

## The Tug Hill/Black River Chapter of Trout Unlimited Exceeded Its 2012 Women's Fly-Fishing Seminar Goals

*We heard a quick screech of car brakes, and everyone looked up to the deck of the Pineville Bridge crossing the Salmon River in Pulaski NY. One would have thought we were witnessing an accident, but instead it was apparent we might be causing an accident. Now three cars were stopped on the bridge, glaring at the water, and we realized most people stopped had never witness nearly 20 women fly anglers lined up along the banks of the river along with their mentors and guides. We all started to chuckle at what must have been an odd moment for the drivers of those vehicles. We were making women's fly fishing history on the Salmon River...*

*- Lindsay Agness, May 2006*

In 2006, the Tug Hill/Black River Chapter of Trout Unlimited decided to offer a Women only 2-day fly fishing seminar. TU member Lindsay Agness agreed to facilitate this volunteer staffed event, with pretty much an all "Guy" team of TU members and other volunteers to get started. Some 15 women signed up for that first class in 2006.

Now...fast forward to 2012. The class date of June 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> was announced in early February. Three days after the announcement, Agness the TU Women's Fly Fishing program coordinator, was inundated with emails, phone calls and face book messages from women that wanted to take the class. In the five years previous to this year, we had no trouble filling the class for 20 women, and always had an over flow of ladies of about five or so.

Agness worked with the Chapter's board to raise the class size to 25. The 2 day class was full of 25 lady fly fishers, with 10 on the waiting list and it wasn't March yet.

Agness has been involved with Project Healing Waters as a guide and mentor to Soldiers at Fort Drum NY. The Women's Seminar started getting requests to attend the class from women soldiers and or men soldier friends & wives urging the TU Chapter to do TWO classes for 2012. Once again Agness worked back with the TU Chapter and all their volunteers (which tends to be almost a guide/volunteer per student), to see if the volunteer staff of 25 would do a second seminar. The same day Agness's request went out ... she received a resounding YES from the TU team they'd be onboard for two weekends in June. So a second class was formed for June (23,24).

By Mid March, there were 50 women signed up for the class, and another 25 on the waiting list. The Chapter continued to receive requests through May and ended with 50 ladies on the waiting list for next year. Over 100 women in a few short months had contacted our TU organization to sign up. Meanwhile TU Tug Hill Chapter Secretary Stacy Furgal was visiting Fly Fishing merchants from Syracuse to Pulaski drumming up donations for the women's events. We totaled fly boxes for 50 women, Rods, fly vests, shirts, socks, books, other gadgets but most of all we even had support for the Women's fly fishing program from Fort Drum, NY and Fort Belvoir, Virginia. The Army was alerted we would have lady Soldiers and Soldiers wives in the class, the vets went on a two month tying frenzy at their on-base PHW events to tie dozens of flies to donate to the ladies event.

Both June 2012 classes were a huge success. It all came down to the excellent work from all the volunteers! Our agenda included lectures on everything from casting and fly tying along with actual

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casting on the lawn, and tying flies in the seminar room, to talks about reading water, knots, entomology, stream etiquette, and how to dress for each season on the rivers to be warm dry and safe. We were excited, for the first time to have all women guides and mentors as the Speakers/trainers that included TU and Casting For Recovery guides Vicky Lane, Pat Watson, and Jan Opal, New York State Licensed guide Jennifer Kakusian, TU Secretary Stacy Furgal, former students Lisa Green, Kim Goppert, Becky Griswold, Bonnie Witchell, Jean Densmore and Erin Oristian.

While the lady guides and mentors proved to be very self sufficient, no class would ever be successful without our men volunteers. A special thanks to Fran Verdoliva Program and Water Shed Coordinator for the DEC and who allows us to use the NYS DEC Altmar Fish hatchery as our home base for the Seminar lectures and casting exercises. Additional thanks to TU Chapter President John Wickam, TU VP Fred Kuepper, TU Treasurer Paul Miller, & many other volunteers. The results were overwhelming. All 50 women showed vast improvements in casting and managing their equipment and moving about on the river over the two day events. The ladies learned that other classmates lived nearby and since have formed little fishing outings at Fort Drum & in the Oswego area. We've followed their success via Facebook posts, Emails and we have witness many successful catches with wonderful photos of them enjoying the outdoors.

The most poignant moment came in the second class, when angler and student Freyda Black who is a Breast Cancer survivor asked to have the floor on day two at breakfast. In a heart felt moment that left everyone's hearts in their throats ...Freyda wanted to thank TU and the volunteers for a life changing moment. That through all her struggles with illness where she had almost given up hope for a fulfilling life, this class, these wonderful women and men volunteers had provided her a new lease on life. ... a reason for hope. She absolutely had fallen in love with fly fishing, and all that surrounds it, the beautiful places these trout live in, and the warm friendships that our sport contributes.

We all know that while fly fishing, you have to embrace the whole journey, your entire surroundings, and this class, and these guides and mentors have been sending that message and achieving those goals for these students for the past six years.