

Newsletter March 2023

DIRT ROAD TRADERS

G'day folks,

It has been some time since I last penned a newsletter to riparian members and interested parties so without any further ado, 2023 festival participant, Mark Liptrot kindly shared a very fine account of his experiences en route to and during the event. I would suggest that you use the URL below and enjoy the read penned from a participant's point-of-view at;

http://www.wildtrout.co.za/images/WTA/Ranger_to_Rhodes.pdf

Some stats from the 2023 event;

1. There were 45 participants including "sheppards" who assisted on and off the water with advice based on their years of flyfishing experience, fly-tying skills and much more.
2. The event's auction turnover amounted to R43 500 of which R6400 accrued to the Rhodes Animal Care project for the hand-knitted Stoepsitfees blankets.
3. Of the auction proceeds, R20 000 was donated to the FOSAF NEMBA war chest.
4. An amount of R20 000 was also donated to the "Hare Street Hatchery" aka the Thrift Sport Fishery enterprise run by Martin Davies.
5. According to the total of 110 catch returns submitted, 1699 trout were caught at an average of 15,4 trout per return submitted
6. Extrapolated, this is equivalent to more than 2700 trout!

For those of you who have not heard about part 2 of point 2, since his retirement from the Department of Ichthyology and Fisheries Science at Rhodes University, Martin Davies established a trout hatchery in his garden in Hare Street, in Grahamstown. To be politically correct, Makhanda. With the advent of the current eskom debacle, the WTA contributed an amount of R12500 towards the cost of a generator for the facility. More recently, a lethal combination of the failed municipality and the failing power utility, 30 000 trout were lost at the hatchery despite Davies best efforts using the generator to power the pumps and many, many cylinders of oxygen. This tragedy led to an initiative to instal a solar system that would allow the hatchery to function without total reliance on the municipal/eskom supply. This disaster inspired the WTA contribution that will facilitate achieving the aim.

More importantly, being a canny Welshman, Davies has a back-up plan in the form of the Thrift dam which some of you may have heard of. Davies has been stocking this water for decades and over time, has developed a more heat tolerant, fast-growing variety of rainbow trout ideal for the waters of the Eastern Cape and for that matter, the entire country! Tapping into this reservoir of trout is a task that is admirable in the extreme. As I understand the process, going fishing in this case is not the fun event that the activity would imply. It involves catching both hen and cock fish when they are at their breeding peak i.e. during winter and more often than not, at night. These fish are stripped or milked and the fertilized ova are then taken to the hatchery to be nurtured into fry, fingerlings and stock-able trout. In addition, this process is not a once-off event but is repeated several times during the spawning season in the dark of the night as the cooler weather facilitates the survival of the ova. This extreme commitment is to be admired and roundly applauded, to say the least.

Imagine the disappointment and down-heartedness when all that time and extreme effort yields nought but material for composting, if you can stand the whiff!

Although the waters of the WTA are self-sustaining, a time may come when severe drought conditions necessitates judicious stocking in the Eastern Cape Highlands. What better trout could one ask for than the Davies'-developed line? This warrants our support, albeit "just in case" and preferably, at some time far into the future.

I'd also like to take this opportunity to salute the dedication not only of Davies but the team of flyfishers and enthusiasts gathered and directed by Alan Hobson. Some of the enthusiasts' hail from as far afield as Gauteng and Port Elizabeth (Gqeberha). Alan and his wife Annabelle are the proprietors of the Angler and Antelope Guesthouse in Somerset East and whom some of you may have met at his fine establishment.

Although a labour of love for the sport, Davies and Hobson's efforts are an investment in the future of fly fishing for trout in the Eastern Cape. They deserve greater support than they get, especially from fly fishing clubs and entities in the Eastern Cape Highlands that are conspicuous by their lack of tangible support

While on the topic of the "FOSAF NEMBA" war chest, I had occasion to delve into history concerning the WTA's ongoing support for the cause. Thus far, funded by the proceeds of the festival auctions, a total amount of R180 000 has been donated to FOSAF for the purpose. It is therefore appropriate to include the most recent update on the matter that reads as follows;

21.3.2023 Update from the FOSAF National Chairman, Ilan Lax, on the current situation with the Department of Forestry, Fisheries & Environment in regard to Trout in South Africa.

Some of you will have seen that the Minister of Environmental Affairs lost another application for leave to appeal earlier this month. This relates to the case FOSAF brought challenging DFFE's (Department of Forestry, Fisheries & Environment) failure to properly consult on the listing of trout as invasive. FOSAF won the case in September 2021. The DFFE applied for leave to appeal the judgement in March 2022, but this was refused by the High Court judge in September 2022. Despite losing twice with costs, the DFFE petitioned the Supreme Court of Appeal for leave to appeal in November 2022 but on 05/02/2023 the SCA refused the DFFE's application with costs. Having lost with costs repeatedly we trust that DFFE will now accept the judgement.

Our thanks go to our legal team for defending the trout industry in a matter which has dragged on for years doing considerable damage to the whole trout value chain. However, as things currently stand trout remain listed as invasive, but the implementation thereof is suspended until the Minister's Trout Task Team (set up in 2021 after FOSAF and threatened to interdict the Alien Invasive Species Regulations) is able to resolve the matter. Both the Aquaculture SA and FOSAF are on the Task Team, but very slow progress has been made on the matter mainly due to the apparent reluctance of the DFFE representatives to meet. Very recently Ilan Lax, National Chairman of FOSAF proposed a number of dates for a meeting but it appears that none of these are suitable. It is hoped the meeting could take place in April.

In Mpumalanga the NTA are faced with a major increase in the cost of permits for stocking trout. This situation the NTA has reluctantly accepted for the time being until the Task Team mentioned above has reached an acceptable solution to the trout matter.

From a Trout SA and FOSAF point of view, we would like to see the DFFE accepting the original agreement reached at the 2014 Phakisa conference. This in brief states that where trout occur they will not be listed, based on the detailed maps agreed to by all stakeholders including the DFFE in the extensive process that took place from 2015 to 2017. The cost of these maps was about R250 000 borne mainly by the NTA and other stakeholders. As you may be aware, the DFFE subsequently reneged on the Phakisa agreement and attempted to change the maps. However, faced with a comprehensive defeat in the courts we trust that the department will now be in a more cooperative mood. If the Phakisa agreement is accepted, we believe that the permitting system for trout stocking in the agreed trout zones will no longer be required in Mpumalanga or elsewhere.

Another hurdle confronting the trout value chain (of which FOSAF is a stakeholder) is the draft Aquaculture Development Bill. As we have mentioned before, this proposed legislation is quite unnecessary as all that is required are amendments to current agricultural legislation. This proposed legislation we believe is an obvious move to extend government's control over aquaculture and then agriculture with the accompanying rent seeking activities which goes with licensing, inspectors etc.

Lastly, we would like to thank you for your support over the many years we have had to deal with these issues.

PS - We have today received the news that the DFFE have now appealed to the Constitutional Court. This means our legal team will once again have to prepare papers to resist this effort.

Since the last newsletter, matters have proceeded apace with the day permit sales being efficiently attended to by the Rhodes Information Centre (RIC). A "modern technology"-based innovation set up by Margie Murray has been the notification system for riparian members known as "WTA Beats". This system notifies group members of beats booked by whom, for when, vehicle registration number etc. Fly fishermen are instructed to place their copy of the day permit on the dashboard of their vehicle. Although this remains the case, we have found that more and more folk are making use of farm accommodation remote from Rhodes and accordingly, the source of day permits being the RIC. It makes no sense if a person is staying at a venue in the Bokspruit or the Sterkspruit, to insist that they drive all the way to Rhodes for a permit that applies to water next door to where they are staying. The advantage of the "chat group" system is two-fold. It keeps riparian members updated and facilitates improving the visitor's experience. This is crucial for repeat business, and it is our WTA duty to make visiting enthusiasts' fishing trips as problem-free as possible. Embracing technological developments as and when they appear, is therefore essential.

If you are not already on the WTA Beats chat group and would like to be included, please contact Margie Murray at 082 773 8576

In pursuance of this strategy, long-time festival supporters and more recently, permanent Rhodes residents, Rudi Hiestermann and Heather Ralph championed making use of an App known as "What-3-

words” (W3W). This is an international system based on the entire world having been divided into 3m x 3m squares, each of which has a unique combination of words to identify the “target”. It is important to note that the words are arbitrarily generated and bear no relation to the site or its owner. For more information, see; <https://what3words.com/how-to-use-the-what3words-app>

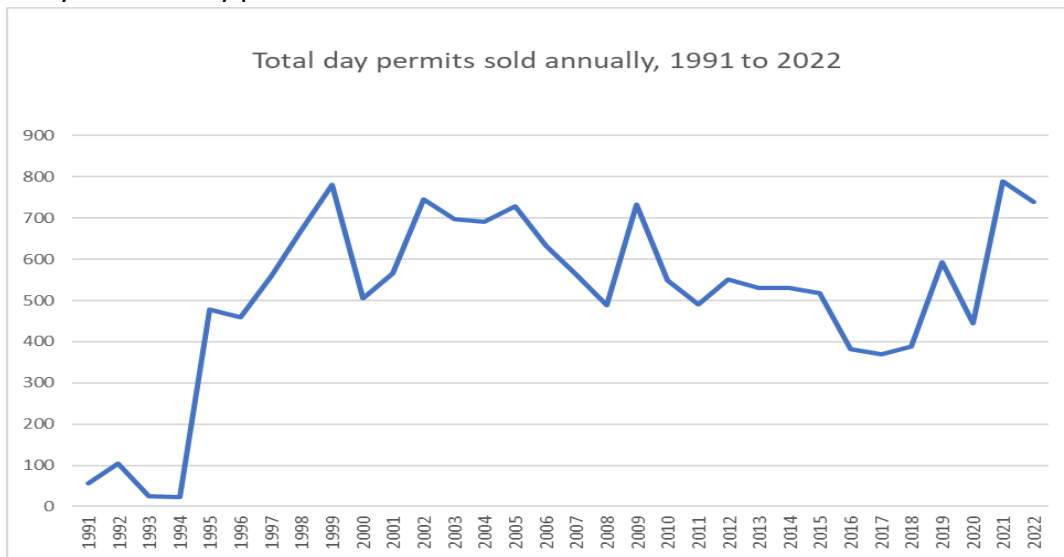
Although GPS co-ordinates have been included in the WTA guidebook for many years ago for beat identification, the W3W system is available to folk who do not have access to the GPS gadgetry. A cell phone that has had the App installed on it is all that is needed in addition, of course, to the appropriate 3 words required. The “3-words” have been included in the association guidebooks’ beat section as well as on the WTA website thus providing less reason for fishing on the wrong beat. Funnily enough, it would seem that these innovations have all led to fewer “wrong beat” incidents on the water between confused and/or other folk and “official” folk. A decision was made some years ago that limiting the content of the WTA website was counter-productive, so the website now consists of the entire contents of the hard-copy publication plus additional material. As I have maintained for decades, “The proof of the pudding is in the return rate”.

The main sponsor of the annual festival, Dirt Road Outfitters, who carry the printing cost of the WTA guidebook and provide participants with an appropriate product from their range, will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. This is a most welcome prospect, and we look forward to a long and mutually rewarding relationship. For a look at their substantial range of products, see; <https://www.dirtroad.co.za>

The dates for the forthcoming festival will be from the opening on the 19th to the 23rd March, participants travelling home on the 24th March 2024. What is pleasing to me, is that the tiny pebble thrown into the EC Highlands pool many, many years ago has had a positive ripple effect, in a manner of speaking. This is evident in the number of festival participants who make use of the opportunity to stay at venues noted during previous festivals. A negative aspect of this is that whereas some of the venue owners have withdrawn from association membership but continue to derive the benefits from the association’s activities but so be it as part of the bigger picture.

In closing, had it not been for riparian members, the WTA would have no purpose in continuing to attract fly fishers to the Eastern Cape Highlands. It is therefore appropriate to convey sincere thanks to every riparian owner who is a member of the association and allows access to their waters.

The economic benefits of this cooperative relationship to the region is significant and provides momentum to the tourism industry despite a lack of support by government by way of maintaining infrastructure and marketing the resource on a sound basis. Nonetheless, fly fishers are by definition, adventurous people not easily deterred by poor roads and the like!



The annual total of day permits is a reflection mainly on weather i.e. periods of drought and, of course, the impact of the Covid epidemic in 2020. The large influx of anglers the following year demonstrates the dearth of fishing outings previously!