

Tips for Creating a Statewide Coldwater Meeting

The Tailwaters Work Group encourages State Councils to start an annual Coldwater Meeting to develop relationships with key agency personnel and other stakeholders to help protect coldwater fisheries. This meeting would be an annual gathering organized by the State Council of Trout Unlimited inviting federal and state agency representatives, TU members, and other stakeholders to discuss protection and preservation of coldwater fisheries.

Although this suggestion is generated from the Tailwaters WG, the meeting certainly should cover other topics as warranted. As coldwater fisheries vary from state to state, so too will the topics that should be covered in a meeting. TU members know which are the most important issues in their state, so it could be water quality and quantity in the tailwater below dams, it could be polluted runoff from agriculture, it could be protection of headwater mountain streams or cold springs, or a host of other coldwater issues. It is important not to take on too many issues at once in a meeting, but it is also important to not exclude an important issue.

These meetings are born two ways – proactively or out of crisis. While both can have positive results in the end, it is always best to build strong relationships with key people before an emergency, such as a fish kill due to flow, temperature or dissolved oxygen changes. The results can be adversarial in the beginning, but this adversity is what needs to be avoided in order to protect fisheries in the long run.

Tennessee has hosted their annual Cooperative Meeting for the Enhancement of Cold Water Fisheries (aka the Coldwater Meeting) with state and federal agencies since the 1991. This provides the TN Council and Chapters the opportunity to interact with federal and state employees, private / corporate agencies, and members of academia that are involved with fisheries research. This was done proactively before a crisis.

By contrast, in Arkansas, the White River Dissolved Oxygen Committee was created by then-Governor Clinton after a massive fish kill on the White River. While this group was born of crisis, in the long-term it has led to cooperative partnerships between TU and state and federal agencies.

Coldwater Meeting Goals:

- Make sure TU's voice is heard and concerns noted and, hopefully, addressed.
 - For example, the TN Council has found it productive to coordinate an agenda with the agencies, which will be making presentations or discussing coldwater conservation issues where there may be a difference of opinion.
 - Make sure attendees come educated on the issues to the degree possible and ready to delve into the issues. No one should arrive at the meeting and ask 'what are we talking about today' and spend the next hour trying to get up to speed.
- Maintain and strengthen relationships with key government agencies, the state game and fish agency, and the US Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation or other federal agencies that control dams in your state. Demonstrate to these agencies that TU is truly interested in addressing and solving coldwater conservation issues.

The meeting should include:

- Updates on the status of ongoing and completed coldwater conservation efforts and what is being planned for the coming year. This includes question and answer sessions and allows the TU members to express concerns with projects and how these activities affect coldwater resources and fishing opportunities. These updates should also include presentations from TU, as appropriate, to make sure that the agencies are aware of our conservation efforts.

- The opportunity for TU to request additional consideration for protection of coldwater resources (e.g., minimum flows to keep the majority of the river bed wet to ensure a sustainable aquatic ecosystem with biotic diversity as great as feasible).
- The meeting should allow for discussion of controversial issues and challenges to the tailwaters to be addressed with an update at the next meeting. Be respectful and agree to disagree if needed, but don't miss an opportunity to address the 'elephant in the room' if needed.

General Tips:

- Put aside the "poison pen" and try the "good neighbor" approach by beginning to not only address concerns of the fishery but that of the local communities and visitors to the region. Understand that the agencies have requirements, which can be considerably different from what TU's objective is; there generally is middle ground in these cases.
- Involve the coldwater community outside of TU and the government agencies:
 - Seek involvement from other non-profit organizations; partner and share opportunities and issues.
 - Seek insight and awareness from fishing guides and business owners who rely on the coldwater fishery and the local economy.
- Before you meet with any agency representatives or other nonprofits, it is important that the TU Council and Chapter members that will take the lead first meet and agree on what issues to cover and set the tone (including emotional tone) of the meetings. It is always important to be unified in message and purpose.
- Select someone to chair the Coldwater Meeting that will be aware of any sensitive issues and allow for a balance of views during the meeting.
- It is advisable for the primary actors from the groups or agencies, say five or six people, meet or communicate by conference call before the larger meeting to make sure the purpose of the meeting, the agenda and issues are understood.

Suggestions on whom to include:

- Although the agencies and groups will vary from state to state and from dam to dam, below are some suggestions on whom to include:
 - Federal Agencies: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, Army Corps of Engineers, and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.
 - State Agencies: state Dept. of Fish & Game, state Dept of Environmental Protection, state Forest and Parks Service, and the state Dept. of Energy.
 - Other Stakeholders: Non-profit conservation groups vary from state to state and some even have different focuses in each state, but can make for strong allies, so consider including them, as well.