



TROUT LINE

Newsletter from the Montana Council of Trout Unlimited



WINTER 2023

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WINTER/23

MONTANA TU'S MISSION

is to conserve, protect and restore Montana's world-class coldwater fisheries and their watersheds.

Founded in 1964, Montana Trout Unlimited is a statewide grassroots organization comprised of 13 chapters and approximately 4,000 TU members.

www.montanatu.org

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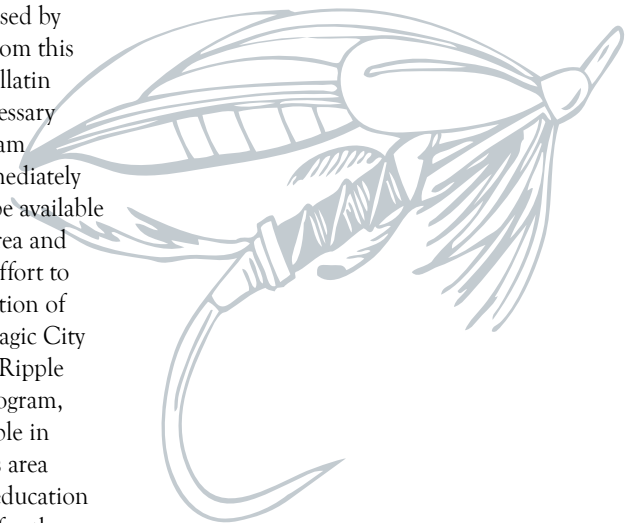
Twice a year I have the pleasure of joining the other Executive Committee members of Montana's State Council in reviewing and approving applications from TU chapters for MTU's Mini-Grant Program. In 2002, MTU's State Council used funds dedicated by the Estate of Bud Morris and Steve Bryant to establish a pair of investment accounts. We regularly distribute the earnings of these accounts as mini-grants to chapter projects that range from stream and habitat restoration and aquatic monitoring, to research, to youth education and increasing angler access. To date, MTU has distributed more than \$415,000 to 112 trout-friendly efforts.

As is usually the case, the projects funded from the Fall 2022 mini-grant cycle demonstrate the diversity of work that MTU prides itself on doing each year. Because of the dip in markets this past year, we judiciously spread the modest mini-grant account interest and earnings over four new projects. Thanks to a mini-grant the Kootenai Valley chapter will help start a volunteer-driven effort to monitor for selenium in critical trout tributaries to the Kootenai River. This baseline data is a critical component in assuring that Montana can hold the Canadian coal mining company Teck responsible for the toxic levels of selenium its operations continue to pump into Lake Koocanusa and the Kootenai. The Missouri River Fly Fishers chapter will use mini-grant funds to support construction of a trout-friendly bridge across the South Fork of Sheep Creek tributary to the Missouri River that will reduce habitat degradation and sedimentation caused by the current creek crossing. Funds from this program will allow the Madison Gallatin chapter to purchase equipment necessary to engineer woody habitat into stream restoration projects, which will immediately benefit work in the Gallatin, then be available for years to come in the chapter's area and statewide for other projects. In an effort to continue educating the next generation of conservationists and anglers, the Magic City Fly Fishers chapter will expand the Ripple Effect Aquatic Learning (REAL) program, which mini-grants have made possible in the Livingston area to three Billings area elementary schools. See the youth education article in this edition of TroutLine for the full story of how MTU has invested in the REAL Program, as well as a growing number of Trout in the Classroom projects across Montana.



MTU State Council Chairman Brian Neilsen

Helping to oversee MTU's Mini-Grant Program always reminds me of the breadth of work the organization makes possible statewide. It would not be possible without the good work of chapters in identifying or designing projects twice a year that directly benefit trout. Nor would it be possible without the foresight and generosity of the donors who started the Program and who continue to support it by contributing to its investment accounts. For a deeper dive on this great work, check out the new Mini-Grant story map that MTU's own Maggie Althaus created and is a feature on MTU's new website (<https://montanatu.org/mini-grants/>).



68th Montana Legislature Convenes in Helena by Clayton Elliott

On January 2nd, the 68th Montana Legislature was sworn into office and began their business in Helena. From day one, MTU has been in the Capitol full-time, talking with legislators and testifying on various bills in front of committees. With nearly 5,000 bill draft requests, the session promises to be a busy one. As always, we'll be needing your help to achieve our mission.

Once again, this session our primary focus will be on making sure that Montana's natural resource agencies have the financial resources to make smart investments in conserving, protecting, and restoring Montana's coldwater fisheries and their habitats. The good news is that the Governor's proposed budget, which is the starting point for the legislature's work, provides robust funding for fish and water issues through the programs that manage those resources. Passing a state budget is the top job of the legislature, and MTU will be a diligent participant in the months of agency hearings and working with legislators to ensure we make smart investments with our angler dollars.

When it comes to agency funding, MTU's top priority will be keeping Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks financially whole, with the authority to apply scientific management to biological resources by qualified professionals. Once again, we know that there will be legislation that threatens the hunter-angler funding model for the agency. Also, every session there are bills proposed that would strip management authority and decision-making from trained biologists and put them in the hands of politicians. MTU will be opposing those efforts.

In addition to the agency budgets, the budget committees also make decisions on bills that affect critical infrastructure funding in our state. At MTU we have a track record of projects that demonstrate the benefit of stream restoration to our rural communities, agricultural partners, and fisheries. We intend to advocate for full funding of programs like the Future Fisheries Improvement Program that help us to continue to do that work over the next two years.

On the policy side, this session will be dominated by legislation regarding water use in Montana. The challenges are mounting as increased demand and decreasing supply are making water management decisions more



The beautiful Capitol rotunda in Helena.

complex than ever. We have spent hundreds of hours since the last legislative session working with our diverse partners as part of the Governor's Comprehensive Water Rights Review process to make responsible changes to the Montana Water Use Act to adapt our water law to these mounting challenges as the state's population and water use demands grow. We will be supporting two bills, SB72 and HB114, from that process as well as holding the line on protecting the prior appropriation doctrine and instream flow statute.

As always, a core priority for MTU will be protecting our clean water and public access to our rivers and streams. We are on high alert for bills this session that aim to improve both, as well as some that would roll back protections.

Finally, MTU will be making it easier than ever to follow our work, the progress of the session, and how you can get involved. We know that it can be overwhelming to find out what legislation affects Montana's coldwater fisheries and where it is in the complicated legislative process, which is why MTU's website is a one-stop shop to catch up on what bills are being heard by legislators, when key decisions are being made, and how you can be involved. Check out our bill tracker for key information and stay tuned to bi-weekly action updates from our boots on the ground in the

Capitol. If you have questions or need help, Bill Pfeiffer is available to help you navigate it all, and if you make it to Helena be sure to find me or Colin Cooney in the hallway!

For Montana's coldwater fish and their habitats, what we do as anglers during this legislature matters. Please get involved and talk to your elected officials!

ACTION ALERT

To assist our work at the 2023 Legislature, visit Montana TU's brand-new website at montanatu.org/legislature. Thanks to our partners at BillTrack50, you can follow along with the bills we are tracking, our current position on each, and how you can get involved and contact your legislators. Join our email list for bimonthly updates on legislation affecting our trout waters.



MTU Mini-Grants Expand Youth Education Beyond Camp by Bill Pfeiffer



Hellgate highschool TIC students release trout they raised in Silvers Lagoon Kids Fishing Pond, Missoula.

When most people think of Montana Trout Unlimited's efforts to educate the next generation of trout lovers, our week-long Youth Conservation Camp comes first to mind. What could be better than getting 20 kids outside for an immersive experience in ecology and fly fishing skills? While camp may be one of our favorite times of the year, the MTU Mini-Grant Program helps encourage youth engagement across the state, throughout the year.

Our Mini-Grant Program has a long history of supporting local chapters and partner work with Montana's younger generations. The Trout In the Classroom (TIC) program and Ripple Effect Aquatic Learning (REAL) are just two recent examples of how we foster a healthy outdoor-oriented learning environment in Montana's schools.

The TIC program is a nation-wide multi-disciplinary education program developed by Trout Unlimited for K-12 students. TIC programs guide students through a trout's life cycle from egg to fry. Each teacher can tailor the program to fit various curricular needs, from science and biology, to writing and art. This allows each program to fit unique classroom and student needs. MTU's Mini-Grant Program helps chapters purchase the necessary equipment and supplies to get these excellent opportunities up and running.

After studying the environmental conditions trout need for egg incubation,

students learn and watch as the eggs hatch, first into alvin, then growing into fry, before releasing them in an appropriate stillwater body, like a local trout pond. Trout eggs are provided by Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks for TIC programs in the Bitterroot Valley, Helena, Missoula, and beyond. The TIC program continues to expand into new classrooms every year. It provides a vital link between the kids and the streams often flowing right through their backyards.

Another great youth education program that MTU's mini-grants have helped fund is Ripple Effect Aquatic Learning (REAL), a program developed by Livingston's Matt Wilhelm. REAL

uses standards-based science lessons and fly fishing programs with a focus on local watersheds. During their lessons in the REAL curriculum students become more aware of and understand the importance of local ecosystems and how organizations like MTU keep these places healthy. REAL provides hands-on, place-based applications to school subjects while bestowing stewardship and access to local watersheds.

In addition, the REAL program introduces students to careers in conservation by engaging fisheries, hydrology, and other professionals from agencies, watershed groups, and private enterprise to expose students to new 'teachers' who are practitioners in the world of water and fish. The MTU education mini-grants have helped expand the REAL program from the Park County rural schools to the Shields Valley School in Wilsall, Arrowhead School in Pray, Gardiner schools, and, more recently, into Billings.

While we are waiting for the snow to melt and the trout streams to flow again, MTU is still busy passing along a strong conservation ethic to young people through our many partners. For more information on these programs, contact Outreach Coordinator Bill Pfeiffer at bill@montanatu.org.



It's never too early to introduce kids to life on the bottom of the river.

Another MT Mine Leaves Cleanup to the Taxpayers by David Brooks

Nearly a decade ago, my predecessor, Bruce Farling, rattled up rough roads heading west of Jefferson City, climbing toward where the Continental Divide runs atop the Highland and Boulder Mountain ranges between Butte and Helena. His aim was to take a first-hand look at the condition of Montana Tunnel's giant pit mine, which opened in 1986, was already running out of minerals and laying off workers in the late 1990s, and hadn't operated to extract gold, silver, zinc and lead since 2008. He found crumbling pit walls and access roads, the pit filling with water from unknown sources and of unknown quality, a below standard tailings facility, earth-quake-like stress fractures in the land around the pit, and Clancy Creek, a headwater trout stream, contained in an 18" plastic pipe in jeopardy of tumbling into the pit. The need to rescue the creek and deal with the dilapidated mine was clear. Thus, MTU and partners dug into those tasks.

Fast-forward to December, 2022, when Montana Tunnels became one in a long line of mining companies to file for bankruptcy, a decision by the owners of the open pit mine that will likely inch the state one step closer to remediating the site, saddling Montana taxpayers with a large share of the cost. The only real surprise in Montana Tunnels petition to seek Chapter 11 protection is that it took so long. Shortly after Bruce's ramble around the mine, MTU helped hire a flyover to get bird's eye footage of the looming disaster. We searched the Department of Environmental Quality's (DEQ) Hard Rock Mine Division records for inspection reports and information about the company's intentions. A 2013 annual report said that DEQ's action plan for getting the company to face up to reclamation was to "hope for the best."

Rather than rely on hope, MTU went to work. In addition to raising awareness of the potential for this defunct mine to pollute groundwater and completely capture Clancy Creek, we pressed DEQ to begin enforcement actions, like suspending the company's permit, recalculating a bond to cover rising reclamation costs due to the mine's worsening condition, and ultimately

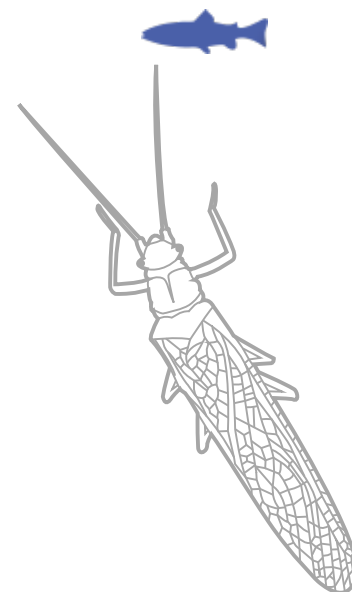


starting reclamation with an emphasis on saving the creek. MTU believes that businesses operating in Montana should not be allowed to make money and run, leaving environmental devastation for present and future generations of Montanans, along with degraded streams and huge tax burdens to pay for clean-up.

DEQ eventually reworked the reclamation plan, including a new scheme for keeping Clancy Creek flowing. The new bond amount was nearly \$37 million, an increase of about \$17 million more than what DEQ had in hand from the company. By 2021, DEQ suspended Montana Tunnel's mining permit because the company had not come up with the bonding shortfall. Over the next year and a half, DEQ went out of its way to provide Montana Tunnels with extensions and an incremental payback schedule. The company failed to meet those lenient parameters and, instead, filed for bankruptcy. Meanwhile, the costs of cleanup have likely risen, meaning more debt for Montanans to shoulder.

Since this mine ceased operations in 2008, it has been nothing but a money pit that is fast growing larger. It is time for the state to shutter this mine for good, cash in the (insufficient) bond and start reclamation. This will cost taxpayers tens of millions of dollars and leave Jefferson County and the DEQ with the mining company's

unpaid debts. Reclamation does not equate to restoration. The pit will remain. The creek will be put into a more permanent pipe or lined trench running across slightly higher ground in hopes that it will continue flowing to downstream trout waters for the foreseeable future. It is the best of the imperfect solutions possible for Clancy Creek and the damaged landscape this mine has left behind. It would be hard to call it a win. But it will keep this site from becoming a greater environmental and financial risk for Montanans. And we'll have to live with one more example of mining gone wrong and promises broken.



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Give Back to MTU All Year Long



Support Our Work: Get the Original Trout Plate!

Do you have the original Monte Dolack-MTU license plate on the bumper of your car or truck? It's one of the easiest ways to support our important work, from defending the Smith, to instructing the next generation of anglers. Get **the fish license plate that matters** (Montana Council of Trout Unlimited) at your local county treasurer's office when you renew your registration or purchase a new vehicle. Thank you for supporting MTU !

THANK YOU!



To all those who donated to Montana TU in the last weeks of 2022, we appreciate your incredible and ongoing generosity. It's only because of people like you that we're able to do this important work! Our gratitude for all you do for wild and native trout!

Chapter News

Big Blackfoot Chapter

2022 projects for BBCTU and our many partners included habitat restoration and fish passage projects on Nevada Creek, Poorman Creek, Willow Creek and the Clearwater River. We also installed a new fish screen on Johnson Creek that will have water conservation benefits. We continued to work on fund raising and in December, we learned that the Future Fisheries Program awarded \$103,000 for Nevada Creek Phase 6. Our latest Holiday Appeal was successful. Over 50 individuals generously donated \$50,000 to BBCTU. We continue to work with NRCS on a Targeted Implementation Plan (TIP) for the Nevada Creek Watershed. Finally, MT DEQ recently produced a video that highlights our collective work on Nevada Creek. Watch it on our Facebook page!

Chapter News

Chuck Robbins Chapter

We are going to be co-hosting a water conference at University of Montana Western, Feb. 22 from 4pm-6pm. Our goal for this event is to have an open discussion about water and its consequences with our local stakeholders. Attendees will include anglers, recreationalists, ranchers, DNRC and hopefully a few realtors. Learning to live with less water will be essential for keeping our trout streams healthy in the coming years. Also, we will be hosting the International Fly Fishing Film Festival on March 18 at UM-Western. We'll also be hosting a pint night on Apr. 14 and our annual River Clean up on Apr. 15. Stay tuned for more details.

George Grant Chapter

The George Grant Chapter will hold their annual Banquet on March 3 at the Copper King in Butte. This year dubbed "The Rat Pack is Back," the GGTU will be raffling off an NRS Otter, fully loaded. Only 125 tickets are sold at \$100/each so get yours today. Email president@ggtu.org for more info. The board continues to be active developing a project for the restoration of Lower Fifer Gulch in Anaconda. This project is moving forward and we'll have more to share this spring.

Madison-Gallatin Chapter

Madison Gallatin Trout Unlimited's 51st Annual TroutFest Banquet will be held on Saturday, Feb. 25th, 2023 at the Best Western GranTree Inn in Bozeman. The event starts at 5:00 PM and includes silent and live auctions, wine and beer and gear raffles and prize drawings, evening presentation, good times and ALL in the name of Conservation of SW Montana's coldwater fisheries! As always, we will be using a mobile bidding platform - Givergy - so folks can participate from near and far. This is MGTU's one and only fundraiser and all proceeds from the banquet go towards MGTU's mission statement to conserve, protect, and restore SW Montana's cold water fisheries and their watersheds. Not attending the banquet? You can still register to view and bid on auction items from afar. Viewing for auction items will open on Monday, Feb. 20th at 9:00 AM MST. Bidding will open on Thursday, February 23rd at 9:00 AM MST.

Missouri River Fly Fishers Chapter

MRF had a great Holiday Party on Dec. 10 at the Do Bar in Great Falls. In addition to a silent auction, Outreach Coordinator Bill Pfeiffer joined us for a fun evening, followed by some alternative-rock from Great Falls finest musicians. We're getting ready for our Winter Riverfest, Feb. 18 at the Newberry. Tickets are selling fast, with only 5 tables left at the time of this writing. There are plenty of general admission tickets, but buying a table is the only way to ensure you get a seat! Contact the Newberry for tickets. Contact us to volunteer at flyfishersmissouririver@gmail.com.

Pat Barnes Chapter

Our annual membership social was held on Saturday Jan. 28, officially known as the "Ice Bowl". We offered free bowling and pizza, as well as the opportunity to renew or sign up for TU membership. In addition to our membership drive, we re-started our Trout in the Classroom program. On Thursday Jan. 26 we delivered 1,600 fertilized trout eggs to 8 different elementary schools within the Helena School District. The students, as well as our board and membership, are very excited to have this program up and running again.

Westslope Trout Unlimited

WSCTU had a full house for our last chapter meeting featuring Alice Owsley, who gave an indepth presentation about fishing in Yellowstone Park, and redbfish in Louisiana. Our next Chapter Meeting is taking place Feb. 8, 2023, at The Still Room, 6:30pm. This month we will be getting an exclusive peak at the 2023 Montana Fly Fishing Film Festival. Upper Clark Fork Restoration Manager Casey Hackathorn will also join us from Trout Unlimited to discuss his work in the uppwer river. Also, please mark your calendars for our Annual Banquet taking place on Feb. 25th. You could win a Sotar Blackfoot Strike Raft with a Montana Raft Frame, Leo Larson Custom Trailer, Rod Dog Rod Holders, Sawyer Oars, Yeti Cooler and more! Huge thanks to Tito's Vodka for sponsoring this awesome boat in the name of conservation! Only 8 tickets will be auctioned live at our banquet. Hope to see you there!



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TROUT LINE WINTER 2023

UPCOMING EVENTS

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2/18/23 **MRFF River Fest**
Great Falls, MT

2/22/23 **Chuck Robbins Water Conference**
Dillon, MT

2/25/23 **WSCTU Annual Banquet**
Missoula, MT

2/25/23 **MGTU Annual Banquet**
Bozeman, MT

3/3/23 **GGTU Annual Banquet**
Butte, MT

3/18/23 **IFF Film Tour**
Dillon, MT

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Please contact the Missoula office at 406-543-0054 or info@montanatu.org to get the word out through Montana TU.



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