroup revised the NCA to match how the TU mission was outlined in this Plan. In 2010 the NLC established the concept of identifying 6-8 critical focus areas to be appended to the NCA. These issues are identified by the NLC as being time sensitive and vital to the TU mission. Examples of critical focus areas include supporting the effort to stop Pebble Mine and the restoration of Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout in Yellowstone Lake. Each year the issues are reviewed and the list altered so as to address current issues most critical for the upcoming year.

Workgroups

The various organizational and conservation workgroups were established to help implement the NCA at all levels of TU and to help build the organizational capacity of TU. Originally, the workgroups were developed to deal with the issues that were paramount in 2002. Some have endured while others completed their work and have been eliminated. As of 2014 the Workgroups are as follows:

Organizational

- New Initiatives
- Grassroots
- Education (Youth Initiative)
- Women's Initiative
- By-Laws
- Fundraising

Conservation

- Great Lakes
- Western Native Trout
- Delaware River
- TU DARE
- Responsible Energy Development
- Conservancy
- Access
- Climate Change

Each of these workgroups has TU Staff assigned to aid them in their work. It is required that each workgroup be chaired by a NLC member, however anyone can participate as a member of a workgroup if they have a genuine interest in the group. We have seen Council Chairs, Chapter leaders and Grassroots Trustees participate in what is becoming an embodiment of the "One TU" philosophy.

Some NLC Accomplishments

- Helped develop the TU Piscicide Policy
- Revised the NCA from 36 issues to 10 in 2002
- Added Land Conservation and Climate Change to the NCA
- Worked with BOT to revise the TU By-Laws
- Revised the NCA to Fit the TU Strategic Plan
- Identified and update Critical Focus Areas each year
- Approve Rechartering and Dechartering of Chapters
- Established Women's Initiative Workgroup
- Established Climate Change Workgroup
- Worked to refine the Access policy of the BOT to fit the needs of the grassroots
- With the Board, formed the Stream Access Working Group (SAWG) to monitor access issues (a major problem for TU some ten years ago, but now a smooth operation)
- Helped develop and implement the Chapter Effectiveness Index (CEI)
- Passed a resolution against stocking of hatchery trout on top of native trout
- Developed a resolution and policy document on oil and gas development that prompted the BOT to establish a TU energy policy

NLC Leaders

Kirk Otey, NLC Chair, 2002-2006
Duke Welter, NLC Secretary, 2004-2006
NLC Chair, 2007-2010
Larry Harris, NLC Secretary, 2007-2010
NLC Chair, 2010-2014
Mick McCorcle, NLC Chair, 2014-
Fred Rasmussen, NLC Secretary 2002-2004
Tom Anacker, NLC Secretary, 2010-2012
Mary Weiss, NLC Secretary, 2012-2014
Paul Doscher, Interim Secretary, 2014; Secretary, 2014

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