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**Saratoga Bridges Associate Executive Director received
National Conservation Volunteer Award from Trout Unlimited**

On Friday, September 14th, Greg Cuda, Associate Executive Director of Saratoga Bridges, received the 2012 National Conservation Volunteer Award from Trout Unlimited at their national convention. Held at the Biltmore Estates in North Carolina, with over 200 people from various state councils throughout the country in attendance, Greg was recognized for his contribution to conservation.

Trout Unlimited (TU) is a non-profit organization dedicated to the conservation of freshwater streams, rivers, and associated upland habitats for trout, salmon, other aquatic species, and people. TU has more than 150,000 volunteers organized into 400 chapters nationwide. Each year TU bestows awards to publicly recognize the outstanding achievements of its members, chapters and councils that have embodied the spirit of TU and fulfilled its mission to conserve, protect and restore North America's coldwater fisheries and their watersheds.

Greg Cuda's historical involvement and personal perspective:

"Upon learning to fly fish I was put off by the fact that the vast majority of NY's cold water fisheries were enhanced by the stocking truck. Wild trout rivers even in remote areas of NY and New England are rare. The Batten Kill is unique because it holds a strong population of wild brown and brook trout and is recognized as one of the top 100 trout streams in the country. Nearly every acclaimed fishing author has written about the river and several have lived along its banks. Further enhancing the river's reputation is the fact that the Orvis Company, the oldest tackle company in the country, is located on the river in Manchester, VT.

In the 1980's anglers noticed a decrease in catchable sized trout in the river. By the late 1990's both NY and VT's Fisheries Department implemented studies to ascertain the cause of the decline. Sparing the details, it was determined that the lack of necessary habitat had contributed to the decline. Road and rail road builders, farms, second homes and recreational use had changed the course of the river. The Batten Kill had become straighter, shallower and fewer trees fell into the river. Flooding in the 1980's had exasperated the problem, in short there was no place for the fish to hide.

My involvement began in the late 1990's. Along with other anglers, I was concerned about the river. I joined Trout Unlimited Clearwater Chapter as they were the designated conservation organization that held stewardship over the river. At about the same time, I went to a public meeting in VT to discuss possible solution for the river. There, I met technicians from the US Fish and Wildlife who were trained in Natural Stream Channel Design. They offered to help.

At this time NY and VT had very different approaches to resolving the problem. NY wanted to increase stocking in the river. The biologist told me the problem was too big for the NYDEC's fisheries department and they had no expertise in habitat restoration. VT on the other hand, wanted to maintain its wild trout fishery. I was determined to prove the NYSDEC biologist wrong. I became the president of the 600 member Clearwater TU chapter to oppose the stocking. I also wrote grants and partnered with the US Fish and Wildlife Department to complete several natural stream channel design demonstration projects. Once the projects were successfully completed, grant money was easier to obtain. Clearwater TU has completed approximately \$150,000.00 in restoration work in NY.

In 2001, I was asked to join the board of the newly formed Batten Kill Watershed Alliance (BKWA). This is a bi-state organization that formed to promote good stewardship of the Batten Kill and its tributaries. They have received grants from the EPA through the River Network as well as the Green Mountain National Forest. The BKWA has raised approximately \$300,000 for habitat work in VT. BKWA also was the recipient of several land parcels. The organization turned the waterfront sections over to the state of VT for river access and then sold the remaining parcels to neighbors to increase their holding sizes. I have been chairman of the BKWA for the last five years. Funding success has allowed the BKWA to hire part-time Executive Director, Cynthia Browning. Cynthia and her family own property on the river as well as significant forested holdings in the valley. Cynthia holds a PHD and she is the VT State Representative for Arlington.

In VT, the BKWA has been involved with habitat restoration in the form of introducing cover and shelter for the fish. The results have been outstanding with some of the restored pools showing a five hundred percent increase in the number of trout in them. NY's problem was more complicated and the solutions more involved. Since the 1950's, NY DEC had installed habitat improvement structures that had actually significantly degraded the river -- making it wide and shallow. Hundreds of these structures were installed and now need to be removed. The new restoration technique Natural Stream Channel Design, was developed in the 1990's, was required. Called geomorphology, it involves surveying and engineering. Several TU members are trained in these techniques and feed data to the US Fish and Wildlife engineer who, in turn, designs the structures.

To date, many miles of river in both NY and VT have been restored on the main stem of the Batten Kill. The main river even withstood the ravages of Hurricane Irene. Nearly all of the structures have remained in place and are functioning as designed. However, some of the tributaries have not fared as well. The BKWA has recently been awarded grants from the US Forest Service and the Orvis Company for \$45,000 and \$15,000 respectively. As of mid-September 2012, two work crews are in the main river, one in NY and one in VT each completing this season's habitat restoration. In August, the biology team from VT did an annual electroshocking of the river to determine the trout population. The normally reserved biologist announced, "There is a shitload of trout in this river!"

I guess I proved the NYDEC biologist wrong!"

As one of the largest private non-profit organizations in Saratoga County, Saratoga Bridges has been providing the highest level of programs to 800 people with developmental disabilities and their families for more than 55 years by promoting their abilities and achievements in every aspect of community life. Throughout their history, they have been committed to ensuring that the individuals they serve are able to realize their goals, hopes and dreams as they work, shop, play, and volunteer while leading full, productive and contributing lives. This voluntary service provider believes that the care they give increases immeasurably the quality of life for every citizen. Saratoga Bridges' philosophy is that every day is full of possibilities!

