



TROUT LINE

Newsletter from the Montana Council of Trout Unlimited



Snowy day at Kelly Island,
Clark Fork River. PC: Bill Pfeiffer

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WINTER 2021

WINTER/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

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FROM THE CHAIRMAN: Brian Neilsen

We survived 2020 and the transition into 2021. Many thanks to outgoing MTU Chairperson, Sharon Sweeney Fee for her nimble leadership the past two years. Thank you for all you have done and for passing the torch to me. I will hold it high, like my favorite fly rod when wading a secret creek in search of the kind of trout-rich, cold, clean water MTU volunteers fight for everyday in spite of the many challenges in our world.

Born in Bozeman and raised in Great Falls, MT, I grew up fishing the Missouri and its many unknown tributaries with my dad and his pals. Fishing the Missouri with a 5'6" Ugly Stick proved a powerful gateway into flyfishing, to which I remain hooked. This addiction led me to guiding on the Smith, South Fork of the Flathead and Missouri Rivers starting in 1993, and then obtaining my outfitters license in 2001. When not guiding, selling sporting goods throughout the incredible state of Montana, or volunteering for MTU, I can be found floating, hiking, skiing and chasing pheasants, elk and deer across Central MT with my amazing wife Shannon and daughter Margo, and our two bird dogs, or hanging out in our Great Falls home with three adopted cats, a rabbit and lonely parakeet.

Thirteen years ago, long time MTU volunteers Mike Bushly and Kirk Evenson urged me to join the Missouri River FlyFishers board in Great Falls. After two meetings, I was "volunteered" as banquet chair and would still hold the position if not for COVID. Since those first MRF meetings, I have been inspired by the hard work of volunteer fundraising, stream restoration, rescuing native fish from



MTU State Council Chairman Brian Neilsen

ditches, tying flies, fishing with veterans, and teaching kids to angle. As an MTU State Council board member, I aimed to get more guides and outfitters involved in coldwater conservation. Three years ago, Tim Linehan and I started "Tip of the Hat" to encourage guides to donate their tip one day a year to MTU, which has raised \$20k in donations. In Craig, MT my fellow guides and I funded a boat washing station to help stop the transfer of AIS to and from the Missouri.

As the new MTU State Council Chairman, I encourage people to get involved in this great organization. I look forward to meeting you in person again someday at our State Council gatherings. Until then, please keep helping your local chapter pull weeds, plant willows, call legislators, teach tying lessons, adopt a trout or hold a local river cleanup. Maybe you'll meet a new fishing buddy that owns a boat and can row. Make a difference, your involvement matters!



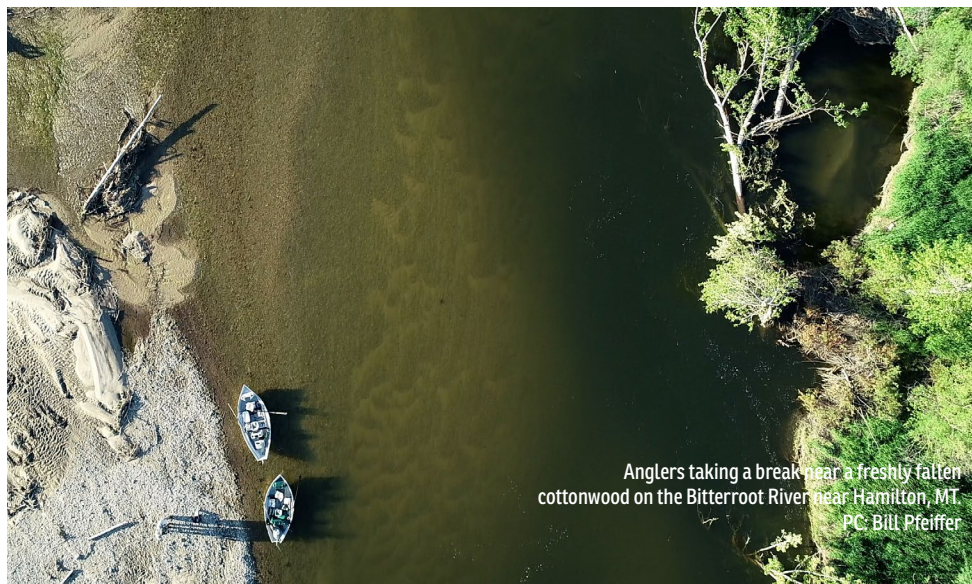
The Montana Trout Unlimited State Council's 2020 awards were virtually conferred upon this year's honorees at our December council meeting. The Council awarded Tim & Joanne Linehan with the Champion of Montana Trout Unlimited Award for their great service to MTU. Dr. Chuck Stokke of the George Grant Chapter received the Chairman's Outstanding Volunteer Award, while Chairman's Outstanding Chapter Award went to the Flathead Valley Chapter. Congratulations to our 2020 honorees!

Trout Need “Good Wood” by David Brooks and David Ward, Vice President, Bitterroot Chapter TU

Trout restoration has long strived for the 3 Cs of stream health – cold, clean and connected water. “Complex” has been rightfully added as the fourth C - especially for trout habitat.

Cold water is essential. Trout thrive only where water temperatures are below well-defined thresholds. They also depend on water that’s relatively free of contaminants, and therefore clean. Because trout travel during their lifecycle, especially to far-flung spawning tributaries, streams and rivers must be connected, free of passage barriers such as dams, diversions, undersized culverts or dewatered sections. Trout also need a variety of habitat features, such as deep pools, riffles, long runs, shaded banks, undercuts, and tangled masses of wood, which create a complex underwater world.

Large wood, such as logs and their root wads, have always played a natural role in most river systems. Wood backs up water or causes scouring that creates pools. It provides instream cover, giving trout holding water, places to hide or rest, places to find cool water during hot months, or deep, ice-free refuges in winter. Wood holds banks in place and moderates the transport of sediment, allowing spawning gravels to disperse and remain clean. Wood redirects the flow of water, braiding channels, which provide a variety of habitat options for trout of different ages from egg incubation to hog holes. Wood retains



Anglers taking a break near a freshly fallen cottonwood on the Bitterroot River near Hamilton, MT
PC: Bill Pfeiffer

organic material and nutrients and boosts aquatic insect populations, literally making trout food.

Research in the western U.S. confirms that healthy amounts of large wood in streams leads directly to more and bigger fish. A study of 50 years of data, from 1969 to 2019 covering more than 100 streams where large wood was restored to historic, natural levels showed “a significant increase in salmonid abundance and biomass.” Furthermore, large wood benefited large fish the most.

Conversely, the removal of wood leads to habitat declines, such as the loss of spawning areas and pools for rearing. Sensitive species often suffer the most from the loss of wood in streams. Bull trout, a federally-designated threatened species, are particularly vulnerable to habitat disruption. Remaining populations of this species are in the least disrupted watersheds with habitat that includes dense woody material.

Yet, in some watersheds, the removal of wood has occurred on a regular basis due to timber harvesting, overgrazing, development, and removal for recreational purposes. Within the last century, many anglers and fishery managers erroneously believed that wood obstructed fish movement, so they ‘cleaned up’ rivers by removing woody debris. We now know better.

That’s why most Trout Unlimited restoration projects that have occurred across Montana include the use of woody material to improve stream habitat and

fish health. Research confirms that woody restoration or protection of instream wood “is one of the most widespread and common techniques to improve riverine fish habitat.” Because we understand the many ways wood contributes to healthy trout populations we will continue to make it a significant part of restoration work, as well as encourage the protection of wood as a key element to our many complex and healthy trout streams.

As anglers, we’ve all had our casts confounded by snarls of root or that inconvenient splay of forked branches. We’ve cursed the wood that’s stolen our fly in the midst of rising trout. We’ve grumbled about fishing time lost to scouting the next bend for sweepers. But as lovers of healthy trout populations, we also must appreciate that wood provides habitat. If we want more big healthy trout, we want good wood.



Large woody debris (LWD) in a side channel of the Clark Fork River.

PC: Bill Pfeiffer

Our Mission at the 2021 Legislature by Clayton Elliott

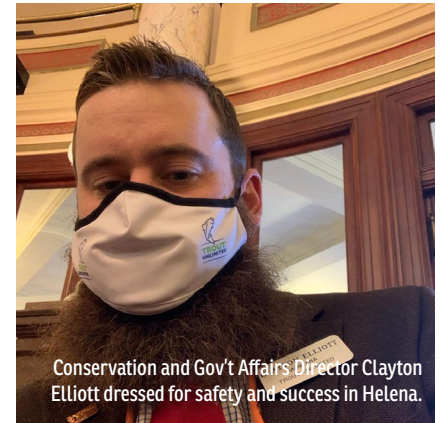
The 67th Montana Legislature gavelled into session in early January. MTU is working in the building to make sure that coldwater fisheries have a voice in the legislative process. The new session will be dominated by many new faces in Helena, including new Governor Gianforte and his picks to lead key state agencies. We are also all adapting to how we do this important work for the people of Montana, and our coldwater resources, in the midst of a pandemic.

MTU will continue to work directly on legislative policy issues central to our mission: to conserve, protect, and restore coldwater fisheries and their watersheds. This session we expect to be working closely on issues related to water quality protections, public access, aquatic invasive species, and streamflow protections. We look forward to any and all progress we can make on some these issues with our legislators, but we also know that we will have to hold them accountable at times as well. We cannot afford to have bad policy threaten our state's best-in-the-nation coldwater resources and access.

ACTION ALERT

MTU just launched a new legislative webpage where you can follow all the legislation we are watching in real time thanks to a new service provided by BillTrack50. Find out our position on various bills, read the full bill text, find legislator contact info and more. You can also join our Legislative Action Team and receive twice a month updates on our priorities. We will reserve action alerts for the times we feel you can make the biggest impact. Visit montanatu.org/legislature to learn more.

Budgets will be as important as policy. Lawmakers will be tackling state spending for the next two years, presenting plenty of opportunities for strategic financial and human investments in our state's coldwater fishery resources. MTU is a leading advocacy voice within the state budget process, working closely with legislators and agency staff on new and existing budget investments. Most of that advocacy focus will be on the Department



of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks budget, making sure that programs like the fisheries division has the staffing and resources they need to effectively do their jobs. There are other investments in public lands and access programs that we will be watching closely in the process as well.

To stay involved during the session, please check out the new BillTrack50 tools on the MTU website, found under the 2021 Montana Legislature tab. You can always reach out to us directly via email or phone to MTU staff Clayton Elliott or Bill Pfeiffer at any time.



Meet Maggie Althaus, MTU's Newest Staff Member

Maggie Althaus came on board in November of 2020 in the role of Office Manager and Administrative Assistant to help with office organization and support MTU staff. She was born and raised in Philipsburg, Montana and is a recent graduate from Carroll College in Helena, MT with a B.A. in Biology and a certificate in GIS.

Maggie's love for Montana and its cold, clear waters were instilled by her parents from an early age. Her father is a Montana FWP Game Warden, and her mother is a grant writer with an active interest in conservation. Growing up, it was quite normal to have injured wild birds and animals in the house on their way to rehabilitation along with spending time playing under the table at many conservation group board meetings.

In her spare time, Maggie is a member of National Ski Patrol and loves to spend



her winter as an alpine patroller. Before joining MTU, Maggie worked in the office of a float trip company during summer breaks where she developed a love of spending days on the river in her kayak. We're thrilled to welcome Maggie to the MTU family!



Congratulations to the Flathead Valley Chapter, winner of the Chairman's 2020 Outstanding Chapter Award, and to GGTU's Chuck Stokke, winner of the 2020 Outstanding Volunteer Award for his long service and extra help during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Stewardship Spotlight: Remembering Paul Roos by Kelley Willett

Stewardship Director Paul Roos passed away in November. In life he exemplified Aldo Leopold's dictum that, "Conservation is a state of harmony between men and land." Having spent his childhood fishing and hunting the Blackfoot Valley, Roos returned in the 1970s to guide from a modest lodge. As his business grew, he mentored countless guides to be not only world-class anglers and teachers, but also to be protectors of the rivers, fish and places they loved and depended on for their livelihood. Those advocates are still hard at it.

BBCTU Project Manager, Ryan Neudecker captures Paul's dedication perfectly, "Paul Roos was a champion of the Blackfoot river's recovery from day one." He recognized challenges the Blackfoot faced from historic mining, dewatering, logging, grazing and overharvest. When the Anaconda Copper Mining Company planned to reopen the Mike Horse Mine in the headwaters of the Blackfoot, Roos saw the famous fishery and his livelihood at stake. He helped stop the Anaconda proposal and, in doing so, helped start the Big Blackfoot Chapter



of TU (BBCTU) to focus on restoring wild trout populations by improving irrigation practices, restoring habitat, increasing instream flow, all by working with landowners, agencies, and all willing partners. In partnership with BBCTU Paul helped to: preserve more than 100

THANK YOU!

Our sincere gratitude to all of the 2020 donors who made gifts during these hard times. You make all of our work possible!

miles of instream habitat, restore nearly 100 miles of riparian habitat in dozens of tributary streams, revive thousands of acres of wetlands, placing nearly 60,000 acres into grazing management, open more than 600 miles of tributaries to spawning through removal of old dams, culverts or roads, and install dozens of fish screens to keep trout out of irrigation ditches. Those projects often improved irrigation systems resulting in more clean, cold water in the Blackfoot.

Roos's collaborative spirit also led to the creation of the Blackfoot Challenge which has protected traditional land uses alongside enhancing wildlife habitat for decades. He always insisted on collaborating with all stakeholders, rather than only gathering natural allies. He helped found the Fishing Outfitters

(continued on next page)

CONSERVE. PROTECT. RESTORE

Jefferson Watershed Manager Restoration Roundup by Chris Edgington

With your support, there are as many ways MTU fulfills our mission as there are trout streams under the Big Sky. To start 2021, we want to share with you some of the diverse ways we are working to conserve, protect, and restore Montana's coldwater fisheries and their watersheds.

Willow Springs Creek

In true TU grassroots fashion, we are moving forward on our spawning habitat improvement project on Willow Springs Creek (see Fall 2020 Trout Line). Upon learning about our plans to restore 1,250 more feet of this prized tributary, MTU Stewardship Director, Paul Moseley and his Ruby Springs Lodge offered a \$15,000 match. This match inspired R.L. Winston Rod Co., 6 personal donations, 3 local outfitters (Healing Waters Lodge,

Frontier Anglers, and Four Rivers Fly Shop), the Trout and Salmon Foundation, and the Chuck Robbins (CRTU) and George Grant Trout Unlimited (GGTU) Chapters to help us raise the necessary project funds. Permitting is underway. We hired Rowe Excavation out of Dillon to complete the restoration.

Parson's Slough

Accompanied by FWP, this fall we counted 160 brown trout redds in this 2-mile spring creek tributary to the Jefferson River. To protect and enhance this resource, we're partnering with the landowner and the GGTU Chapter to fund off-stream stock water to prevent riparian degradation and improve water quality.

Centennial Valley Arctic Grayling

Last fall, in partnership with FWP, we applied for a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant to improve over-winter habitat in Upper Red Rock Lake for Arctic grayling. As an early Christmas gift to a brighter future for grayling, we were awarded a \$199,500 grant in mid-December. Now we are developing a strategy to raise the \$200,000 non-federal match.

In conjunction with the CRTU Chapter, we are supporting FWP's stream restoration project on Elk Springs Creek, a tributary to Upper Red Rock Lake. This project will improve spawning habitat, fish passage, water quality, dissolved oxygen, and temperature. Elk Springs Creek is

(continued on next page)

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Restoration Roundup from page 5



MTU Exec. Dir. David Brooks ponders removal of the Shaw Diversion fish barrier on the Boulder River
PC:Chris Edgington

located entirely on public land and one day will provide you the chance to cast a fly for Montana's most iconic native salmonid.

Westslope Cutthroat Trout (WCT)

We are securing three genetically-unaltered populations of WCT in the Beaverhead sub-basin to contribute to species recovery in the Upper Missouri Basin. In 2020, we successfully applied for money from the USFS and FWP's Future Fisheries program to complete these three projects on Buffalo, Browns, and Painter Creeks. This is a promising step forward to increase native WCT from 5% to 20% in Southwest Montana.

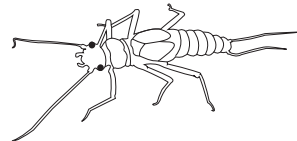
Cornell Park

We've been working behind the scenes to assist Beaverhead Trails Coalition (BTC) and Beaverhead Watershed Committee to secure public access in perpetuity at this popular Dillon park and Beaverhead River access. In October, BTC assumed ownership of the park. The stream banks at the park are eroding into the river causing excess sediment and loss of quality fish habitat. We are vetting design alternatives and raising money for the bank stabilization project.

Shaw Diversion - Boulder River

In December, we received a grant to determine the feasibility of removing the Shaw Diversion Dam, a hazardous fish passage barrier on the lower Boulder River. The Boulder River provides cold water refugia and spawning habitat for a stretch

of the Jefferson River that badly needs it. Early analysis indicates we can increase instream flows with the removal of the diversion dam and a change in irrigation withdrawal, as well as free this river of a serious recreational hazard.



Remembering Paul Roos from page 5

Assoc. of MT, co-chaired the Lincoln Forest Restoration Committee, and was one of the champions of a statewide ballot initiative that stopped a cyanide-leaching open-pit gold mine along the banks of the Blackfoot River.

Paul's work to stop further mining (I-137 for example) in the headwaters of the Blackfoot have helped the river revive and ensured its protection as an iconic native trout fishery for future generations. The organizations he helped start have and will continue to protect and restore the Blackfoot valley, and serve as examples that inspire collaboration between conservation organizations and rural communities across Montana and the country. Roos also made a lasting impact by personally investing in restoration. Conversations with Paul often began with a description of the shovel-work he'd just been doing to improve a trout stream on his Blackfoot River property, or the hike he'd taken deep into grizzly bear country to assess a potential tributary reconnection project on public lands.

Paul's legacy is nothing less than a healthier watershed for future generations. Montana Trout Unlimited is grateful and will miss him.

Chapter News

Bitterroot Chapter

We would like to thank our loyal supporters that contributed to a successful online auction. We missed seeing everyone at our usual annual banquet and hopefully we can be back to those times soon. Our Trout in the Classroom initiatives are doing well and are navigating our chapter's first year with the program. Both teachers have been wonderful to work with and are doing an incredible job!

Big Blackfoot Chapter

BBCTU will be focusing our efforts in the upper Blackfoot River watershed this summer on the high priority native trout tributary, Poorman Creek. Working with several state, federal and private partners, we will restore over two-miles of stream which will reduce sediment impacts to the upper Blackfoot River and dramatically improve habitat conditions for westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout. We are also planning to upgrade an undersized culvert which restricts fish passage to the upper ten-miles of Poorman Creek. BBCTU was awarded funding through the MFWP Future Fisheries Program, USFS, MT DEQ, Lewis & Clark County, USFS and MTU. We also worked with the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service to secure \$125,000 for native fish restoration projects in the Blackfoot Watershed and these funds will benefit habitat for westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout. BBCTU is currently holding a Behring Made custom knife raffle and we plan to hold an on-line auction later this spring – details coming soon. We also plan to host our annual meeting this spring via Zoom and project updates for 2020 accomplishments and 2021 plans will be the focus.

Madison-Gallatin Chapter

The Madison-Gallatin Chapter of Trout Unlimited is now an Amazon Smile charity. If you select us as your preferred Amazon Smile charity when you buy on Amazon Smile 0.5% of the proceeds of the sale go directly to support our mission: actively working to conserve, protect and restore Southwest Montana's cold-water fisheries and their watersheds. Go to <https://smile.amazon.com/> and support MGTU! We will also be hosting a virtual meeting at 7pm on Feb. 10 with

Shane McLafin with a presentation on backcountry fishing in Yellowstone NP. Details on our Facebook page!

Westslope Chapter

The WestSlope Chapter is hosting monthly online livestreamed meetings and we have featured John McMillan and Kelly Galloup with great success. On February 10, Skip Morris will be presenting on "Make Nymph Fishing Work" and all statewide TU members are invited to join us with fly tying at 6:30pm and the program at 7:00pm.

Visit westslope-trout.org for streaming details. We are in the process of planning our 2021 WestSlope UnBanquet online fundraiser and there will be more information on our site.

Pat Barnes Chapter



In the fall of 2020, NorthWestern Energy in partnership with the USFS-Helena Ranger District, Pat Barnes Trout Unlimited Chapter and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks implemented Phase I of a restoration project on Beaver Creek, near Nelson, MT. Phase 1 included just over 0.6 miles of channel construction and approximately 7.0 acres of wetland and riparian habitat. This project improved aquatic habitat condition on Beaver Creek by establishing proper channel and floodplain dimensions and creating off-channel, disconnected and connected shallow emergent wetlands. Constructed and preserved scrub/shrub wetland communities are also supported by new floodplain surfaces and side-channel habitat. This has been a great project for our chapter and we're excited for more in the future.



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TROUT LINE WINTER 2021

UPCOMING EVENTS

www.montanatu.org

2/10/21

WestSlope Chapter Meeting-7pm

Missoula, MT - available via Livestream at westslope-trout.org
Skip Morris - Make Nymph Fishing Work

2/10/21

Madison-Gallatin Chapter Meeting - 7pm

Bozeman, MT - available via Zoom livestream
Shane McClaflin - Backcountry Fishing Yellowstone

2/27/21

WestSlope Chapter TU Online Auction

Missoula, MT

3/1/21

George Grant Chapter TU Online Auction

Butte, MT, online, runs through March 5th

3/6/21

MTU State Council Meeting

Helena, MT - Microsoft Teams Virtual Meeting

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Winter 2021