

Mountaineer Support for the Wild Monongahela

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Member, Board of Directors
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Hearing on HR 5151

The mission of Trout Unlimited, both nationally and locally is to conserve, protect and restore our cold water fisheries and their watersheds. The native and wild trout in these ecosystems represent not only an unsurpassed recreational opportunity but also connect us to the natural heritage of our country. For those of us lucky enough to live in West Virginia, the embodiment of our heritage is the Eastern Brook Trout. These beautiful speckled trout require intact, undisturbed watersheds to flourish. And because of this, Mountaineer Chapter Trout Unlimited wholly supports the Wild Monongahela: a National Legacy for West Virginia's Special Places legislation.

The Eastern Brook Trout is the only native trout for the eastern United States. This stunning fish with its flanks splashed in red and blue spots, creamy white underbelly washed with orange, pectoral fins striped white black and orange and its veined dark olive back holds a special place in the hearts of West Virginia's anglers and residents. Stranded in our mountain streams and rivers after the retreat of the last glaciation, the "trout of the springs" *Salvelinus Fontinalis* symbolizes the wildness and beauty that was our nation before European settlement. Just like our special places the hollows, ridges and cricks of West Virginia, the Brook Trout faces threats from development, poor logging and agricultural practices and energy production.

Federal wilderness designation permanently protects portions of the national trust. It allows these forests and watersheds to heal and mature. An intact and undisturbed forest is one of the best management tools for protecting Brook Trout. Forest floors, free of the compaction of roads and logging trails absorb, cool and slowly release rainwater to streams. They help minimize the flooding and subsequent soil erosion of extreme precipitation events. This keeps the stream bed gravels clean and free of siltation, which allows the Brook Trout to successfully reproduce. The mature forest canopy provides vital thermal protection, shading our streams and rivers from an increasingly warming climate. Warming waters, above sixty-eight degrees Fahrenheit, do not contain enough oxygen for the trout and the insects, crustaceans and forage fishes upon which they feed.

Federal wilderness designation will also give the included streams a Tier 3 protection level under the anti-degradation rule of the Federal Clean Water Act. This is the highest level of water quality protection and provides citizens and government officials with an important tool to safeguard the sources of much of our drinking water. Maintaining high water quality in the headwaters of many of our larger watersheds may provide flexibility in the regulation of downstream (non-federal lands) development and agricultural production. This may become invaluable for residents within the Chesapeake Bay regulatory watershed.

Mountaineer Support for the Wild Monongahela

Wilderness is a management designation that allows fisheries biologists many options to monitor and improve the health of Brook Trout populations. The re-establishment of native species is a primary goal in wilderness. Creel and size limits and their effect on population dynamics can still be managed. The opportunity to fully study populations and their response to environmental changes is unsurpassed in a wilderness area. Many other states, most notably Montana and Idaho, constantly monitor and manage their native fish populations within wilderness areas and use this data as a baseline for work outside of wilderness areas. Wilderness also allows for the protection of native fish from invasive, non-native species. The protection of native Brook Trout from introduced non-native trout species is becoming an important part of fisheries management.

HR 5151- The Wild Monongahela: A Natural Legacy for West Virginia's Special Places will be a large and first step towards conserving and protecting the Eastern Brook Trout and their watersheds in the twenty-first century. Mountaineer Chapter Trout Unlimited supports and encourages its passage by Congress and its approval by the President. The membership of Mountaineer Chapter Trout Unlimited would also urge the Congress to add two of the finest limestone karst geology Brook Trout watersheds in West Virginia to the bill. Seneca Creek and its watershed, listed by Trout Unlimited National as one of Americas top one hundred streams, as well as the East Fork of the Greenbrier River both support wild native Brook Trout. These two areas are overdue for the protection Congress can provide with Wilderness designation.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my personal support for the Wild Monongahela (Wild Mon) legislation. I am a resident and business owner from Pendleton County, West Virginia. I hold a Bachelor of Science Degree in Environmental Sciences with a major in Forest and Land Use Management from Stockton State College in NJ. My business is related to the timber industry; Robert Bittner Cabinetmaker is a custom design/build proprietorship specializing in furniture and architectural millwork. Supplies of quality wood are the lifeblood of my craft. Given that more than ninety-seven percent of the state's timber harvest comes from private land, I know that the Wild Mon legislation will not adversely affect my business; however, keeping the image of West Virginia as wild and wonderful will benefit my business. My disappointment in the bill is that it does not yet include the crown jewel of West Virginia's native trout streams, Seneca Creek, in Pendleton County. I hope that Seneca will be in the Wild Mon act before the President signs the bill.

Thank you for your time and interest. As a citizen, I appreciate the opportunity to express my personal support and the endorsement of Mountaineer Chapter Trout Unlimited for this important legislation.