

# Friends of the Upper Delaware River

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## **'Reckless' Watercrats Endanger Delaware Trout As West Branch Flow Is Cut 90 Percent Overnight**

As the critical brown trout spawning season arrives on the upper Delaware River, the government water bureaucracy throttled back the flow out of Cannonsville Reservoir by 90 percent this week—a reckless and irrational act.

“It is incomprehensible how the authorities charged with the stewardship of this famous fishery and its magnificent environment could be so reckless,” says Al Caucci, vice president of Friends of the Upper Delaware River, a nonprofit environmental conservation group. “Under current conditions, more than 50 miles of prime wild trout water on the West Branch and main stem Delaware, from Deposit to Callicoon, N.Y., is in serious jeopardy.”

Water releases from Cannonsville were cut from 1,100 cubic feet per second to 115 cfs overnight Sunday. Within hours, gravel beds were exposed downstream.

If trout spawning has begun, the exposure of the eggs is probably fatal, said Caucci, who has written three reference books about the relationship between trout and aquatic insects, including the seminal “Hatches.” Also imperiled are aquatic insects, dwarf wedge mussel beds and the shad fry trying to make their way downstream to the ocean.

This is the fourth time since May that FUDR has been prompted to issue a “Crisis Alert” over irrational yo-yo dam releases by the water bureaucracy.

“They have proven once again that there is absolutely no stewardship whatsoever by the water authorities in matters of the fishery,” says Caucci.

The Delaware River Basin Commission, a multi-state entity, is charged with overseeing the river system. Also to blame is the New York City Department of Environmental Protection, which has extraordinary influence with the DRBC.

Protocols for water-release rates are spelled out in the so-called Flexible Flow Management Program, approved in 2007 by the commission.

FUDR has long been a critic of the program, which leads to heavy flows when trout need it least and a trickle when the fish need it most, like now and during heat waves. FUDR advocates a common-sense release plan that would benefit the wildlife as well as those who live on and visit the river for recreation.

The simple solution, supported by environmental groups and fishery experts, is a steady release of a minimum flow rate of about 600 cubic feet per second out of Cannonsville into the West Branch from April through September. For the past month, water was being released in a muddy torrent at nearly double that rate. As of Tuesday, the flow was measured at one-fifth of FUDR's target rate.

Last year, FUDR gained assurances from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation that any early-fall flow reductions would be done gradually to protect spawning trout.

"And now they close the spigot 90 percent overnight, without warning," says Dan Plummer, FUDR's board chairman. "It's frustrating that our endless discussions with--and promises from--the water bureaucracy lead us right back where we started."

FUDR has called upon the DRBC to devise a rational water-release plan. The organization is urging the river's residents, fishing enthusiasts, those who use the river system for recreation, and those in the region who earn a living from outdoors tourism to contact their elected officials or the DRBC to let them know that they value a healthy river and oppose the flawed flow plan.