

TU's Madmen chapter all about Ohio's Mad River



By Mike Moore
Editor

Bellefontaine, Ohio — As Tom Allen worked his way through the tangle of honeysuckle on the banks of the Mad River, he thought to himself of the bigger goal in mind.

Allen and a small group of volunteers from Trout Unlimited's (TU) Mad River Madmen chapter took on the Herculean task recently of ridding this section of the Mad of the resilient weed.

For Allen and a number of members of the Madmen, it is a labor of love. Allen grew up in Yellow Springs, Ohio, and studied ground-

water at Wright State University and Ohio State University. He is on the Ohio State council for Trout Unlimited and the Madmen chapter's conservation chair.

"The Mad (River) has always been an interest to me and not just because of the trout," he said in a recent interview with *Ohio Outdoor News*.

The Madmen's conservation goals run in a number of different directions. For the last 30 or 40 years, chapter volunteers have been clearing the Mad of logjams.

"Usually, you want logs and debris in your streams," Allen said.



"But, the Mad River is a little different. A lot of it has been channelized and leveed. So, if you get a tree all the way across from bank to bank ... all you're going to end up with is severe bank erosion. So, we work with landowners to open the flow."

It is logjams and in-stream habitat improvements that drives Allen and his group of volunteers.

"Especially the last few years when we've had such erosion ... we've lost five or six miles of riparian area on the Mad in the last 10 years," he said. "There's nothing to protect the bank, so it starts eroding. And then you end up with all that silt in the river."

"So, when we go in, we're trying to keep those riffle areas going into drops and basically holding water for the trout," said Allen. "We also think about the macroinvertebrates and other native aquatic life, too."

The effects on the Mad of this erosion and the logjams have really taken their toll in the past decade.

"The Mad River is really degrading," said Don Dean, a Madmen chapter organizer and retired Ohio State University professor. "It is not what it was even 10 years ago. There was certainly some improvement when the Clean Water Act came in. But, since then the problems became non-point source pollution. The Mad is really suffering a lot from sedimentation, which just really wreaks havoc on the aquatic macroinvertebrates."

Whenever the Madmen perform



Tom Allen (photo at left), the conservation chair for Trout Unlimited (TU) in Ohio, holds a brown that he caught this spring in the Mad River. Above, volunteers from TU's Madmen chapter work on clearing logjams from the Mad. This exercise is one of the Madmen's major objectives on the river.

Photos courtesy Tom Allen

habitat work on the Mad River, approval must first come from the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

One of the other main goals of the Madmen chapter, says Allen, is improving access to the Mad River for anglers and other users.

That's where the aforementioned honeysuckle clearing comes in.

"If you wade the river and then try to get up on the bank ... you're basically out of luck," Allen said. "The honeysuckle is so thick."

The open dumping issue on the Mad River is something the Madmen chapter has been dealing with and trying to wrap its head around for years, Allen said.

"Especially in the last five or six

years, it's gotten ridiculous," he said. "Any place that someone can get in there, it's just trashed. People dumping off their couches and old TV sets ... it's just disgusting."

To remedy the situation, the Madmen chapter is developing an Adopt a Bridge/Stream Watch program.

"The idea is that if you're at your bridge that you signed up for, you pick up the litter," Allen said. "If you see open dumping or something you can't deal with, we'll contact the sheriff or the game warden or the health department to try to take care of the issue."

All of the work has one goal in mind, said Allen.

"What we're trying to do is if you're canoeing or kayaking or just fishing, we're trying to make it better," he said.

Volunteers are the backbone of the Madmen organization.

"These are the people who take care of the equipment, help plan projects, and do the brunt of the work," Allen said. "The two main guys are Dave Dailey and Mike Palatas. Other volunteers that have helped on many projects are John Davis, Scott Shane, Randy Kirchner, and Joe Penry."

Allen, when he's not working on the Mad River, is fishing it. He and his wife, Pam, are dedicated fly anglers.

"I like to see the (stocked fish) spread out and not just sitting at the bridges, and that's what we've seen this year," he said. "I'm real happy with the distribution of the stockers and the carry-overs."

Allen joined TU Madmen in the late 1970s and has been doing conservation work on the river for 43 years.

"I started fishing the Mad in 1968," he said.

The TU Madmen chapter has about 1,300 members, the largest chapter in the state.

"We've had great support from Central Ohio Flyfishers in Columbus, Miami Valley Flyfishers in Dayton, and Buckeye United Flyfishers in Cincinnati," Allen said. "Some of the folks from Cincinnati with this honeysuckle removal have been driving up."

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