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Trout Unlimited named Cacapon champ

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Dustin Wichterman and daughter Brooklynn do a little trout fishing.

Josh Duplechain Trout Unlimited

WARDENSVILLE — The Cacapon and Lost Rivers Land Trust’s Board of Directors has named Trout Unlimited the 2020 Cacapon Conservation Champion for Trout Unlimited’s dedication to protecting and improving habitat for native brook trout and water quality in the Cacapon watershed.

“When we established the Cacapon Conservation Champion Award in 2019, we wanted to give recognition to individuals or organizations that lead the way toward conservation outcomes in the watershed and provide exceptional expertise and counsel to our organization to help us

further our mission,” Trust Executive Director Jennifer Jones said. “TU has been an exemplar partner for more than a decade and personifies what this award is all about.”

Trout Unlimited works across public and private lands at the watershed scale to achieve meaningful ecological restoration outcomes, providing an array of benefits to the surrounding communities and fisheries.

These conservation efforts include in-stream and riparian restoration, road/stream crossing improvements, stream bank stabilization, agricultural exclusion fencing and alternative water source installation.

Trout Unlimited’s efforts have benefitted over a dozen miles of brook trout habitat in the Cacapon watershed and in some of these project waters there have been documented increases in the size and number of brook trout.

As the eastern most stronghold for native brook trout in West Virginia, the Cacapon watershed has long been an area of focus for TU.

“The projects in the Cacapon watershed are community endeavors that bolster on-farm and near stream infrastructure; improve flood resilience, water quality and instream habitat; and ultimately, provide West Virginians with better native and wild trout fisheries. Our efforts would not be possible if not for a long list of state, federal, and nonprofit partners like the Cacapon and Lost Rivers Land Trust who collaboratively work together,” said Dustin Wichterman, Trout Unlimited’s assistant director for the Mid-Atlantic Coldwater Habitat Program.

In addition to the organization’s on-the-ground conservation efforts, Trout Unlimited has been instrumental in engaging the state’s political leaders to increase the level of federal dollars for brook trout restoration in the watershed and other areas of West Virginia.

“They are just as effective in improving the flow of conservation resources into the state as they are in improving the flow of cleaner water,” noted Mark Haynes, chairman of the trust’s board.

The partnership between Trout Unlimited and the Cacapon and Lost Rivers Land Trust will continue through a 2-year grant recently awarded to the land trust by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

“TU staff here in the watershed know how to listen to landowners’ goals and find ways to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes. We’re excited to continue working together to add to the record of success here,” Jones said.

“Our work is about protecting native brook trout — a heritage species. And it’s more than that. It’s about leaving something better for our children,” said Wichterman.

In addition to this grant funding, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service will focus \$600,000 in priority funding for the Cacapon watershed through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program.

“NRCS provides technical assistance to landowners, on a voluntary basis, to develop Conservation Plans. EQIP can provide funds to help install those planned best management practices to improve habitat for native brook trout and improve water quality,” says Christi Hicks, NRCS District Conservationist. “The NRCS priority funding in the Cacapon watershed will be tremendous boost to all of our efforts,” added Jones.

John Gavitt, the former owner of the North River Retreat in Hampshire County, was named the first Cacapon Conservation Champion in 2019.

The Cacapon and Lost Rivers Land Trust is the only local land trust in the Cacapon watershed. For 30 years, CLRLT has been working with landowners and other partners to protect the forests, farms, rural heritage, wildlife, and water quality of the Cacapon and Lost Rivers watershed.

Trout Unlimited protects, reconnects, and restores the places we love to fish. o