



History of the National Leadership Council (NLC)

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 trout 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, restoring and sustaining trout and salmon watersheds. The early reference to trout angling 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 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 on the protect, reconnect, restore and sustain 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 reviewed. 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. After many interviews, a new organizational format was proposed: The **National Leadership Council (NLC)**. The TU bylaws proposed changing 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 Committee and serve roles in leadership of the NLC. Each state council selects an NLC member to represent them at the national level of TU. This individual is responsible to communicate information about national activities and policies back to their constituents and carry important information, concerns, opportunities or general feedback from their state up to national.

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 then votes on the NLC officer nominations and the NCA at the NLC Annual Meeting. The vote for the Grassroots Trustee nominees is then 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 six to eight Critical Focus Areas (CFAs) 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, Climate Change and Clean Water Act. 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 2020 the workgroups are as follows:

Organizational

- Communications
- Diversity and Inclusion
- Grassroots
- New Initiatives
- Youth Education

Conservation

- Access
- Climate Change
- Great Lakes
- Delaware River
- Driftless Area Restoration Effort (DARE)
- Land Conservancy
- Native Trout
- Responsible Mining and Energy
- Tailwaters

Each of these workgroups has TU staff assigned to aid them in their work. It is required that each workgroup be chaired by an NLC member; however, anyone can participate as a member of a workgroup if they have a genuine interest in the group – with the exception of New Initiatives, which is to be made-up of only current NLC reps. What has resulted is council chairs, chapter leaders and Grassroots Trustees participate in what is becoming an embodiment of the “One TU” philosophy.

Some Key NLC Accomplishments

- Work with BOT to update the TU bylaws annually;
- Helped develop [the TU Piscicide Policy](#) (2006);
- Revised [the National Conservation Agenda \(NCA\)](#) from 36 issues to 10 in 2002;
- Revised [the NCA](#) to fit the TU Strategic Plan;
- [Land Conservation](#) and [Climate Change](#) added to [the NCA](#);
- Identify and update Critical Focus Areas (CFAs) annually;
- Approve every four years the rechartering of chapters;
- As necessary, approve the dechartering of chapters;
- Established Women’s Initiative workgroup and subsequently renamed to [Diversity and Inclusion workgroup](#) that has put into place nearly 100 volunteers at the local, state and regional level working to make TU more diverse, equitable and inclusive;
- Established Climate Change workgroup which did the initial drafting and encouraged passage of the Board approved [Policy on Climate Change and Promoting Responsible Energy Development to Protect Coldwater Fisheries](#) (2015);
- With the BOT, formed [the Stream Access Working Group](#) (SAWG) to monitor access issues;
- Helped develop and implement the Chapter Effectiveness Index (CEI) at a key time when the organization needed to use a tool to measure the effectiveness, or lack thereof, of over 600 chapters, many of which were non-functioning. Today, TU’s 400 active and healthy chapters file a form that builds on this original CEI call the Annual Activity Report;
- Adopted a [resolution against stocking of hatchery trout over native trout](#) (2012);
- Assisted in development and approval of [Land Conservation Resolution](#) (2009);
- Assisted in development and approval of [Conservation Easement Policy](#) (2012);

- Assisted in development and approval of [Policy on the Ownership of Access Rights for Recreational Fishing](#) (2012) Assisted in development and approval of Social Media Policy (2016);
- Adopted Clean Water Act and Increasing TU Capacity as Critical Focus Areas (2018);
- Assisted in development and approval of various [Code of Ethics policies](#);
- Delivery of membership growth and retention reports to each council for baselining efforts to increase member acquisition and retention (2019)

NLC Leaders

Kirk Otey, NLC Chair, 2002-2006
 Fred Rasmussen, NLC Secretary 2002-2004
 Duke Welter, NLC Secretary, 2004-2006

Duke Welter, NLC Chair, 2007-2010
 Larry Harris, NLC Secretary, 2007-2010

Larry Harris, NLC Chair, 2010-2014
 Tom Anacker, NLC Secretary, 2010-2012
 Mary Weiss, NLC Secretary, 2012-2014

Mick McCorcle, NLC Chair, 2014-2018
 Paul Doscher, NLC Secretary, 2014-2018

Jim Walker, NLC Chair, 2019 -
 Rich Thomas, NLC Secretary, 2019 -