

MAC broadens Youth Outreach  
By Tom Gamper

On Saturday January 15<sup>th</sup>, members of the Mid-Atlantic Council Trout Unlimited joined 200 parents, children, and civic leaders at the Baltimore Montessori Public Charter School as part of the second annual Greater Baltimore Children and Nature Conference. The Conference provided educational workshops, networking opportunities and a general forum for advocating the importance of getting our children outside and enjoying the benefits of nature. The Parks & People Foundation, the Chesapeake Bay Trust and REI, Inc. sponsored the event with the support of MACTU and several local organizations. Three MAC sanctioned youth outreach programs were highlighted at the conference, Trout in the Classroom, the Trout Unlimited Tri-State Conservation and Fishing Camp and City Catch sponsored by Maryland Chapter Trout Unlimited and Baltimore City Recreation and Parks.

In the morning, Jim Robinson of the Potomac Patuxent Chapter lead a workshop on Trout in the Classroom (TIC) in front of a packed classroom of teachers, parents and representatives from governmental agencies. TIC is an environmental education program which brings children in contact with the life cycle of trout. Trout are often called "the canary in the mineshaft" with regard to water quality and by using chilled water aquariums to raise trout from eggs to fingerlings, the program encourages children to be stewards of the trout in the context of a curriculum which engages them in stream habitat study, allows them to learn about water resources, and enables them to understand ecosystems. At the end of the year, the children participate in releasing the trout in a state-approved stream near the school or within a nearby watershed. Trout Unlimited volunteers assist teachers by troubleshooting problems with the aquariums, by teaching students about fly tying and trout fishing, and by celebrating the release of the fish. (After eight years in Maryland under the careful guidance of Jim Greene and Sandy Burk, TIC is now in 32 schools in 9 counties. This winter, MACTU signed a partnership letter with the Carnegie Institution for Science in an application for a NOAA B-WET Grant ( Bay Watershed Education and Training Program). If awarded, MAC's Trout in the Classroom would join Carnegie's BioEYES Program focusing on fish genetics and related water quality issues in 10 Baltimore City Public Schools next year – with that number growing to 20 schools in three years.)

Throughout the day at the Conference, George Gaines of the National Capital Chapter fielded questions on TU's Tri – State Conservation and Fishing Camp. Open to 24 high school students, the camp offers expertise from officials of the National Park Service, professional conservationists with state natural resources agencies, environmental educators, professional fishing instructors and guides, and experienced members of Trout Unlimited. Two big points were emphasized -- the program has scholarships for disadvantaged children and many of its alumni go on to professional studies in

environmental science. The camp, located at Graves' Mountain Lodge in Syria, Virginia, will run from Sunday, June 26 to Friday, July 1, 2011. The cost of the six-day, five-night Camp is \$750.

Being on home turf, the Maryland Chapter Trout Unlimited used the Conference to showcase its legacy City Catch Program. Each spring, MDTU outfits children with fishing gear, complete with rod, reel, line, and tackle provided at cost by Tochterman's. TU volunteers assist the children in assembling their tackle, tie on a hook and sinker, bait the hook, and fish for the 800 rainbow trout that the Chapter stocks in Dead Run in Baltimore's Leakin Park. In addition, the children are also given a booklet which illustrates simple techniques for catching fish, introduces sportsmanlike conduct and helps explain the benefits of protecting water quality. The children's fishing trip ends with lunch provided by Baltimore City Recreation and Parks staff in the Ben Cardin Picnic Pavilion and the awarding of "official fishing certificates" signed by the Parks Director and the MDTU President. City Catch 2011 will be on April 9th.

One of the major events of the day was the presentation of a segment of a new documentary called **Mother Nature's Child**. The film explores nature's powerful role in children's health and development through the experience of toddlers, children in middle childhood and adolescents. Many of the country's leading experts in the Children and Nature movement are interviewed in the film and some were in attendance at the Conference, including Brother Yusuf Burgess who specializes in youth development and environmental education at Green Tech High Charter School in Albany, N.Y. An avid fly fisherman, his students are showcased in the film in a section depicting the rewards of fishing. Also in attendance was Dr. Maria Brown who was recently the focus of an article in the Baltimore **Sun**. According to outdoors writer Candus Thomson, Dr. Brown is a nature champion, trained by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to teach other health care providers at St. Agnes Hospital about the benefits of getting children outside to combat obesity and accompanying diseases such as diabetes and asthma. Dr. Brown promised to bring a cadre of fellow pediatricians to the conference next year.

With the Chesapeake Bay and the Baltimore Inner Harbor now in the process of renewed and robust restoration efforts, we "upstream" stewards have a powerfully strategic role to play – with none more important than educating the next generation on the issues related to trout and cold water conservation. Through this Conference and through our small acts as well -- like taking a child fishing -- we will be fulfilling our responsibilities. As Katie Dix of the Parks & People Foundation stated in the Baltimore **Sun**, "Through these programs, we are breeding the next generation of leaders who will care about our world."

Note : If you would like to assist MACTU's Youth Outreach Committee through these types of programs, please contact Tom Gamper at 410.685.3582 or at [tgamper@smgarch.com](mailto:tgamper@smgarch.com)