



TROUT LINE

Newsletter from the Montana Council of Trout Unlimited



Bull Trout safely recovering in the net before release
Photo Courtesy of Tony Reinhardt, Montana Trout Outfitters



SPRING 2020

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SPRING/20

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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FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Weeks of shelter-in-place are reminding me of the things I consider most important and dear. As the current President, and a long-time appointee to the Montana Board of Nursing, I know that human health tops that list. As a Swiss philosopher once wrote, "health is the first of all liberties." COVID-19 has been a stark reminder of how health crises, not to mention individual health problems, can curtail our ability to pursue other interests.

With my MTU volunteer leader hat on, I am equally aware of how vital getting out on the water and doing what we love is to our overall health and happiness, not to mention the real public health benefits of conserving, protecting and restoring clean, cold water.

The overlap of my experience in the health and conservation communities makes me especially appreciative of all the efforts, patience, diligence, caution, and creativity that MTU staff and chapter volunteers have shown in continuing to advocate for and work toward our mission during this time.

That is clearly reflected in this newsletter's stories on protecting native trout and the Smith River, conserving statewide water resources through the CSKT Compact, trout migration and tracking studies, and the long-serving commitment of MTU's Stewardship Directors, for example. All of these stories are part of what make it possible for me and you to find respite and healthy angling on our streams and rivers.

Thank you to members, donors, MTU staff, agency partners, Chapter Leaders, and other friends of our work for staying the course during these challenging times. Our mission and our work together are as important as ever. I hope we all get out to our local waters and safely enjoy the hatches ahead!



Sharon Sweeny Fee

SSFee



Bull Trout safely recovering before release
Photo Courtesy of Tony Reinhardt, Montana Trout Outfitters

Is That “Grip and Grin” Killing Trout? by David Brooks

There's no short, easy answer to that question. But recent research does show that the way we handle trout when skill and luck favor us matters to their health and, possibly, survival. That is especially true when it comes to some of Montana's native coldwater fish. Take a study on bull trout, for example.

A 2020 article titled “Can smartphones kill Trout? Mortality of memorable-sized Bull Trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) after photo-releases,” cuts straight to the point that over-handling spawning-aged bull trout could have a population-level impact (B.A. Joubert, et al. Fisheries Research 223). Researchers caught mature bull trout on single, barbless hooks. The fish they immediately released experienced a 15% mortality rate within 24 hours. Alternately, researchers switched up their handling to include more than a minute of airtime and, most importantly, measuring and taking a grip-and-grin photo. Snapping a photo

of those bull trout for posterity, and the handling it entailed, killed them a third of the time (33%) within a day. The article concluded that because large, memorable bull trout are more likely to be the subjects of prolonged handling and photographs by anglers than, say, small bull trout, such seemingly harmless practices “could produce a runaway cycle of collapsing fisheries in spite of stringent regulations.”

One of the unique features of this study was the focus on delayed mortality. All of the bull trout caught and released survived the initial handling, whether they were let go immediately or measured and photographed before swimming free. It's easy and usually reasonable to think that once we watch our quarry flex its gills, slash its caudal fin, and arrow back to the safety of deeper, darker water that we have done our part as responsible catch-and-release anglers. Knowing that 15-33% of fish can perish up to 24 hours after swimming away

without apparent signs of their demise is a stark reminder, especially when it comes to abiding by restrictions on targeting endangered fish like bull trout. As Fish, Wildlife & Parks biologist Ladd Knotek, who works in the heart of Region 2's bull trout country, said when discussing this research, “Excessive handling of bull trout and holding them out of the water is illegal because it kills many of them ... including many fish that anglers think they have successfully released!” That is especially true, according to Knotek, in late summer when warm water temperatures are already stressing adult trout, many of which are staging at the mouths of tributaries in preparation for fall spawning.

Quite frankly, this is a lesson worth considering, especially when fishing for native trout. While many of our wild and native trout continue to thrive in streams, rivers and lakes, none are without threats

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Congressional review of CSKT Water Compact opens by Clayton Elliott

MTU has been an active participant in the negotiations and legislative debate over the proposed Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes' Water Compact. Many of you have lent your support and travelled to Helena to urge its passage. We know that this Compact is important for conserving, protecting, and restoring fisheries in western Montana, and we are once again weighing in with our elected officials.

Earlier this year Senators Steve Daines and Jon Tester introduced the Montana Water Rights Protection Act, S. 3019, which would provide for U.S. Congressional ratification of the CSKT Water Compact. As you know, the Compact was approved by a bipartisan

majority in the Montana Legislature in 2015. In the near future, Congress will begin its review of the proposed legislation with a hearing in the Senate Indian Affairs Committee. From here, we expect both the full Senate and House to consider the legislation by this fall. We are urging its timely passage.

The benefits of ratification of the CSKT Compact are many, and MTU members know them well. Most importantly, the Compact will resolve hundreds of contested water rights across Montana, saving years - likely decades - of costly litigation and adjudication through the Montana Water Court. That certainty is a good deal for all

water users and means more water in our rivers for our coldwater fisheries. What's more, the Compact will provide millions of dollars of investment in restoration work within the Flathead Indian Irrigation Project and associated water infrastructure. That work will save water for instream flows and provide fish-friendly improvements for migration and movement. That's a win for fish like Westslope cutthroat and bull trout while we invest in our communities and their economies. Lastly, this work has deepened our partnership with the Tribes in meaningful ways, and we look forward to that continuing in the future.

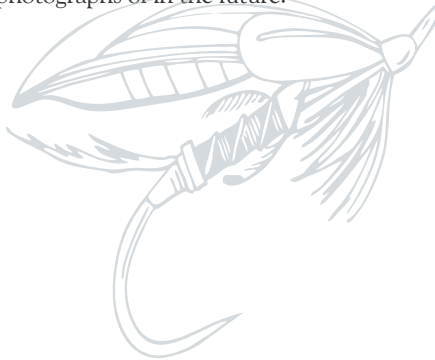
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"Grip and Grin" from page 3

and challenges. Everyday our attention and efforts at MTU are spread across the state on issues like fish passage barriers (dams, diversions, or failing culverts), illegal and invasive species, or low, warm water in traditionally coldwater habitats, to name a few. Most anglers want to be good stewards of our fishery resources, and thankfully many are! If and when we practice catch-and-release angling, we should do so with long-term fish survival in mind. "Keep 'em wet" by using a net and/or hook release tool.

Waterproof cameras are allowing for more unique, realistic photos of fish that remain fully - or at least partially - submerged after being caught. And when air and water temperatures are on the rise, we can readily follow hoot-owl guidelines, as well as forego playing a hooked fish any longer than necessary. We can also practice preserving "memorable-sized" fish in our memories and the stories we have to tell, rather than relying on our memory cards. Let us not forget the value of a good, undocumented fish tale!

After about two months of working remotely and social distancing, the things I miss most about fishing and, hence, look most forward to returning to are not holding a slab of trout and having photographic evidence to relive the moment later. I miss spending time on the water with close friends, in close proximity. I miss the ribbing and laughing about all the ways we (or at least I) tend to bungle clutch casts, set hooks too early or too late, or slip and soak myself. I miss sharing shore lunches. I miss taking my turn on the oars without concern about whose hands were just plying them. Maybe those are the things I'm going to take more photographs of in the future.



CSKT Compact from page 3

MTU is urging chapters and members to make their voices heard by contacting the Montana congressional delegation and urging them to keep fighting for passage of S. 3019. If you have already done so, please consider writing a letter to the editor in your local newspaper expressing your support. It is important to elevate the benefits that this legislation will have for anglers and the native fish they chase to our friends, neighbors, and communities. Contact Clayton with questions of how to best elevate your personal and chapter support for the legislation.

ACTION ALERT

You and your chapter can help educate the public on the benefits to trout habitat and the public regarding S. 3019 and the CSKT Compact. Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper or contact MTU Conservation Director Clayton Elliot for more information at: clayton@montanatu.org.

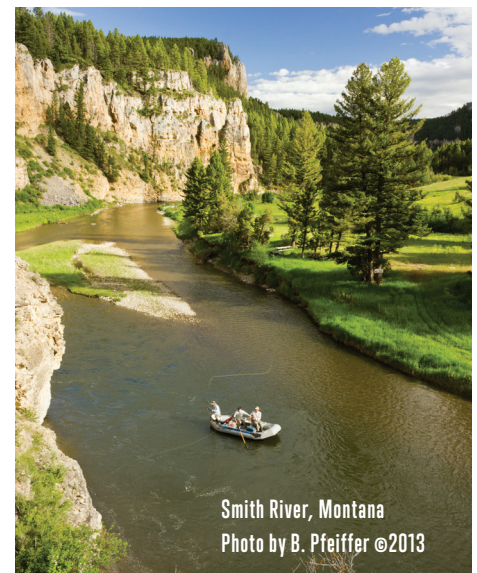
CONSERVE. PROTECT. RESTORE

DEQ permits mine in the Smith watershed. Our fight continues. by David Brooks

This spring, just as thousands of lucky Montana anglers were anticipating the float of a lifetime on the crown jewel of Montana rivers, the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) announced its decision to permit the Black Butte Mine on the headwaters of the Smith River. MTU and our partners, as well as many of you who share our love for the Smith River and our desire to protect it from this risky mine, have spent more than six years weighing in with DEQ at every possible turn in the department's permitting process. We have repeatedly pointed out the scientific evidence and expert reviews that demonstrate many of the flaws and gaps in the plan to mine in these precious headwater trout streams. Most of those flaws and gaps

remain in the Final Environmental Impact Statement that DEQ used to permit this mine. In doing so, DEQ ignored not only MTU's views and the best available science, but also feedback from more than 12,000 Montanans who submitted comments with concerns or in opposition to this mine.

This does NOT mean that our fight to protect the Smith River is over – far from it. We are not surprised or unprepared for this next phase. We will move our efforts from the administrative process arena – which we have fully participated in at every stage – to the legal arena. We have had a legal team since we began this fight and are working with them to identify and prepare for several litigation options that we will pursue.



Smith River, Montana
Photo by B. Pfeiffer ©2013

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Smith Mine from page 4

Thanks to strong grassroots and donor support from people like you, we are well positioned to continue leading our fight to save the Smith, and we will look again to friends and supporters to engage with us. We will continue to keep you informed and let you know how you can help. If you'd like to help today, please use the "Donate Here" option here.

Many people who received permits to float the Smith early in the season this year were unable to because of Covid-19 closures. Thankfully that closure was temporary and has been lifted. We do not intend to see future generations robbed of their chance to enjoy this treasured trout stream due to perpetual impacts of a mine. Please don't hesitate to contact us with your questions or suggestions.



Sadly, due to safety concerns surrounding COVID-19, we were forced to cancel our 2020 Conservation Youth Camp at Camp Watanopa on Georgetown Lake. All applications received will be forwarded to next year and we hope our partners and volunteers will join us in 2021 for our 19th camp. In the interim, we've started a new online youth education program, MTU River Life, that's self-guided for parents and kids. Check it out at montanatu.org/youtheducation.

PHILANTHROPY CORNER

Ratchesons lead through generosity and stewardship by Kelley Willlett

Remember the last time you went to the mailbox and found a handwritten note? Doesn't happen often, but when it does, it sure lifts my spirits. Few people take the time anymore. A text... an email... these come fast and furious, but a note of thanks or recognizing good work is a rarity in today's world, and thoughtful, generous people are the senders. That's who Drs. Bob and Peggy Ratcheson are... thoughtful and generous. After a donor recognition event last fall, Peggy took the time to write a card and let us know that she and Bob had enjoyed themselves and appreciated our work. The lovely trout card now hangs in my office and inspires me.

Despite their busy past, Robert, a retired neurosurgery department chair and Peggy, a cultural anthropologist, they found time to be members of MTU's Stewardship Directors. This dynamic duo is notable because their commitment to conservation in Montana spans over four decades and has included support for all levels of Trout

Unlimited, as well as for several other conservation NGOs. From Peggy's role in bringing to life the Reel Women of the 'Root at the Chapter Level, to opening their home for a MTU event, and Bob's past service to National TU as a member of the Coldwater Conservation Fund, they have generously given time, talent and treasure. Their annual, unrestricted gift to MTU makes a difference year after year, and their intention to include MTU in their estate plan serves as motivation for others to do the same.

They have driven thousands of miles to participate in day-long State Council Meetings all over Montana, and their institutional knowledge means Bob (who is also a gifted bamboo rod builder,) is often posing the needed, contemplative question when it comes to a new enterprise or organizational strategy. This makes us better.

Bob and Peggy are both accomplished anglers who have fished all over the world.



Drs. Bob and Peggy Ratcheson, MTU Stewardship Directors on a recent fishing excursion.

They could spend all of their time on the river. The fact that they choose instead to give so much to make the rivers better is a gift --not just to MT-- but to all of us. Thank you, Bob and Peggy!

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CONSERVE. PROTECT. RESTORE

Trout migration studies in western Montana help prioritize restoration by Bill Pfeiffer

For most anglers, the first thought in our minds when we land a big, beautiful, native cutthroat trout is “Where’s my phone?” not “Where was this fish was born?” It’s easy to get lost in these special moments. We return to them frequently in our memories and timelines, but meanwhile, after we release it, our prize cutthroat heads off to feed and grow, most likely migrate, and hopefully spawn. The answers to where our fish was yesterday and where she might travel tomorrow are usually forgotten.



Releasing a tagged trout to spawn in Marshall Creek
Photo courtesy of Chris McAdams

While biologists have long studied the movements of steelhead and salmon we know relatively little about our more resident trout that migrate into and out of larger, interior river systems. This is especially true for Montana’s Clark Fork watershed, particularly since the recent and historic removal of Milltown Dam. We know our fish sometimes move great distances, but how many do so, and how far, and how often? Does a fish always return to a home stream or do some stray?

We were all astounded a few weeks ago to hear the story of Rainbow #0068, a fish

that travelled over 150 miles from below Thompson Falls Dam to presumably spawn in Johnson Creek in the Blackfoot drainage, just a few miles above the old Milltown Dam site. Migrations like this remind us of the strength of collaboration between agencies and conservation groups and how small restoration projects can combine to produce great success stories.

A new study launching this spring looks to shed more light on the travels of westslope cutthroat, rainbow trout, and hybrids in the Missoula area. Through the Missoula Trout Tag Study, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks biologists Ladd Knotek and Patrick Uthe along with a team of technicians are partnering with Trout Unlimited, Montana Trout Unlimited, and local anglers. Biologists, technicians, and volunteers tagged over 800 fish using colored Floy tags, with specific colors corresponding to various spawning tributaries in the Missoula area. Anglers are encouraged to report the location, tag color, and tag number of any tagged fish they catch in the Clark Fork, Blackfoot, and Bitterroot rivers. You can find more information about both the Missoula Trout Tag Study and the Race Up Rock Creek on our new Trout Migration webpage, montanatu.org/troutmigration.

Here at MTU, much of our restoration work focuses on tributary streams because they
(continued on next page)

ACTION ALERT

If you catch a tagged fish:

- 1) DON'T REMOVE THE TAG
- 2) Take a clear photo of the tag if possible
- 3) Record the tag number, color, and catch location
- 4) Release the fish
- 5) Report your catch to (406)542-5520 or visit montanatu.org/trouttag

Trout Migration from page 6

are essential to conserving our native fish species and providing valuable spawning and rearing habitat for all wild trout. The more we learn, the more we realize how important these streams are to healthy trout populations throughout our river systems. Projects like the Missoula Trout Tag Study and Race Up Rock Creek help us learn more about our fish and focus restoration efforts in areas that can provide the biggest help to native and wild trout. Look for tagged fish on your angling adventures this season and please report tagged fish. Good luck!



Tagged rainbow trout spawning in Rattlesnake Cr.
near Missoula, MT

Chapter News

Madison Gallatin Chapter

The Madison Gallatin Chapter will hold their annual Lower Madison River Clean Up on August, 29th, 2020, from 9am - 1pm. This is a collaborative effort to spruce up one of our beloved home water stretches. All volunteers should meet at the Warm Springs FAS at 9am for a brief safety talk, clean up directions, and float details. Clean up finishes at Trapper Springs Pavillion for food, beverages, and prizes. Bring your boat, if you have one, or just yourself and your friends! If you'd like to volunteer or for more information, call (406) 219-7691 or email mgttroutunlimited@gmail.com.

MGTU is also supporting the Ennis Chamber of Commerce to plan and host a Fly Fishing and Outdoor Festival in Ennis, MT this September. The Festival dates are set for September 3rd-5th. Several folks from the local area, fly fishing industry, and beyond are stepping up to make this event possible. We will continue to monitor the Covid-19 situation and regulations and adjust as needed. For now, we are moving forward. For details and schedule of events, go to: <https://www.ennischamber.com/fly-fishing-and-outdoor-festival/>

Pat Barnes Chapter

The Pat Barnes Chapter is pleased to announce that two new officers have been elected within the Board of Directors. Shalon Hastings was elected as new

President, accompanied by Mike Agee as Vice President.

While PBTU was sad to cancel our spring banquet, we are exploring options for a late summer/ early fall event to raffle off our raft/trailer package. Stay tuned to pbtu.org for more details. In the interim, the chapter continues to work with the US Forest Service on restoring Beaver Creek below Hauser Dam, as well as partnering with FWP in their 'Clean, Drain, Dry' campaign to fight aquatic invasive species in our local waters. Until fall, tight lines!"

Westslope Chapter

On May 1 the WestSlope Chapter wrapped up the Veterans Tie-A-Thon Challenge and sent 3,456 flies to Warriors and Quiet Waters. Seventeen tiers contributed 115 dozens flies with Ron Knowles leading the pack with 42 dozen flies! And Doug Houston of Fly Boy Angler donated 173 dozen commercially tied flies. Over the last 3 years this program has donated over 35,000 flies to WQW. In conservation news, the chapter plans to award about \$50,000 in grants to help fund 8 projects, mostly involving fish passage and spawning enhancement. The total project value is over \$1,000,000. We will award another \$25,000 later in 2020 as more projects are submitted to the chapter. The chapter has a full line up of speakers for the 2020/2021 meeting season starting in November but all that is pending how the pandemic is going.

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Chapter News

Bitterroot Chapter

The Bitterroot Chapter has continued planning projects and moving forward with plans despite these unprecedented times.

We just finished our Corona Bug Challenge and had some very creative entries. The entry donations were given in support of the Hamilton Business Relief Fund. The winner was Tim Richards and he provided this great description of his Bug, "A standard dry fly for a dry cough, with China Red body and yellow thread. The red, white and blue flashes and waves amongst the fly with CDC (Center for Disease Control) wings. There are the double yellow "comb-overs" with a touch of orange for world-wide high visibility and of course... the face mask.... we don't want the fish to catch anything, just the fisherman."

For our Reel Women of the 'Root group we are planning an outdoor event that will

provide adequate social distancing. More details will be coming soon on that front.

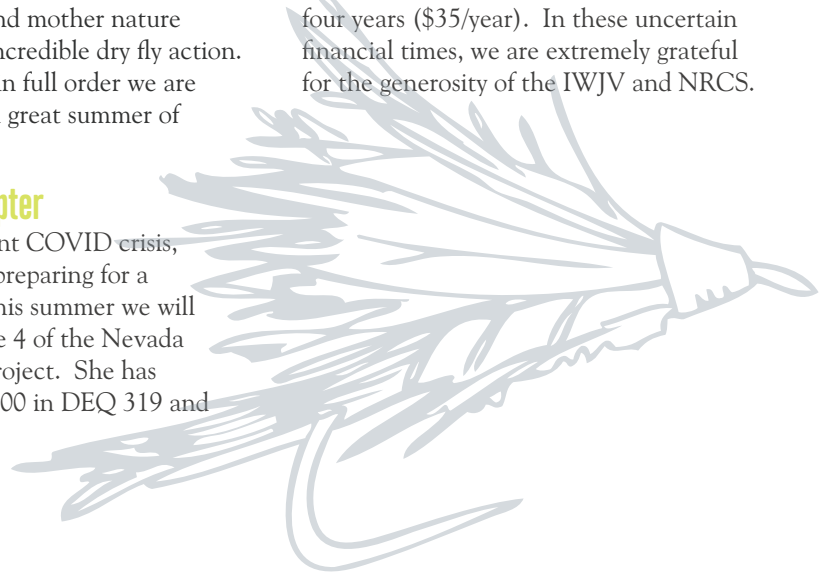
With the uncertainty of our future for having large groups together we have made the tough decision to cancel our 41st Annual Banquet in October. In lieu of this we will be hosting an online event. Look for more details in the coming weeks on our website, www.bitterroottu.org.

The skwala fishing on the Bitterroot was fantastic this year and mother nature provided weeks of incredible dry fly action. Now that run off is in full order we are looking forward to a great summer of fishing.

Big Blackfoot Chapter

In spite of the current COVID crisis, Ryen Neudecker is preparing for a busy field season. This summer we will be working on Phase 4 of the Nevada Creek restoration project. She has raised nearly \$400,000 in DEQ 319 and

MFWP Future Fisheries restoration funds for Phase 4. BBCTU has also had a successful campaign raising money for general operations. The Missoula based Intermountain West Joint Venture (IWJV) provided \$10,000 to BBCTU to help support their Water 4 Campaign. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), a U.S. Department of Agriculture agency recently finalized a funding agreement that provides BBCTU with a total of \$140,000 over the next four years (\$35/year). In these uncertain financial times, we are extremely grateful for the generosity of the IWJV and NRCS.



TROUT LINE SPRING 2020

UPCOMING EVENTS

www.montanatu.org

5/29/20 MTU State Council Meeting - Online

8/29/20 Lower Madison River Clean Up
Bozeman, MT

9/03/20 Ennis Fly Fishing & Outdoor Festival
Ennis, MT

WANT 4,000 MONTANA TU MEMBERS TO HEAR ABOUT YOUR EVENT?

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



www.facebook.com/montanatu