



# TROUT LINE

Newsletter from the Montana Council of Trout Unlimited



Contractors removed Rattlesnake Dam near Missoula on Aug. 8, 2020, freeing the Clark Fork tributary for the first time in over 100 years.

Photo: Bill Pfeiffer

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Spotlight on Dr. Marshall Bloom, Big Sky  
Watershed Corps update, Chapter News,  
and more!



## FALL 2020

## 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

Wow, time really flies, even with staying home these many months! I hope this issue of our Trout Line quarterly newsletter finds you all well and safe. It is hard to reflect on my last two years serving as Chair of the Montana Trout Unlimited State Council with out thanking the MTU staff and Council members for a yeoman's effort to achieve conservations gains statewide.

From completing a new 5-year strategic plan to participating in online meetings and providing financial support, I am so proud and humbled to be a part of the work we have completed. I feel it necessary to thank those past leaders who have supported me: To Tom Anacker, Doug Nation, Doug Hakke, Dan Short and Christ Schustrom, your example has helped me at each step; I truly did stand on the shoulders of giants.



Sharon Sweeny Fee

MTU is an amazing organization to be part of and our council is made up of some of the best conservation volunteers in the state! Even under the cloud of the COVID pandemic, chapters are still working to conserve, protect, and restore our cold water fisheries and habitat. The recent volunteer push by our chapter leaders to add "Clean. Drain. Dry." messaging to boat ramps in their communities to help prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species is just one example of the power of MTU's grassroots. Others have creatively found safe ways to carry on with river cleanups and youth education. It is this dedication that has sustained me over the past two years and will carry our work forward into the future.

As I depart as Chair, I wish you all a wonderful fall season, and whether you are hunting or fishing, I hope you will celebrate the work MTU volunteers do all year long. You will be hard pressed to get out and not find our legacy across Montana. Whether through access to a favorite spot or restoration of a new reach to fish, you are probably not far from a place that MTU and your local chapter has made better. Remember to thank them (and yourself!).



Pat Barnes TU Chapter volunteer Will Trimbath paints a "Clean. Drain. Dry." stencil at Shannon FAS, Canyon Ferry Lake, Photo: Bill Pfeiffer

## Budget, COVID to dominate legislative session by Clayton Elliott

In less than one hundred days, the 67th Montana Legislature will convene in Helena. As with so many things in our lives right now, the daily logistics of the session are still up in the air. Nonetheless, the Montana Constitution requires the Legislature to pass a budget funding state government for the next two years. There will be a legislative session of some form, and MTU will be in Helena working to advance our mission, just like we always do.

Passing a budget in this uncertain time will be a challenge for legislators. State general fund revenue is down; leaders are battling over how to spend millions of dollars in federal COVID funds; and the basic questions of how legislators will even meet is still undecided. What we do know is that Governor Bullock will unveil a proposed budget by November 15th. The Governor-elect will then have one month to propose changes to that budget, and those proposals will set the stage for the Legislature to convene on January 4th.

MTU works on various aspects of the state budget because we know that the allocation of money matters to our mission to conserve, protect, and restore coldwater fisheries and their watersheds. The budget for Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (FWP) is a top priority, although we also monitor other items affecting water and natural resource protection.

One bright spot in the state revenue woes is the better-than-expected hunting and fishing license sales. That is important because FWP's budget comes predominately from license sales. For those of us who spent time this summer and fall on the river and in the woods, the fact that license sales are up isn't surprising – more people are taking advantage of our state's rich fish, wildlife, and public lands heritage in this time of COVID.

With funding from license sales, we will be looking for responsible resource investments in the proposed FWP budget. Notably, we always advocate for a budget that prioritizes

a core value of managing our coldwater resources for wild and native fish, and we believe that adequately funding the basic needs within the Fisheries Division is paramount to making good on that value. Further, we will continue to advocate for a fair increase in funding for Fishing Access Sites across the state. And, we know that we will have to once again protect the basic agreement of users that revenue from the Smith River Corridor Enhancement Account go towards conserving the resource of the Smith.

There is plenty more to come for MTU's outlook on the session as we sort through the impacts of the elections, the Governor's proposed budget, and the realities of what convening may look like in January. We know that the usual threats will come, and we know there is opportunity to advance our mission. Once again, we will be working with diverse partners and our agencies to make sure that our coldwater fisheries conservation remains a legacy that we pass on to future generations.

## Rattlesnake Dam Removal Project Nears Completion



In the summer and fall of 2020, while much of the world ground to a halt due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Trout Unlimited, MTU, and our partners, the City of Missoula, MT Fish Wildlife & Parks, and numerous volunteers helped to complete the removal of Rattlesnake Dam near Missoula, opening up miles of spawning habitat for native Westslope cutthroat and bull trout in the Clark Fork watershed. The dam itself was dismantled by contractors on August 10 (see cover photo). Throughout the fall, volunteers will be helping to plant new native trees and shrubs in the project area now that large-scale earth moving and restoration has ended. This project is a great example of the how TU restoration builds community, from the planning stages and identifying a local workforce, to finding matching funding with the help of the Missoula's Westslope Chapter TU, to volunteer recruitment, and telling the story of a restored stream. Thank you and congratulations to everyone who helped make this project a success!

# Playing the Long Game: Issue Roundup by David Brooks

With daylight dwindling and temperatures dropping, many of us are notching our final fishing days of the year. Similarly, I wanted to update you on a few of MTU's long-term conservation priorities for our final newsletter of 2020. For this roundup, we're focusing on issues that we've invested in because, while many are situated in single watersheds, they have ramifications across our state.

## Lake Koocanusa Selenium Pollution

For more than half a decade, MTU has advocated that Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) address the increasing levels of selenium – a metal that moves up the food web and becomes toxic to aquatic life, fish, wildlife and humans – in Lake Koocanusa and the Kootenai River. Selenium is flowing into Montana's waters from upstream coal mines in British Columbia via the Elk River. The Elk's renowned bull trout and westslope cutthroat fishery is already at risk of collapse due to selenium levels in the water and adult fish tissue that could disrupt entire spawning years. Along with many partners, MTU is stressing the need to protect trout in Koocanusa and the Kootenai from a similar fate. After extensive data collection and modeling, backed by a library of scientific literature on the harmful impacts of selenium, DEQ is proposing to set a selenium standard for these prized northwestern Montana waters. If adopted, this standard is a big first step in enabling Montana to defend our clean water from upstream, transboundary pollution. MTU strongly supports the DEQ's proposed standard, as have every other conservation organization aware of this issue, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, numerous other Tribes in the upper Columbia, and Montana's Board of Environmental Review. The proposal is open for public comment through November 23rd and DEQ needs to hear from you that a protective standard for selenium must be adopted to save these remote, wild waters from devastating pollution. (For more information, see our Action Alert or contact David or Clayton, david@montanatu.org or clayton@montanatu.org).

## Yellowstone River Pallid Sturgeon

This summer, construction began on a concrete, canal-like bypass channel run-

### ACTION ALERT

DEQ needs your support to set selenium standards and protect Montana's water quality. We believe the proposed standards are the first step to stopping transboundary pollution. To comment, please simply write that you support the new selenium standards recently proposed by the DEQ. Comments should be submitted to Sandy Scherer, Paralegal, Department of Environmental Quality, 1520 E. Sixth Avenue, P.O. Box 200901, Helena, Montana 59620-0901; faxed to (406) 444-4386; or e-mailed to [sscherer@mt.gov](mailto:sscherer@mt.gov), no later than 5pm, Nov. 23, 2020. A copy of proposed NEW RULE 1, as well as technical documents supporting the rules, may be viewed at the department's website: <https://deq.mt.gov/water/Surfacewater/standards>.

ning alongside the Yellowstone River near Glendive. This bypass and a new, higher, concrete-topped diversion dam spanning the Yellowstone at Intake are a misguided part of the solution to recovering endangered pallid sturgeon in the lower Missouri River system. This dam is designed and supported by the Army Corps of Engineers and Bureau of Reclamation (BoR). For years MTU has evaluated how to get pallid sturgeon farther upriver, above the current rock diversion dam that feeds water to the local irrigation district, and has advocated for reasonable, scientifically-viable and economically-sustainable ways to open the river, while still delivering water to irrigators. MTU's suggestions were roundly dismissed by the agencies in favor of an untested bypass channel. The same agencies that claim the bypass will work, despite a total lack of real-world examples, have already made mistakes. They've had to re-do parts of the bypass because they failed to survey its path correctly and failed to account for impacts to the upstream opening of the bypass from common spring ice-scouring. Given our skepticism, we continue to press the BoR to partner with FWP biologists from the region, who are the experts on these elusive

fish, and release a long-term monitoring and adaptive management plan. So far, the agencies have done little more than promise that water will flow through the bypass channel at rates and levels that might accommodate spawning pallid sturgeon looking to access upstream habitat. A monitoring and adaptive management plan needs to include the means to assess whether or not pallid sturgeon are actually using the bypass and spawning successfully, as well as whether or not their larvae and young offspring are able to drift downstream without being trapped by the irrigation intake or ground into pulp when they pass over the new dam. A solution at Intake is only successful if it's actually helping the pallid sturgeon population. The plan also needs to commit to a new solution if the bypass fails to meet these indicators of pallid sturgeon recovery, including the option of opening the river. At a pallid sturgeon working group meeting last spring, the BoR committed to releasing such a plan soon. We're still waiting and will continue pushing for it.

## Ruby River FAS Lease Funding

Five years ago, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) faced a funding crunch that forced the Fisheries Division to consider ending leases for three fishing access sites on the Ruby River near Alder and Sheridan. MTU along with the George Grant, Madison-Gallatin and Chuck Robbins chapters offered to pay for half the cost of those leases for five years to relieve some of FWP's financial burden while the department figured out the long-term funding. This was a \$45,000 commitment over 5 years for us.

(continued on next page)



Ruby River brown trout, Photo: Josh DuChateau, Firehole Ranch



We've all heard good excuses when someone's verve for volunteering wanes: my kids; my career; my changing priorities. The best excuse might be, "I'm the associate director for scientific management at a nationally renowned laboratory that is working around the clock to find a vaccine for the Coronavirus." Though factual, Dr. Marshall Bloom does not excuse himself from his lifelong volunteering with TU because of his pressing profession. Instead, he reminds us, "trout can't speak for themselves," and he continues volunteering countless hours in the service of our mission.

Dr. Bloom has called Montana's Bitterroot Valley home for almost half a century and has humbly and consistently devoted himself to helping wild and native trout.

Montana Trout Unlimited Executive Director, David Brooks points out, "If I had to narrow down Marshall's impact, then I would point to his ability to inspire. He inspires consensus among diverse water users to tackle complex issues. He inspires others to give time and treasure to Trout Unlimited - anglers and non-anglers alike. He inspires positive change that lasts. His efforts leave a true legacy of better fishing for the next generation. Plus, he's wickedly smart, funny and plays a mean banjo."

In the 1990's, Marshall co-chaired the Governor's Task Force on Whirling Disease. He was part of an innovative team which had the then-revolutionary idea to purchase instream flow from the Painted Rocks Reservoir to increase flows in the Bitterroot River. He literally helped turn a dam - usually the bane of a trout stream - into a benefit for one of Montana's fishiest rivers. Since then water leasing has become a commonly used conservation tool.

Capturing just how much Marshall motivates others to participate in TU is a challenge because hundreds of people have come to the mission thanks to him. Marshall is a master of novel combinations, especially combinations of people. It occurred to him that there might be a benefit to Montana Trout Unlimited if he had a scientist famous for mapping the human genome (Dr. Irv Weissman), an artist (Monte Dolack) who is a key figure in the visual arts of the American West, and one of the most revered fly rod builders in the world (Tom Morgan) join forces in the service of saving wild and native trout. This unlikely combination of people comprised MTU's first Stewardship Directors, providing critical financial support and counsel for decades. Conservatively, Marshall's kind and steady 'wrangling' has directly or indirectly raised more than a million dollars for Montana Trout Unlimited's conservation, education and advocacy.

Not only does Marshall inspire others, he is very quick to share credit, especially recognizing the tireless work of the dedicated fishery and watershed professionals who take care of our resources. He often presents an award to fisheries professionals at the annual Bitterroot Chapter TU banquet (now in its 41st year) which he emcees each year. Giving these awards and telling the trout advocacy stories of the recipients often brings him to tears of thanks and joy.

## Big Sky Watershed Corps: Thank You, Reyna!



Reyna Abreu-Vigil is the Big Sky Watershed Corps (BSWC) member serving both MTU and the U.S. Forest Service this year. Since January, Reyna has worked for our watersheds, primarily with instream flow water reservations in western Montana. Her efforts on 24 instream flow applications will protect 109 cfs in more than 80 miles of Lolo National Forest Streams, water that our native trout species need to thrive.

## Long Game from page 4

Meanwhile, the Doornbos, Barnosky and Guinnane families lowered the price of those leases because of their interest in ensuring that people still had access to the a 40-plus mile stretch of river with no other points of public entry. We have held FWP accountable for this deal and the need for a permanent fix over the years. FWP is now in the process of renewing these leases to keep essential access sites open on the Ruby. This is a win for southwest Montana anglers. Thank you to the department, especially Fisheries staff. Thank you to the chapters who have helped us keep these sites open through generous annual contributions. And, thank you to the civic-minded ranchers who continue to value public access to this fishery.

These three issues are a reminder of how our work is often about persistence. Protecting clean water, public access or the most imperiled species from the far northwest corner of our state to its easternmost trout waters takes consistency and focus. It's not unlike the years of practice it takes to delicately land a dry fly on the surface at the end of a long cast across contrasting lines of current with just the right mid-cast mend. We appreciate all of you who are committed to our sometimes lengthy conservation fights because those hard efforts make it possible to pursue those other lofty angling goals in wild, free-flowing, healthy trout waters.

Reyna also learned about stream restoration and monitoring through MTU's projects on important tributaries. She especially enjoyed working on the ongoing Ninemile Creek mine reclamation project. This Clark Fork tributary not only provides critical habitat for native trout, it is also an important corridor for black bears, grizzly bears, moose, and other species. In March, Reyna obtained grant funding to revegetate the latest phase of the project once floodplain reconstruction is complete. Replanting native species will help reduce sediment loading caused by historic mining in the valley. Reyna is excited to lead TU volunteers this fall in this effort.

Thanks so much to Reyna for all her great work this season! She hopes to use these skills to continue working with watershed health and protection into the future.

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# CONSERVE. PROTECT. RESTORE

## Willow Springs Creek: Continuing work on a TU legacy by Chris Edgington

Bubbling up at the base of the Tobacco Root mountain's western flank amongst willow and cottonwood, Willow Springs Creek is arguably the most important spawning tributary for the wild trout of the Jefferson River. Every year, tens of thousands of rainbow and brown trout hatch in this small tributary south of Whitehall. Each year's spawn of new trout is a legacy of Trout Unlimited's work.

A severe drought in 1988 all but dried up the Jefferson River in the vicinity of Willow Springs, which at that time was overwidened and denuded of riparian vegetation because of cattle grazing. Spurred by the dire drought, Trout Unlimited Project Manager, Bruce Rehwinkel, who was also the former Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (FWP) Jefferson river biologist, began reconstructing Willow Springs with a shovel to help the wild trout population rebound from near collapse. Rehwinkel's initial one-man restoration effort was followed by several phases of habitat improvement on  $\frac{3}{4}$ -mile of the spring creek. The restored channel was designed specifically for spawning and rearing with the addition of spawning gravel and no deep pools that might harbor predacious adult trout. New fencing prevented cattle from trampling the restored banks and redds. FWP's Future Fisheries Improvement Program purchased an off-site cattle waterer to ensure the rancher, who owned the land through which the creek ran, could continue to water his cattle while protecting the creek.

With support from the George Grant chapter in Butte, a bridge was installed to replace a culvert to improve fish passage. Before this work, there were fewer than 300 fish per mile in the Jefferson and no rainbow trout in Willow Springs. Wild rainbow trout eggs were harvested from Hells Canyon Creek, an upper-Jefferson river tributary, for introduction in Willow Springs Creek. In recent years, hundreds of trout redds



Willow Springs Creek, Photo: Chris Edgington

are counted each spring in this spawning channel and the Jefferson river rainbow trout population has approximately tripled as a result. Willow Springs Creek essentially became the Jefferson's trout nursery.

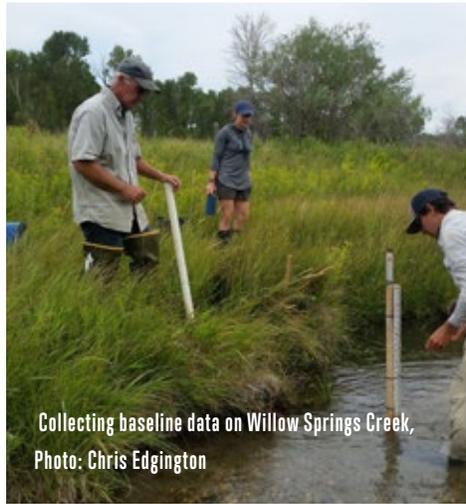
Over the summer I have been working with FWP's Jefferson river biologist, Ron Spoon, on designing another phase to improve spawning habitat on a  $\frac{1}{4}$ -mile of the stream. Currently, this portion of Willow Springs Creek is confined to a man-made ditch. Our plan aims to reduce the steep banks, increase the floodplain width, and induce meandering to resemble a natural channel capable of increased groundwater storage. We will plant live willows and place dead cottonwoods, sourced on location, to provide shading and additional terrestrial and avian predation protection. We will turn the current silt bottom into spawning habitat with locally sourced and screened gravel. Post-construction, native grasses, forbs, willows, and cottonwoods will be planted to stabilize the banks. And we will build riparian fencing to prevent the effects of grazing on the spring creek.

The cold and stable water temperatures

(continued on next page)

## Willow Springs Creek from page 6

(42°-60°F and ±13 cfs) of Willow Springs Creek will ensure that the new channel will provide high-quality habitat diversity for spawning and rearing of juvenile trout. Ron Spoon expects an appreciable increase in wild trout recruitment. I will continue to monitor Willow Springs Creek over the next several years to measure the effectiveness of the project. This project builds on years of habitat work that brought the Jefferson river fishery back from near-collapse in a region regarded for its blue-ribbon trout streams.



Collecting baseline data on Willow Springs Creek,  
Photo: Chris Edgington

## Chapter News

### Missouri River Fly Fishers

Members of the Missouri River Flyfishers assisted Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks and the Sun River Watershed Group with an arctic grayling rescue and study. Volunteers helped salvage grayling stranded in the Sunnyslope canal near Fairfield; the fish were released in Tunnel Lake, where habitat is more suitable. Volunteers also helped measure and collect genetic samples from the rescued fish to inform a study of this population's parent brood stock and fitness. The arctic grayling relocation takes place each year at the end of the irrigation season.



Rescued arctic grayling. Photo: Tracy Wendt

### Big Blackfoot Chapter

2020 has been a productive field season in the Blackfoot River Watershed. Highlights include restoration of 2,000ft of a spring creek in the Upper Blackfoot to provide high quality spawning habitat for westslope cutthroat trout and increase recruitment to the Blackfoot River. We were grateful

for the support of Montana Trout Unlimited, Blackfoot River Fund through Log Jam Presents and the WestSlope Chapter of TU.

BBCTU also completed several fish passage improvements, upgrading an irrigation dam with a fish screen on Boles Creek near Placid Lake, and replacing an undersized culvert with a new bridge to provide fish passage to 2.5 miles of Poorman Creek. The Poorman project was done in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service.

In conjunction with Lolo National Forest, we finished two projects on Morrell Creek near Seeley Lake. We restored one-mile of in-stream habitat and relocated over one-mile of road that was depositing sediment into Morrell Creek. Both of these projects will benefit the bull trout populations that rely on this stream for clean and cold water.

Also in early October, BBCTU completed Phase 4 of the Nevada Creek restoration. This is a showcase project that restored 7,100 feet of stream and riparian habitat. The project will benefit westslope cutthroats and Western Pearlshell mussels – both Montana Species of Special Concern. Finally we de-commissioned seven miles of U.S Forest Service roads and replaced 10 undersized culverts in the Cottonwood Creek and Spring Creek drainages. The incredible partnership of Federal, State and Private partners made this work possible.

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# TROUT LINE FALL 2020

## UPCOMING EVENTS

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

**10/30/20** **Ninemile Planting - Volunteers Needed**  
9am-1PM Ninemile, MT

**10/31/20** **Ninemile Planting - Volunteers Needed**  
9am-1PM Ninemile, MT

**11/23/20** **DEQ Selenium Standard Comment  
Deadline** Helena, MT

**12/4/20** **MTU State Council Meeting**  
Microsoft Teams Virtual Meeting

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**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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