



# TROUT LINE

Newsletter from the Montana Council of Trout Unlimited



Outreach Coordinator BILL Pfeiffer shows a group of Youth Clinic attendees their first Salmonfly nymph. PC: Laurie Lane, WSCTU

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plus river etiquette, drought fishing  
tips, Chapter news and more!

 SUMMER 2021



# SUMMER/21

## 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](http://www.montanatu.org)

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## FROM THE CHAIRMAN: Brian Neilsen

Low snowpack, lack of rain combined with early and intense summer heat is stressing our rivers and trout more than ever. Hoot owl restrictions have been triggered across numerous rivers in the state as anglers from across the country seek fishing and fun on Montana's rivers. Current conditions require anglers to take initiative; the health of Montana's trout is in our hands.

We're all wondering what we can do and feeling helpless as pictures of dead Montana trout are featured not just locally, but in national press too. We can help, by not fishing when it's too hot and modifying how we fish when temps allow (see page 5). If you're receiving this newsletter, you've already done something, joining and/or giving to MTU and our work to keep Montana's trout fisheries alive and well. Thank you.

Montana Trout Unlimited is more important than ever this year. If you don't get a chance to hit the water as much as you've hoped, consider donating the money you saved on a tank of gas to the good work of MTU. As Zane Grey once said, "If I fished only to capture fish, my fishing trips would have ended long ago." Be safe and respectful out there and keep enjoying and protecting Montana waters.

BNL



MTU State Council Chairman Brian Neilsen



MISSOURI RIVER CLEAN UP

# BASHIN' TRASH



**AUGUST 21, 2021**

**HELENA**  
**HOLTER DAM**  
**GREAT FALLS**  
**BREAKS MONUMENT**  
**VOLUNTEERS NEEDED**

To volunteer or adopt a reach, contact [bash.trash.mo@gmail.com](mailto:bash.trash.mo@gmail.com)  
or visit [www.sunriverwatershed.org/bashintrash](http://www.sunriverwatershed.org/bashintrash)

## Your pressure pushes native fish projects over the finish line by Clayton Elliott

At their June 24th meeting, the Fish and Wildlife Commission finally approved twenty-two pending native fish restoration projects that had been put on hold by the Director's Office pending review by the Commission. To put it bluntly - your calls and emails demonstrating the broad and deep support for native and wild trout paid off. In the end, the Department received more than two hundred comments, over eighty percent of which supported the restoration projects. Support for the projects was diverse – from the intrinsic values wild and native fish provide to all Montanans to the economic benefits provided to small rural communities by restoration activities. The slate of projects was finally approved with a unanimous vote from the Commission.

While MTU still believes strongly that the decision to stall these projects was legally unwarranted and procedurally



Wild westslope cutthroat trout from a Bitterroot River Tributary. PC: Bill Pfeiffer

redundant, we are grateful for our members and supporters stepping up at this critical moment to stand up for Montana's coldwater fisheries. However, this is a short-term victory, and we know that your

diligence is going to be required to hold the Department accountable in the coming months and years ahead. The Department has now announced their intention to complete a comprehensive review and rewrite of the recently completed Statewide Fisheries Management Plan (five years ahead of schedule). MTU will be calling on our members to engage in that process and support and protect native and wild fish conservation once again.

Also at their meeting, the Commission endorsed a pair of potential access acquisitions on the Yellowstone River in Paradise Valley and Browns Lake near Ovando. Public comment for those projects will be available in the coming months.



## Fishing Etiquette Refresher by Kelley Willett

Have you ever had a day on the river marred by your own rage toward other anglers? I remember a day when I'd driven a good bit and then hiked a good bit and then began fishing a favorite hole on a favorite river... only to have a gentleman and his son step in just upstream of where I was standing. My Scottish blood began to boil - How dare they? The nerve!!! Fly fishing is my therapy and my church, and they were ruining it! I realize now that I was the one ruining my own day and I decided not to do that again. But how - with the increasing numbers of anglers on all our rivers and streams - can we get along and have the fishing experience that we count on and treasure? Below are a few reminders of the basics of fly-fishing etiquette that are habit for many of us and perhaps new for folks just joining our sport.

Assume good intent. Okay, this is not actually specific to fly fishing, but it can't hurt. Often an angler who jumps in too close for comfort or leap frogs upstream into a hole you were heading toward simply does not know any better. I count my blessings that I have a Dad who taught me the 'rules' and a little brother who is often

there to remind me, "Hey Kel, make sure you leave a couple of holes between if you decide to fish up." Lucky me.

Go old school and just talk to each other. Though it may be awkward to ask an angler where she's headed, that conversation is less awkward than guessing wrong and moving into her planned lane. When you come upon another angler, simply ask, "Are you fishing upstream or downstream," and then go the opposite direction. Upstream anglers always have the right of way.

How close is too close? Every angling Blog has a different answer. Watch the person casting and then when you determine however much space you think is adequate - double it. Another good rule is to always leave a run/hole/feature between you and the other angler. I once heard a longtime angler say 'out of sight' is the best distance.

If you're floating through a hole where a wade angler is casting, stop fishing and give him that run. There will be plenty more.

General fishing etiquette includes not trespassing on private property and picking up litter, but those are the obvious, easy rules.

The trickier moments involve engaging with other anglers, who may not have had the benefit of good teachers. These interactions present opportunities to make the whole sport better. Consideration for others on the river has a conservation benefit too; not fishing right on top of each other puts a hair less pressure on the fish, in a summer when they are at risk. Let's give each other lots of grace on the river because life off the river is hard enough.



Learning to share the water with other users can make your day more relaxing. PC: Bill Pfeiffer



# Building On a Half-Century of Wild and Native Trout Successes by David Brooks

Ever wonder why Montana has more blue-ribbon trout streams than almost anywhere else in the lower 48? One of the main reasons is the foresight and courage of fish biologist, Dick Vincent almost fifty years ago. He trusted the science that indicated the trout populations would be healthier without stocked fish. In a radical, highly contested move, Montana stopped stocking trout in streams and rivers in 1974. Science showed that naturally reproducing native and wild trout would flourish if healthy habitat was protected and restored and the competitive influence of hatchery fish was removed. This experiment has been a great success and created the world renowned legacy of wild and native trout management that brings anglers to Montana from across the globe.

Recently, a long-time MTU volunteer leader told me a story of growing up in a state well east where he learned to fly fish. The most important piece of information for him as a young angler, and for all his fellow trout anglers in the state, was the state's hatchery planting report. When the report said trout were going to be stocked in a local stream, a line of cars and trucks would line up and follow the hatchery truck to its destination. Then anglers stood shoulder to shoulder downstream of the truck to have a go at hooking a hatchery trout that was ready to eat right after being shot out of a tank.

Whether you grew up chasing stocking trucks or fishing for trout that spawned and matured in Montana's streams and rivers, most anglers who fish here recognize that native and wild trout are sacred. That is why MTU will be partnering with other like-minded conservation organizations to increase education and outreach on why Montana's wild and native trout heritage matters. Native and wild trout are indicators of clean water that benefits human health, agriculture, ranching, outdoor recreation and, generally, our self-reliant way of life.

These trout and these many benefits need your help now more than ever.

A warming climate means more frequent and severe droughts (see Chris Edginton's article on pg. 5). Recently

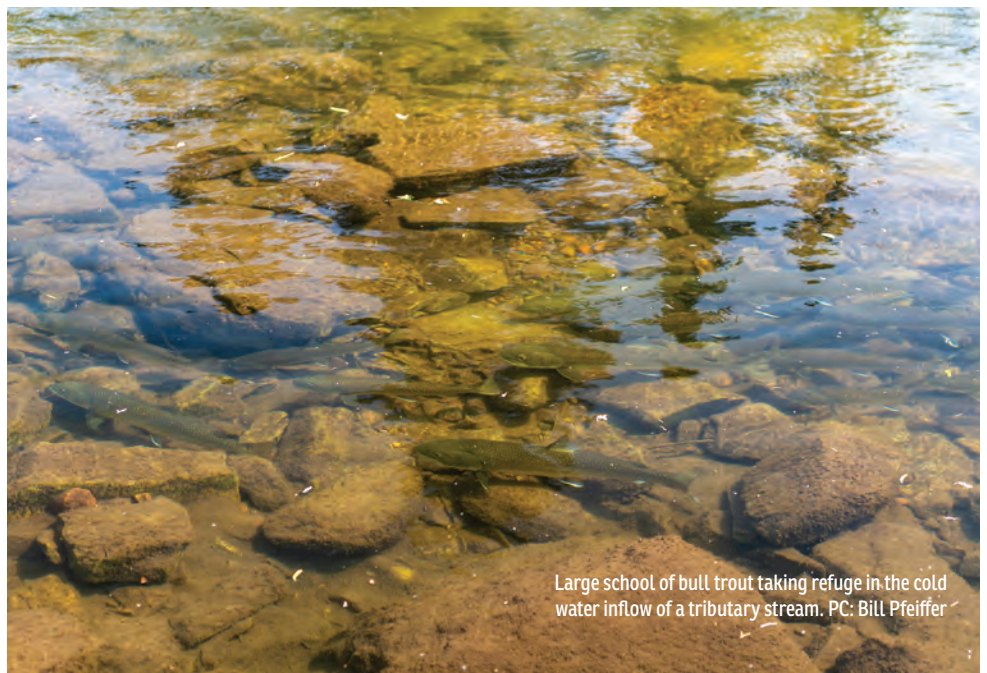
we faced misguided efforts by leadership at Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks that could slow down or undermine the scientifically-sound and publicly celebrated efforts to restore native trout. Illegal introductions of nonnative fish and aquatic invasive species pose mounting threats to trout habitat and populations across the state. The 2021 Montana Legislature's efforts to lower water quality standards or make it more difficult for the public to contest illegal water usage, are just two examples of ways that our state laws directly threaten wild and native trout.

Educating and advocating on these issues is core to MTU's mission. In addition to continuing our on-the-ground projects to restore trout habitat and native trout populations, removing passage barriers like deadbeat dams, collaborating with water users to keep more clean, cold water in streams, or rescuing native and wild trout from diversions, we plan to ratchet up our work to grow the next generation of coldwater conservationists and anglers through youth education. We will also continue to promote fish-friendly policy and budgets. As part of these redoubled efforts, we will be encouraging more people to join the Montana Wild and Native Trout Coalition. You don't need to be a member of any participating

organizations and it's completely free. Through this coalition, we hope to gather a diverse group of educated and informed advocates and activists to speak on behalf of Montana's rich wild and native trout heritage. Stay tuned, stay informed, encourage others!

## ACTION ALERT

Join our new campaign, the Wild & Native Trout Coalition! Scan this QR Code with your phone and join our mailing list. We'll update you on important wild trout management issues, and we'll have a new campaign website on the way soon!



Large school of bull trout taking refuge in the cold water inflow of a tributary stream. PC: Bill Pfeiffer

## Tips on How to Fish Responsibly This Summer by Staff

This is a tough summer for trout. Record-breaking high temps and low flows cause cumulative stress and although trout live underwater, they still need oxygen. As water warms and slows it contains less dissolved oxygen, which stresses fish and can kill them.

Together we can help ensure trout survival so that our remarkable angling legacy endures. Please keep in mind the suggestions below:

- If it is hot outside, check for and comply with mandatory restrictions and closures; be diligent in following FWP Hoot Owl restrictions and any appeals for voluntary cutbacks on angling. 'Hoot Owl' is a closure to fishing - often 2:00 p.m. to midnight, or a full closure. Hoot Owl Restrictions are an important tool used by MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks when flows drop below critical levels for fish, when water quality is diminished, or when maximum daily water temperatures reach at least 73 degrees for three consecutive days.
- Avoid streams with low flows and high-water temperatures (67 degrees +). Explore higher-elevation streams and lakes where fish may be less affected by drought. Montana has thousands of stream miles and hundreds of lakes that offer good fishing and bonus - smaller crowds.
- Steer clear of waters that are attracting extra angling pressure because of fishing closures elsewhere. Try not to contribute to more river crowding.
- If you choose to fish during low flow/high temp periods, fish in the morning when air and water temperatures are coolest. Avoid fishing in the afternoon and evening when temperatures are highest. Avoid fishing at night. On some rivers, night is when dissolved oxygen levels are the lowest.
- Don't play fish any longer than necessary; avoid direct handling of fish and use extra caution with native species such as cutthroat, grayling and bull trout. Release fish as quickly as possible, always keeping them wet. Resist the temptation to hold fish out of water for photos; action shots in the water are a great alternative, and let the fish recover before releasing. Fishing barbless is even more important in warm conditions.



Angler shows proper fish handling technique with a large Missouri River brown. PC: Bill Pfeiffer

- When streamflows and temperatures become very acute, consider doing something else. Montana has no shortage of alternative outdoor opportunities.
- Carry and know how to use a stream thermometer (how-to video at [montanatu.org/how-to-fish-responsibly-this-summer](https://montanatu.org/how-to-fish-responsibly-this-summer)). When the temperatures in moving water hit 67 degrees, call it a

day. Those fish will live to dance with you another day.

The angling you give up temporarily today safeguards future angling opportunities.

**Thank you.**

?s - contact Montana Trout Unlimited at 406-543-0054 or [Bill@montanatu.org](mailto:Bill@montanatu.org).

## Restoration Tools for Fighting Drought by Chris Edgington

The story of summer 2021 in Montana is drought. But this story started last year. Following an extremely dry 2020 water year, the winter of 20/21 had a late, dry start with a three-week blast of snow and cold in February, only to dry up again. Historically, March through June are some of the wettest and most telling months for stream conditions for the summer ahead. In June and July, stream flows were routinely breaking low-flow records on stream gauges across Montana. Regionally, the Jefferson basin suffered some of the earliest and lowest runoff in the state. Other basins, like the Smith River in central Montana, challenged for this unsavory title.

The Smith River had its shortest float-



TU volunteer Stan Bradshaw checking flows on a small but cold Blackfoot tributary. PC: Morgan Case

(continued on next page)



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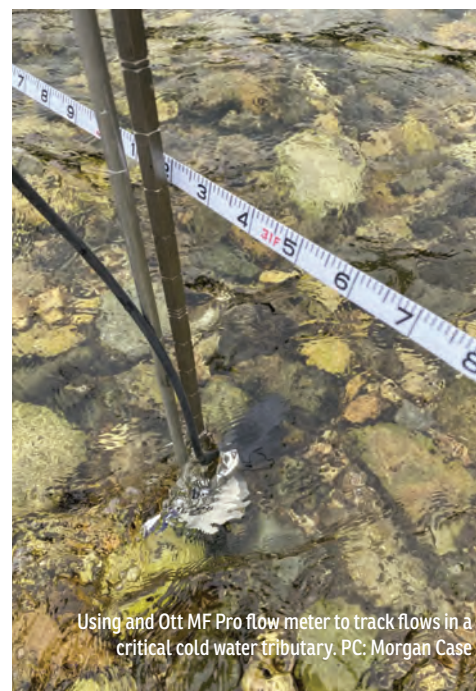
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## Restoration Tools for Fighting Drought from page 5

camp season on record, affecting the normally booming tourist, fishing, and outfitting industry (worth more than \$10M annually) in White Sulphur Springs and surrounding communities. Around Twin Bridges, the parched lower Ruby was the first river in the state to go under fishing restrictions, a full closure on May 14 followed by Hoot Owl closures on many sections of the Big Hole, Beaverhead, and the length of the Jefferson River on June 28. Many, if not all of our partners; fishermen who make up MTU chapters and membership, watershed groups, state and federal agencies, and agricultural producers are feeling the stress of the drought while working together to mitigate the most severe impacts.

Unlike the droughts of '88, '94 and the early-2000s, we have more tools to soften the sharp edge of drought. Most notably, many chronically dewatered basins across the state have drought management plans (DMP) that arose from those drought cycles. While far from perfect, they are a vehicle for open and honest communication amongst a diverse group of stakeholders. I assist the Jefferson River Watershed Council with its DMP. In June, I made initial calls to the four canal companies that rely on irrigation water from the Jefferson and its tributaries. Their participation is critical to keep the river from drying up, as it did in 1988. On July 15, I started hosting weekly drought meetings for water users and concerned citizens in Whitehall. This will continue until conditions improve. Through these efforts, water users are sharing the sacrifices necessary to ensure that the Jefferson maintains minimum, emergency-level flows for the health of the river and fishery.

In the Upper Big Hole, the Arctic Grayling Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA) management team, Fish, Wildlife & Parks, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and MT Department of Natural Resources, coordinate with landowners who participate in the program to protect grayling through voluntary habitat restoration, grazing management plans, and water efficiency projects. In extremely dry years like this, the CCAA is pushed



to its limits, when ranches not enrolled in the CCAA program continue to divert sacrificed water. We are continuing to advocate for policies that protect instream flow for CCAA enrollees who voluntarily forgo their water rights for that purpose.

Across the greater Jefferson drainage, multi-stakeholder work is happening because of collaboration, a social compact that came about because so many people recognize the importance of protecting the most basic thing about a river: it continues to flow. Other great examples exist in Montana, like in the Blackfoot. These DMPs can and should be developed where they don't currently exist. This summer is yet another harsh reminder of this need. Montana's coldwater streams and rivers are the pride of our state. As conservationists and anglers, MTU shares the concerns about drought with everyone who depends on water for their livelihood or enjoyment. As we work to protect flows through tools like DMPs where they exist this summer, we will also continue to help build those tools where they don't and would be beneficial. This won't be the last dry summer we experience, but working together can and does make a difference.

# Chapter News

## Bitterroot Chapter

The Chapter held a successful Youth Conservation Clinic on July 10. Sitting under the BRTU canopy, the participants learned what trout eat, how to “read” a stream to find fish, and how Trout Unlimited works to conserve, protect and restore Montana’s cold-water fisheries. They were introduced to fly casting and tackle and also learned the skills of knot tying, fly selection, fly line management, how to look for bugs, water safety, and how to land and safely release fish. The day ended with some time on the water with rod in hand along the naturally eroding bank of the river adjacent to the park. The kids all had a great time and we are already discussing a repeat for next summer. Thanks to all the volunteers for their help!

## George Grant Chapter

GGTU has been off for the summer but has still been busy and engaged, assisting with the Rock Creek Youth Clinic and other projects. The chapter approved funding for the Andrus Creek (tributary to the Bighole) Fish Barrier project for native fish restoration as well as a macroinvertebrate study on the Bighole to evaluate changes to insect densities and presence since the last study 10 years ago. Chapter representatives have also been attending meetings to discuss fishing regulation changes related to the decline of brown trout in many streams in Southwest Montana.

## Madison-Gallatin Chapter

MGTU hosted a conservation youth clinic with MTU on July 16 at the Glen Lake Pavillion. Despite the smoke and heat, we still had a great time learning about conservation, aquatic insects, fly casting, fighting fish and more. One of our lucky anglers even took home a new fly rod and reel thanks to the chapter. Several campers were excited to learn about MTU’s Youth Conservation Camp and are hoping to attend next summer.

## Magic City Flyfishers

Magic City Fly Fishers, Billings TU Chapter, received a \$5,000 MTU minigrant that is assisting the Stillwater Watershed District Council kick off a multi-year water quality testing and research project on the

Stillwater River and several tributaries. The goal of the project is to initiate baseline research for future use to determine how various recreation, development and agriculture use affect the river. In addition to funding, MCFF also plans on dedicating time to join SWDC in completing the on-water research as well as other joint Stillwater River projects.

## Missouri River Fly Fishers

Missouri River Flyfishers are partnering with several organizations to host a Missouri River Cleanup – Bashin’ Trash on August 21 to remove trash from the river, parks, and trails from Helena to Great Falls and at the Missouri Breaks Monument. Sign up to volunteer, sponsor, or adopt a reach at [www.sunriverwatershed.org/bashin-trash](http://www.sunriverwatershed.org/bashin-trash). MRF will have more volunteer opportunities so be sure to follow us on Facebook. See our ad on page 2!

## Snowy Mountain Chapter

The Chapter partnered with MTU to host the first-ever TU youth flyfishing clinic in Lewistown on June 13 on Big Spring Creek! The event received great coverage in the local paper, was well attended, and all of the campers took home a new fishing rod and reel. Thank you to the many donors, volunteers, and community members who made the clinic a success. All the kids had a great day and we can’t wait to host another one next summer!

## Westslope Chapter

The WestSlope Chapter hosted a Warriors and Quiet Waters volunteer group on a TU restoration project in the Ninemile. It was a great way to connect with these heroes and plug them in to our work on the ground. The Chapter also participated in an MTU Youth Day clinic with GGTU that was a great success. Thanks to the generosity of the Ranch at Rock Creek for their hospitality and hosting the event. We also held wader safety clinic and tabled a booth at the Montana Fly Fishing Film Festival where we recruited new members and sold WSCTU Logo merchandise. The conservation projects we funded are in high gear and getting done. We’re looking forward to another great fall and winter of monthly meetings. Stay tuned!

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# TROUT LINE SUMMER 2021

## UPCOMING EVENTS

[www.montanatu.org](http://www.montanatu.org)

8/21/21

**Bashin' Trash Missouri River Clean Up**  
Helena to the Breaks

9/25/21

**MTU State Council Meeting**

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

Please contact the Missoula office at 406-543-0054 or [info@montanatu.org](mailto:info@montanatu.org) to get the word out through Montana TU.



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