

TU's National Leadership Council: What it Is and What it Does

BY JIM WALKER AND RICH THOMAS

Last year, when the two of us stepped in as chair and secretary of the National Leadership Council (NLC), we resolved to embark on a lengthy listening session. Over the course of 2019, we had intensive conversations with nearly 75 NLC representatives, council chairs and workgroup leaders. Our goal: to assess the state of the TU grassroots.

What did we learn?

We learned that even as TU has grown into a \$50 million organization with a professional conservation staff of more than 220, volunteers remain its foundation and one of its greatest strengths. Add up the number of grassroots hours and dollars spent putting conservation projects in place, educating the next generation, engaging veterans and their families, advocating for wild trout and building chapters, and the numbers are

truly impressive: more than 737,000 hours, \$10.7 million dollars, 1,000 conservation projects, 1,600 educational outreach programs and 600 veterans events. We also learned that we're at a critical time for the organization, and we learned something about what's needed to grow and sustain our efforts over the next generation.

One thing we discovered last year was that many TU members have only a vague notion of what the National Leadership Council (NLC) is, how we fit into the TU ecosystem, what we do, and perhaps most importantly, how they can play a role in our work. So let's take a moment to remedy that. You probably know that the 32-member Board of Trustees directs the overall operation of Trout Unlimited. You surely understand that councils and chapters do much of the day-in, day-out work

of the organization, with national staff providing leadership, assistance and initiative. On the TU organization chart, the NLC sits between the Board and the state councils.

The NLC is a group of 38 volunteers representing the 36 state councils. The simple idea is that input and ideas from the grassroots should bubble up through NLC representatives to the board and national staff, and national initiatives should filter back through us to our members and supporters. (As NLC chair and secretary, the two of us also sit on the Board of Trustees.)

The NLC's three roles are to set a National Conservation Agenda, direct its implementation and oversee national and regional initiatives to grow and improve TU's ability to achieve its mission.

The National Conservation Agenda encapsulates TU's top-line priorities.

NATIONAL LEADERSHIP COUNCIL WORKGROUPS



Climate Change

Developing a science-based educational program to raise awareness about the impacts of a changing climate on the future of trout and salmon.



CHRISTOPHE PEREZ

Delaware River

Representing TU on important issues facing the Delaware River Basin, including the need for improved minimum flow agreements to protect native and wild trout.

There, you will find both our coldwater conservation goals, like protecting wild and native trout watersheds or reconnecting habitat, and our organizational needs, such as encouraging grassroots participation or improving chapter

through 14 workgroups focused on critical conservation issues, key regions and organizational needs. Though NLC representatives make up the bulk of workgroup members, they are open to any TU member.

The NLC helps put the National Conservation Agenda into action through 14 workgroups focused on critical conservation issues, key regions and organizational needs.

fundraising. The agenda also spotlights critical issues deserving of special attention: blocking Pebble Mine, protecting the Clean Water Act, addressing climate change.

Regularly updated with input from volunteers, the agenda keeps TU pointed in the right direction. It informs the strategic plan and every initiative that flows from that.

The NLC helps put the National Conservation Agenda into action-

We learned much about the work ahead for TU. It won't be easy, but the needs are clear.

We need to find fresh ways to engage our members and grow our numbers. We need to recruit and mentor dedicated NLC, council and chapter members who represent a diverse range of experiences. And we need to encourage advocacy on key issues at a time when our coldwater resources face more threats than ever.

As for those of us in the NLC, we need to do a better job of communicating the National Conservation Agenda and the efforts of our workgroups to councils, chapters and members. This story in *TROUT* magazine is a start. We've also posted materials on the newly refurbished TU website (www.tu.org/nlc).

We will be revisiting the National Conservation Agenda and preparing to assist in the development of TU's next strategic plan. Any TU member in good standing can recommend changes to the conservation agenda and its critical focus areas by submitting a proposal to the NLC's New Initiatives Workgroup.

We encourage all members to review the agenda on tu.org, and work with the councils, chapters and NLC to help TU achieve the long-term goals that will keep the organization healthy for the next generation.

Jim Walker is chair of the NLC; Rich Thomas is secretary.



Great Lakes

Promoting a "Case for the Great Lakes" to help grassroots advocates working on aquaculture, invasive species, pipeline maintenance, large-scale water withdrawals and other critical clean water issues.



BARRY AND CATHY BECK

Native Trout

Facilitating native trout restoration with an emphasis on Yellowstone Cutthroat restoration and stream temperature monitoring.



JEREMY ALLAN

Diversity & Inclusion

Working to create effective strategies and programs to recruit a more diverse membership, encourage diversity within leadership at all levels and ensure every chapter creates a welcoming environment for all genders, ethnicities, ages and cultures.