



TROUT LINE

Newsletter from the Montana Council of Trout Unlimited



Summer on a Blackfoot Tributary.
PC: B.Pfeiffer

SUMMER 2022

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SUMMER/22

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

TROUT LINE is published quarterly by Montana Trout Unlimited.

Printed on recycled paper using eco-friendly inks.

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FROM THE CHAIRMAN: Brian Neilsen

Unless you've been living on the moon the last few weeks, you've seen the images and news of the devastating flooding on the Yellowstone River and some of its major tributaries. No doubt the floods have touched the lives and properties of some of you, your families or close friends. The human impacts and costs are top of mind.

As floodwaters recede and damage is assessed, there will be many notions of how to rebuild. As coldwater and trout conservationists, we know that restoring habitat and healthy floodplains is one very good way to benefit fish, aquatic ecosystems and build resiliency into river systems, including their ability to handle floods. Natural or restored banks and floodplains absorb floodwaters, reducing their speed and volume. That's good for trout and for property.

The last time the Yellowstone experienced highwater events like this in 1997, there was a rush by the U.S. Army Corps to permit many projects that involved hardening banks with riprap or building levees, rather than naturalizing floodplain areas. The environmental evaluations of these permits was scant, so MTU took the Corps to court to enforce better



MTU State Council Chairman Brian Neilsen

assessments of projects. We won, saving many places along the Yellowstone from the kind of 'rebuilding' that would have been detrimental to fish and aquatic life and, ultimately, could have worsened the impacts of future floods, like this year's. With that experience in mind, MTU will be closely watching the necessary efforts to recover from this flooding. When and where possible, we will advocate for appropriately evaluated permits and projects, as well as prioritizing long-term floodplain health. If you live along a river, why wouldn't you want stream habitat that helps control flooding and is good for fish?

ACTION ALERT

Tell Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks you support a 66°F! Hoot Owl trigger for cutthroat fisheries!

Scan the QR Code and select "Drought Angling Restriction and Fishing Closure ARM." Comments will be accepted July 9 through August 5.

Additional comment will be accepted at the August 25, 2022 Fish & Game Commission meeting. See our article on page 3 for info!



Changes to 'Hoot Owl' proposed to conserve native cutthroat by Clayton Elliott

Fisheries managers at Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (FWP) are proposing to increase protections for native fish facing low and warm water conditions because of drought. The Fish and Wildlife Commission voted in June to send the proposal out for public comment before making a final decision at their August meeting.

The new proposal by FWP would create a new, separate trigger of 66°F for implementing hoot owl angling restrictions for cutthroat waterbodies versus the standard level of 73°F for salmonid species. Bull trout currently have their own trigger in the rule. For the past two years, MTU has been engaged with FWP about considering the most up-to-date scientific literature to establish more appropriate temperature triggers for native species. The 66°F trigger comes from research documenting that cutthroat trout, more than other salmonid species like rainbow and brown trout, begin suffering from physical and metabolic stresses at this lower water temperature. The proposal further streamlines the process for managers on the ground to help avoid the issue of "on and off" hoot owl restrictions.

MTU supports this new proposal because it is grounded in science and takes a protective approach to the health of fisheries facing low and warm water conditions due to the persistent drought conditions Montana is facing. These changes will help minimize the impact of angling on cutthroat, and we will be working with managers to implement these new restrictions in a scientifically accurate way in the statewide fish management plan where native fish communities are present. That will include identifying which sections of streams are predominately cutthroat waters and, hence, warrant the new temperature trigger.

Public comments on the proposal will be taken through August 5th. To comment on the proposal, follow the QR code link on page 2. For more information about this proposal contact Clayton at clayton@montanatu.org.



Native Westslope cutthroat trout.
PC BILL Pfeiffer



Wild Trout and Water Temperature

>67°	65°-67°	55°-65°
All species exhibit elevated stress <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Low dissolved oxygen• Stop fishing!• Released fish may not survive• Mortality begins to occur above 80°	Cutthroat, Rainbow, and Brown Trout begin exhibiting stress <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Limit angling to Hoot Owl hours• Release fish quickly• Use heavier tippet	Prime water temperatures for cutthroat, rainbow and brown trout. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• High growth rates• High dissolved oxygen• Low hooking mortality• Low stress

Hot Weather Fishing Tips

- Always use a stream thermometer when it's hot out!
- Fish early in the morning when water is coolest.
- Use heavier tippet to land fish more quickly.
- Reduce fish handling time & keep fish in the water.
- Go up in elevation to find cooler water in the mountains.
- Stop trout fishing when the water exceeds 67°

60° Bull trout begin exhibiting stress response - KEEP FISH WET

Montana TU Water Quality Wins by David Brooks

Clean water matters to trout and people. That's why year after year, MTU focuses many of our efforts on protecting and restoring the high quality of water in our streams, rivers and lakes. Three of our current efforts illustrate just how, and how well, we're doing that by: 1) ensuring that the state maintains robust water quality regulations; 2) helping to identify sources of pollution that degrade water quality; and 3) pushing the state to use every tool available to curtail impairments to water quality.

As we've reported, the 2021 Montana Legislature passed a bill (SB358) that directed Montana's Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) to get rid of science-based, numeric nutrient standards for facilities that have permits to discharge pollution directly into Montana streams and rivers. We opposed that rollback but have worked with numerous conservation partners to make sure that the new narrative standards for nutrients that DEQ is developing do not allow polluters to backslide, reduce water quality and get out of their obligations to ensure that the highest beneficial uses of our waterways are being maintained, if not improved. In addition, we have encouraged the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to make sure that any changes to Montana's nutrient standards meet the legal requirements and purpose of the Clean Water Act. This spring the EPA officially told DEQ that four major provisions of SB358 fail to meet that bar. In short, the EPA determined that contrary to SB358, the science-based numeric standards remain in place in Montana until DEQ develops new standards that meet federal approval. Furthermore, DEQ's track record of using narrative standards for nutrients fails to "provide adequate protection of designated uses" of Montana's waters, according to the EPA. EPA also struck down the bill's provision that would have allowed polluters to degrade high quality waters without review or restraint to the point that they just barely support designated uses, such as healthy aquatic life, recreation, agriculture and drinking water. We are glad to see EPA making sure that Montana's water quality standards continue to be science-based, rather than favoring the financial interests of permitted polluters. As DEQ grapples



Cladophera algae blooms are linked to high nutrient levels in the water. Adobe Stock photo.

with how to meet the EPA's expectations, MTU will continue to represent statewide conservation interests by advocating for empirical nutrient standards that maintain or improve Montana's waters.

We are proud to announce that we are one step closer to receiving an EPA grant to study toxins in Clark Fork River fish both to update the state's fish consumption advisory and to better identify possible sources of a host of toxic compounds in the watershed. Please stay tuned...

If you've been on the Gallatin River in mid- to late-summer the last few years, you likely have spent time cleaning algae off your hook. Because algal blooms on portions of this river have gotten to the point of impairing angling, recreation, and aquatic habitat and life, MTU joined fellow conservation organizations this spring in petitioning the DEQ to assess these impacts and to list the Gallatin as an impaired water, warranting agency resources to help solve the causes of the increasingly harmful algae issues. We commend DEQ for quickly and positively responding to our concerns and the needs of the Gallatin by doing the recommended assessment and determining that the impacted portion of the river be placed on the state's 303(d) list. This is a win for the Gallatin that will take continued vigilance. This listing will kick off with a public comment period (we'll keep you posted via social media and action alerts) and result in the development of Total

Maximum Daily Limits (TMDLs) for the Gallatin. TMDLs are essentially caps on the amount of a pollutant a river, stream or lake can receive and still support its designated uses. For the Gallatin, it's likely (and our concern) that excess nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus from septic systems, wastewater treatment and runoff from expanding development are driving algae blooms and degrading water quality for aquatic life and recreation. Setting TMDLs will provide DEQ and stakeholders with the ability to properly identify nutrient (or other pollutant/impairment) sources AND a framework for reducing these pollutants to solve the problems excess algae is causing for water, wildlife and people. With growth and development predicted to continue in the Gallatin Valley, setting TMDLs that will provide tangible tools for reducing the root causes of algae blooms is a vital step in protecting this treasured river, its wild and native trout, and the people who depend on it for clean water.



Stewardship Spotlight: Paul Stanley by Kelley Willett

When discussing fly fishing with MTU Stewardship Director, Paul Stanley, one can't help but think of The Gentleman Angler. His vigilance about the importance of etiquette in the angling community rings true today - more than ever - as increasingly more people escape to the rivers with rods in hand.

Paul never remembers a time when he didn't love fishing. As a child growing up just blocks from San Francisco Bay he'd catch and release crabs, marveling at the water's bounty. He recalled an afternoon at the Palace of Fine Arts lagoon catching several mosquitofish, none larger than his little finger. When asked who taught him to fly fish, he credits 'countless guys.' His love of fly fishing has taken him all over the world; though his favorite places are in Montana, where he and his wife Marolyn spend part of the year. Esther Lilly, wife of Bud Lilly, legendary angler and conservation advocate, was his realtor when he decided to buy property on the Madison. Whom better to have as inspiration - passing along the conservation spirit!

When asked about favorite places, he fondly remembers fishing Milesnick Spring

Creek, back when he could fish all day and practically have the whole place to himself. "Lots of big fish," he said.

Paul joins several stewardship directors in crediting retired MTU staffer, John Wilson, for connecting him with Montana Trout Unlimited. Paul and his wife Marolyn not only generously support MTU, but would host John at their Piedmont, CA home when he was traveling for MTU business. Their friendship grew over hundreds of days on the water together and helped to cement Paul's commitment to MTU's conservation mission.

Now in his 90's, Paul is keen to pass on his legacy to the next generation of conservationists in his family. He took the time to introduce his daughter and son-in-law to MTU's executive director during a recent



trip to the Bay Area. Paul's commitment to protecting the rivers comes from lessons learned as a lifelong California resident.

"I have seen what happens to a place when more and more people put pressure on a resource," Paul said. His hope now is for more courteousness and civility among anglers and encourages MTU to educate people new to the sport. His longtime generosity is allowing MTU to do that and so much more.



John Wilson, an MTU friend and legacy by Bruce Farling



When Montana TU hired John Wilson as its conservation director in early 2000 he told me he was on a mission to make a difference advocating for Montana's wild trout. Mission accomplished.

John passed away June 23 after battling cancer and after nearly five decades working to preserve Montana's open spaces, rivers and trout. Before he worked for MTU, he was a long-serving member of the State Council and even before that he lobbied

for us at the Montana Legislature. He had TU in his blood. Those tasks were wrapped around jobs as the Director of Tourism for the Schwinden Administration and more profoundly as a partner in the Montana Land Reliance, where he contributed to thousands of acres of Montana's rural landscapes and river corridors being preserved with conservation easements. After leaving MTU in 2006 and until retirement he applied his skills to protecting our national parks

It is no exaggeration to say he upped MTU's fundraising game by orders of magnitude, enabling us to tackle more conservation challenges and more habitat restoration. He introduced us to key donors who still support the organization. He was our guy at the Montana Legislature, and his persuasive personality enabled us to beat back numerous bad bills while creating new measures that advanced trout conservation. His fundraising, organizing and strategizing with our legal team from TU national's water project enabled us to

prevail at the Montana Supreme Court in a huge case involving the Smith River, forcing Montana's water permitting agency to consider groundwater connected to rivers as integral to streamflow. That case stopped further dewatering of the Smith, and it has helped ensure groundwater development elsewhere in the state does not harm river recharge.

John loved trout. He lived for fishing. I know no one who mastered the Missouri River's finicky fishery better than John. Trout in Argentina feared him, as did Caribbean bonefish. He was an esteemed colleague and friend. Be assured his conservation achievements will endure. John is survived by his wife Jan of Helena, and his adult sons Jeff and Joel.



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CONSERVE. PROTECT. RESTORE.

A Lifeline for Arctic Grayling by Chris Edgington



The unmistakable arctic grayling
PC: Richard Magjill

The vivid green landscape rising to the high elevation snow along the Centennial Range was a reminder of how much moisture had fallen since early April in Southwest Montana. Abundant wildflowers and wildlife provided a fragrant and pleasant backdrop for a critical meeting at the Red Rock Lakes Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) in early June. We gathered to press the US Fish and Wildlife Service into action for the Arctic grayling in Upper Red Rock Lake (Upper Lake). In the Winter Edition of Trout Line, we shared the dire outlook and our urgent effort to help grayling in the Centennial Valley. Updated grayling population sampling in April 2022 estimates that there are only 73 spawning adults remaining in Upper Lake.

In short, years of study and modeling show that improving overwinter habitat in Upper Lake is necessary for grayling to persist there. Diverting highly-oxygenated water from the man-made Shambow Pond to deeper portions of Upper Lake would provide critical winter habitat to deep parts of the lake where it presently doesn't exist. To date, we have raised \$344,000 for this project that was vetted over the last three years through an Alternative Analysis Plan of twenty-four potential solutions. All project partners, Fish and Wildlife Service, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, and MTU were pulling in the same direction leading up to a meeting in late January. In that meeting, we detected hesitation from the Refuge Manager. He was not eager to begin the permitting and compliance process known as NEPA. In response, we solicited and received several letters of support from local conservation organizations to show

stakeholder support for action. In February, the Refuge Manager sent an email to his staff stating that the project was not moving forward. Despite being the primary project fundraiser, MTU was not informed in writing or otherwise by the Service of this decision.

The Service's unilateral decision to halt the project was based on concerns we believe can be overcome. Fortunately, two basic agreements came from our meeting in June. The Upper Lake grayling population is a high conservation priority for each partner. They are presently imperiled based on demographic and genetic information. We walked away from the meeting with a path forward.

The next step entails all parties, including MTU, to conduct a Structured Decision Making (SDM) process. Facilitated by the US Geological Service, the SDM process is a mediated analysis of natural resource management decisions. As a partner in the SDM process, we aim to come away with a durable, collaborative, and legally defensible set of project alternatives that will be the basis of a NEPA analysis to move this Arctic grayling conservation effort forward.

Time is of the essence to implement a project to improve overwinter habitat in Upper Lake. If partners are unable to agree on a plan to do so, the Refuge system will have failed the Arctic grayling. Stay tuned as we pursue a brighter future for this imperiled population.



Chapter News

Bitterroot Chapter

Bitterroot Trout Unlimited is awaiting the drop in the river which should happen soon. We recently completed a Kids Day Camp in a local park. It rained all day, but they enjoyed it and could not get enough fishing. We are planning another similar event in September. MTU's Bill Pfeiffer did his usual great job. BRTU is working closely with Darby Ranger District and were awarded a RAC grant to rebuild a boat launch ramp along the West Fork. The project will be done in September. We also recently completed a new exhibit with the Ravalli County Historical Society that shows the history of fly fishing on the Bitterroot. The grand opening wine and cheese event will be July 18 at 6:30 PM. Stop in and see the old cane rods and historic flies nicely presented by the museum staff.

Joe Brooks Chapter

The Joe Brooks Chapter has been doing all we can to help all of our friends in the Yellowstone Valley impacted by the recent flooding. President Matt Swan and other JBTU volunteers recently helped Sweetwater Fly Shop conduct a rescue for a number of fish that were stranded in an abandoned side channel. Over 20 trout were captured and returned to the main river. We will be continuing our efforts throughout the summer. Please contact us at swanmatt@yahoo.com if you'd like to get involved with chapter events and join our volunteer list.

Kootenai Chapter

The Kootenai Chapter is pleased that new and contested Montana DEQ water quality standards surrounding selenium levels in Lake Kooocanusa and the Kootenai River will remain in place. Thanks to Montana TU staffers and local chapter members for the due diligence over the past couple years. It's more than likely the new standards will be contested again in the next legislative session but we will be prepared to do whatever is necessary to protect our water quality in Montana.

Madison-Gallatin Chapter

MGTU's 50th Annual TroutFest Banquet & Fundraiser was held on February 26th in Bozeman. Our 50th Annual TroutFest was quite a great success and one heckuva party! We SOLD OUT with nearly 275 guests in attendance at the GranTree Inn. I

think it's safe to say, everyone who attended was ready to gather as a community of anglers once again. We are so grateful for the support of our attendees, sponsors and donors, local businesses, fly shops, guides and outfitters. Bozeman's Sunrise Rotary hosted their Annual Kids Fishing Day at Glen Lake Rotary Park on May 21st. The day was a great success with well over 200 kids attending! MGTU was happy to be one of the many sponsors of this event, as well as offer volunteer support. We also had 34 volunteers pull 430 lbs of weeds at 14th annual Gallatin Weed Pull held on Saturday, June 11th. MGTU is a proud sponsor of this important annual event. Check our website soon for details on the Lower Madison River Clean Up, Sept. 10!

Missouri River Fly Fishers Chapter

MRF had a great time participating in FWP's "Kids Fishing Day" on June 4 after a 2-year hiatus! MRF volunteers had a great time at Wadsworth Pond in Great Falls and the kids enjoyed it, too. On June 10, MRF sponsored a Great Falls Voyagers baseball game. It was a great way to connect with more people from the community and we hope to do it again in the future.

Westslope Trout Unlimited

The Chapter celebrated our first ever RiverFest on May 22 at Fort Missoula. Designed for the fly fishing and conservation community, all attendees enjoyed great weather, excellent food, beer and NA beverages, casting games, competitions, instruction, fly tying contests and demos, entomology for kids and anglers, fly fishing bingo, face painting, raffles, door prizes and more. It was a great first year for this community-oriented event. Thank you to all of our partner and sponsor organizations for their time and support. The Chapter is on hiatus for in-person meetings, but we're planning a great fall and winter of visiting speakers and guests.



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TROUT LINE SUMMER 2022

UPCOMING EVENTS

www.montanatu.org

7/10/22 **MTU Youth Conservation Camp**

July 10-14, Georgetown Lake, MT

9/10/22 **Lower Madison River Clean Up - MGTU**

Norris, MT, 9am - 1pm

9/24/22 **MTU State Council Meeting**

Butte, MT

10/7/22 **Memorial Float**

For info contact Kelley Willett at kelley@montanatu.org

WANT 5,000 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.



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