



TN Coldwater Summit

February 7, 2026



SESSION 1: Who do I say I am and who do you say I should be?



What is our Mission Statement?

Our Mission Statement



- ✦ To conserve, protect, and restore Tennessee's coldwater fisheries by:
 - Leading statewide advocacy efforts
 - Nurturing strong, effective chapters
 - Engaging volunteers in grassroots conservation

Our Mission Statement - Origin



- ✦ Rooted in Trout Unlimited's national mission
- ✦ Built to support Tennessee's unique coldwater resources
- ✦ Created to unify chapters under a shared conservation vision

Our Mission Statement - Intent



- 🐟 Habitat restoration
- 🐟 Water quality protection
- 🐟 Advocacy
- 🐟 Outreach and youth engagement



How does our mission statement translate to our program areas?

How our mission statement translates to our program areas



- ✦ Habitat restoration / Water quality protection
 - Conservation Grants
- ✦ Advocacy
 - Advocacy & Partnerships
- ✦ Outreach and youth engagement
 - Trout Camp
 - Trout in the Classroom
 - Support & development for the chapters



**What our key initiatives are for each program area
and how they enable/reflect our mission?**

How Key Initiatives Enable and Reflect Our Mission



- ✦ Grants fund on-the-ground restoration
- ✦ Education builds future conservationists
- ✦ Chapter support expands volunteer capacity
- ✦ Advocacy protects coldwater resources long-term

- ✦ Every one of these depends on people



Our greatest needs and challenges in executing our mission?

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📌 Greatest Needs

- Sustainable funding
 - Very fortunate to have the Conservation Grant
 - Other avenues for funding?
- Volunteer capacity and leadership
- Membership growth and diversity

📌 Greatest Challenges

- Aging membership
 - Ten years ago our average age was 59, today it is 69
- Declining membership
 - Membership has declined by more than 25% over the past 1.5 years
 - Over 3,000 members in 2024 to 2,255 members today

Our greatest needs and challenges in executing our mission



- ✦ Our current members have carried this organization for decades
- ✦ Recruitment, retention, and relevance are now mission-critical issues
- ✦ Why are we losing members?
 - Members are growing older
 - Members are passing away
 - Members can't attend meeting regularly any longer
 - Younger members aren't interested in the same type of events that we have always done
- ✦ Unfortunately, I don't know all the answers, but I do recognize that we have a problem



Program Area Prioritization Aspirations: What program areas and/or initiatives do agencies and their users wish we emphasized more or emphasized less?

- ✎ Where should we do more?
- ✎ Where should we do less?
- ✎ Where should we focus together?
- ✎ This is why prioritization matters.
- ✎ If membership is declining and the average age is rising, we have to ask hard questions.
 - Are our programs accessible to younger people?
 - Are our events welcoming?
 - Are our communications reaching the intended audience?

- ✦ Social Media – this is future of communication
 - Must catch the readers attention in the first couple of seconds
 - Social media can't be an after thought
 - We need to recruit younger, tech savvy members to help run our social media
- ✦ OMTU / ESTU Collaboration



How we can work together to overcome our challenges to achieve our missions?

How we can work together to overcome our challenges to achieve our missions



- ✦ This isn't something TCTU can solve alone
- ✦ Joint projects
 - Wood Loading – TU/USFS/TWRA
 - DNA Studies – TU/GSMNP
 - Hiwassee/Appalachian Chapter Projects
- ✦ Coordinated advocacy
 - Caney Fork – TU/TWRA/USACE



Final Thoughts

- ✦ Why this matters
 - Doing more of the same will not get us where we need to go
 - Every generation of TU members has carried this mission in their own way
 - This is our moment to do the same
- ✦ My ask from you
 - For agencies – Help us
 - For chapters - Be willing to change
- ✦ If we do this together, the future of this mission is strong



Questions?



SESSION 2: Looking Ahead – The Changing Angler Dynamic and Our Mission



What role does angling play in your organization's mission and how does angling influence your mission implementation?

What role does angling play in your organization's mission?



Why Angling Matters

- Entry point to conservation
- Volunteers and advocates
- Community connection

How does angling influence your Mission implementation?



- ✦ Anglers don't just participate in our mission — they often point us in the right direction.
- ✦ They're on the water regularly. They notice changes before anyone else.
- ✦ Examples of fisherman input
 - Low DO on South Holston River
 - Low flow issue on South Holston River



What do you know about angler expectations and behaviors?

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Angler Expectations

- Access
- Quality fisheries
- Education and community



What are the most important gaps in your knowledge of angler behaviors and their impact on coldwater resources?

What are the most important gaps in your knowledge of angler behaviors and their impact on the coldwater resource?



- ✎ There's still a lot we don't know.
 - What keeps younger people engaged long-term?
 - What turns interest into leadership?
 - What barriers cause people to drift away?"
- ✎ Understanding those gaps matters if we want to reverse membership decline.



What angling groups/opportunities/demands do you see growing and which are not?

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- 🐟 Growing Groups
 - Younger anglers
 - Women and families
 - Conservation-minded participants



How can we work together to fill these gaps?

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- ✦ Shared surveys and data
- ✦ Joint education programs
- ✦ Unified conservation messaging



Final Thoughts

- ✦ Our mission is strong.
- ✦ Our members are dedicated.
- ✦ But the trends are clear.
- ✦ If we want this work to continue, we have to be willing to adapt, invite new leadership, and meet people where they are.
- ✦ Collaboration is how we protect not just trout — but the future of conservation itself.



Questions?