

TROUTFEST Reaches Milestone for GSMNP Fisheries

M. Gary Verholek, Little River Chapter Trout Unlimited

With the addition of a check for \$13,846.94 presented to Great Smoky Mountains National Park Superintendent Dale Ditmanson and Fisheries Manager Steve Moore, the four-year total of funds raised for Brook Trout restoration by the Little River Chapter of Trout Unlimited through TROUTFEST has reached \$46,000. If the pending Park budget is approved, the Fisheries Department will receive matching federal funds, making 2007 TROUTFEST worth \$27,694.



Photo 1. Dale Ditmanson, GSMNP Superintendent, Gary Verholek, LRCTU, Dan Holloway, LRCTU, Matt Kulp, GSMNP Fisheries, Jeff Hall, LRCTU President, Dan Calhoun, LRCTU, Steve Moore, Manager GSMNP Fisheries Department

TROUTFEST is an annual outdoor arts and crafts festival hosted in May by the Little River Chapter of Trout Unlimited in Townsend, TN for the sole purpose of supporting the Fisheries Department of the Park. Each year LRCTU hosts a fundraising banquet and auction on Friday evening before the outdoor festival, followed by two days of arts, crafts, exhibits, food and music, all aimed at educating visitors about the Park and Brook Trout, in particular, as well as entertaining folks in the foothills of the Smokys.

TROUTFEST is well attended by visitors on their way to the Park, as well as local folks who enjoy the outdoor playground in their back yard. Overflow crowds at previous banquet events, caused a change in venue, but again it was a full house. In addition to fine food cooked and served by LRCTU members, events included the raffle of a hand-made bamboo rod and a Sage graphite rod; bucket auctions; silent auctions, and a live auction. Auction items ranged from outdoor gear to useful household items.

The outdoor festival saw crowds of three to five thousand per day make their way over the grounds of the Townsend Visitor's Center. With live music, hot food, kids events, and much more to offer, TROUTFEST continues to gain in attendance. Jerry KinCannon of Rocky Branch Community Club, Inc, handled live music, which including a number of fine local groups. WDVX had a live feed from the Townsend Visitors Center in the morning, setting the stage for a relaxing day of entertainment.

The younger set enjoyed several bouncing blow-up games, painted trout silhouettes, and received instruction on trout, bees and casting in the grass. Exhibitors included UT, TWRA, GSMNP, Trout Unlimited, Casting for Recovery, and the Roane County Rescue Squad.

Craft vendor rimed the front lawn and varied from household crafts to fine carvings. There were several vendors offering outdoor gear, such as fly rod of bamboo and graphite, hand-made silk lines, hand-made canoes and clear-bottomed kayaks. Local guides also offered tips and services.

There seemed to be something for all ages and interests. Folks relaxed on the lawn, listening to the music and eating local foods and hand-made ice cream. The comfortable May weather contributed greatly to the enjoyment of the outdoors venue.

In addition to TROUTFEST, LRCTU has garnered yet another \$10,000 Embrace-a-Stream grant from the national council of Trout Unlimited. This money will also be eligible for Federal Matching Funds and that would bring the LRCTU total to over \$47,694 in 2007 alone. Since 2001, LRCTU efforts through TU grants and TROUTFEST have resulted in nearly \$120,000 in funds for Brook Trout Restoration in the Park.

In addition to the funds provided directly to the Fisheries Department, LRCTU members provide hundreds of hours of volunteer work in the streams along side the Fisheries biologists, performing tasks ranging from water quality monitoring to carrying Brook Trout from one stream to another. These stream activities have been on going since our chapter was founded in 1993. From the early efforts by the Fisheries Department to restore the Southern Appalachian Brook Trout to some of their original range, Little River Chapter of Trout Unlimited has been an integral part of fieldwork and fund raising, working in the spirit of TU's motto – *To Conserve, Protect and Restore North America's coldwater fisheries and their watersheds.*

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Banquet



WDVX live music feed



Live Stage Music



Kids fun



Food Vendors



Hand-crafted canoes



Carved fish

More photos available on request.