

# CARIBOU-TARGHEE NATIONAL FOREST FISHERIES PROGRAM 2002 ANNUAL REPORT

## C-T Forest Fish Bios

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## External Partners



US Bureau of Reclamation



Jackson Hole One Fly



US Fish and Wildlife Service



Idaho Department of  
Environmental Quality



Trout Unlimited



Federation of Flyfishers



Ntl Fish/Wildlife Foundation



Idaho Dept Fish & Game



## Turning the Corner: Converting Data Into Deeds

For the last few years, we have been updating you on our progress performing the Forest Fish Distribution Survey on every fish-bearing stream on the Forest. We plan to complete this effort in 2003. The streams will be resurveyed in a decade. The stream survey reports produced from the surveys have already been used to produce 2 forest plans, 5 watershed analyses, and countless project environmental assessments. They are extremely useful to the Forest and our partners in the conservation of our fisheries.

In fact, we are turning the corner, converting data into deeds. Our intention is to use our findings to propose and implement prioritized projects that directly benefit native fish on the Caribou-Targhee National Forest. Although monitoring and inventory will always be important components of our



A half-meter long Yellowstone cutthroat trout is examined by the 2002 C-T Forest Fish Crew in the Blackfoot River Drainage.

fisheries program, we are now increasing our focus on native fish population and habitat restoration. In addition to sharing our 2002 accomplishments, this annual report will feature some of the restoration activities in which the C-T National Forest Fisheries Program and our partners are currently involved.

## Fish Surveys Document YCT Populations

In 2002, the C-T Forest had 2 fish crews; one stationed in the Ashton/Island Park Ranger District and the other working in the Soda Springs and Dubois Ranger Districts. A total of 246 miles of stream were surveyed with the C-T Forest Fish Distribution Survey Protocol. Yellowstone cutthroat trout populations were documented in 25 streams, most for the first time. Of those, the Forest considers 17 to be YCT strongholds.

Important partners in this effort included US BOR, USFWS, One Fly, Idaho DEQ, TU, Federation of Flyfishers, and IDFG.

Digital reports, photos, spreadsheets, and maps have been completed for each stream surveyed in 2002.



A half-meter long Yellowstone cutthroat trout collected by the 2002 C-T Forest Fish Crew in the Henrys Fork System.

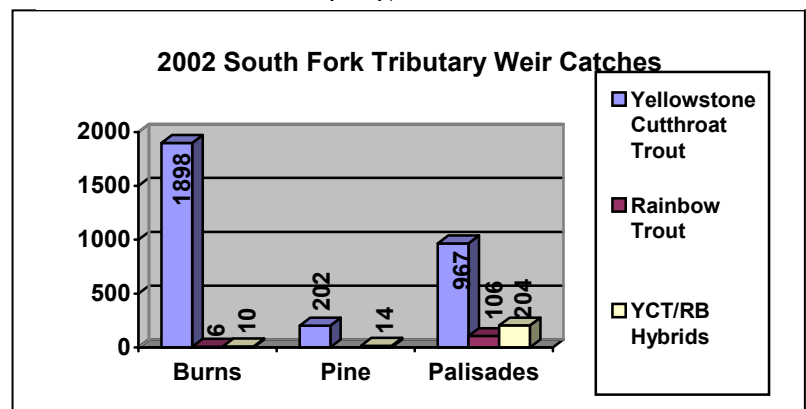
# Snake River Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout Weir Update

Due to the increasing threat of non-native fish, particularly rainbow trout, in the South Fork Snake River, a partnership of agencies and organizations with interest in the conservation of Yellowstone cutthroat trout constructed fish weirs across 4 major tributaries of the river, in 1999-2001. These weirs at Rainey, Burns, Pine, and Palisades Creeks are operated to exclude non-native fish migrations upstream, but allow upstream and downstream passage of native fish. The streams are now considered spawning and rearing refugia for Yellowstone cutthroat trout.

In 2002, Idaho Department of Fish & Game personnel operated the weirs from March to July. While the Rainey Creek weir was not operated due to irrigators drying the lower stream, precluding the upstream migration of fish from the river, the weirs on Burns, Pine, and Palisades Creeks were operated and successfully excluded some non-native fish from those streams.

Structural problems occurred at the Pine and Palisades Weirs, affecting fish catches. At Pine Creek, no upstream-migrating rainbow trout were collected in 2002 due to structural problems and high flows during their migration period.

In addition, Jackson Hole One Fly funded the design and production of interpretive signs for the weirs and related restoration work on Rainey Creek in 2002. These signs will be erected in the spring of 2003.



## Pritchard Creek Aquatic Restoration Project



The raw, eroding stream banks of Pritchard Creek as it flows through the bed of the old reservoir. The project proposes to excavate these stream banks back at a slope and plant native vegetation to decrease erosion and increase stream shade.

Pritchard Creek is an important Yellowstone cutthroat trout tributary to the South Fork of the Snake River. Both resident and river-dwelling populations use the stream for habitat. The Caribou-Targhee National Forest Fisheries Program proposes to improve the aquatic and riparian habitat in Pritchard Creek by reclaiming an old dam and reservoir bed. The old dam site and stream banks will be recontoured and planted with stabilizing native vegetation. Cattle will be permanently excluded from this site to accelerate and maintain riparian and aquatic habitat recovery.

This project is in partnership with Trout Unlimited and Bureau of Land Management through the South Fork Snake River Home Rivers Initiative. Work is expected to begin in the summer of 2003.

# Free Fishing Day is.....

...a chance to teach kids and their parents the value of our fisheries and sport ethics.

The Caribou-Targhee National Forest hosted 3 Free Fishing Day Celebrations throughout Southeast Idaho in June 2002. The Free Fishing Day Derbies were held at Mill Pond in Island Park, the Little Lemhi Boy Scout Camp near the South Fork Snake River, and Kelly Park Pond in Soda Springs. Nearly 300 children and their parents participated in the events. Idaho Dept of Fish & Game was an event partner.



...an opportunity to work with national tackle suppliers and local merchants to benefit kids.

Kid's prizes were contributed by local and national merchants, including All American Sports, Cal Ranch Stores, Chota Outdoor Gear, Fishboy, FlyLogic, Fred Meyers, General Plastics, Hydes Drift Boats, Idaho Sporting Goods, K-Mart, Shopko, Sportsmans Warehouse, Target, and Walmart. At the end of the day, every kid went home with prizes in their arms and smiles on their faces.



...A Lot of FUN!

Look for the Caribou-Targhee National Forest Free Fishing Day Derbies at the same three locations as last year on June 7, 2003. If your kid doesn't have a rod and reel, don't worry. We have loaners and lots of bait. Just come prepared for fishing fun!

# Garden Creek Stream Channel Restoration Project



The old stream channel of Garden Creek on private land once connected the upper drainage to the river, allowing the return of large river fish to spawn on the Forest. Today the channel is reduced to a sandy swale due to a century of irrigation withdrawals and cattle trampling.

The Caribou-Targhee National Forest is working in partnership with Trout Unlimited, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Conant Valley Ranch, the C-T Forest Resource Advisory Council, and others to restore the stream channel of Garden Creek through the Conant Valley Ranch, reconnecting Garden Creek to the South Fork Snake River.

The intent of the project is to re-establish connectivity between the small Garden Creek Yellowstone cutthroat trout population on the Forest and the cutthroat trout in the river, increasing the long term viability of the Garden Creek fish.

Implementation of the project is expected during the summer of 2003. This project is led by Trout Unlimited through their South Fork Snake Home Rivers Initiative

## Beaver Reintroductions Help Restore Streams

During the 2002 field season, 15 beaver have been reintroduced into 2 tributaries of the Teton River to restore stream stability and aquatic and riparian habitat. This is part of an ongoing beaver reintroduction program on the C-T National Forest that is initiated with a beaver re-introduction feasibility study. The source beaver were trapped from large populations that were affecting road drainages or other infrastructure elsewhere on the Forest. Monitoring of these reintroductions will continue to determine project effectiveness.



A beaver is reintroduced into a tributary of the Teton River by fish personnel during the 2002 field season.



Beaver dams are extremely valuable for many streams on the C-T Forest. They provide excellent habitat for fish, stabilize streams, regulate stream flows, and elevate water tables. Returning beaver to streams restores these functions.

# Thomas Fork Bonneville Cutthroat Trout Fish Passage



The Esche Diversion is a barrier to Bonneville cutthroat trout attempting to migrate from the Bear River to the upper Thomas Fork to spawn in tributaries located on Forest and BLM lands.



Personnel from Idaho Department of Fish & Game, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Trout Unlimited, and Flyway River Ranch discuss providing fish passage at the Esche Diversion.

In 2001, the Caribou-Targhee Forest completed the Thomas Fork Watershed Analysis. The document concluded with management recommendations. The top priority fisheries-related recommendation was to provide consistent passage over the Esche Irrigation Diversion, located on the Flyway River Ranch near the mouth of the Thomas Fork of the Bear River. Utah State University graduate work by Warren Colyer documented the diversion structure was a barrier to upstream-migrating river-dwelling Bonneville cutthroat trout. In some years, the structure completely blocked the spawning run from accessing its spawning grounds on the Caribou-Targhee and Bridger-Teton National Forests and lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management.

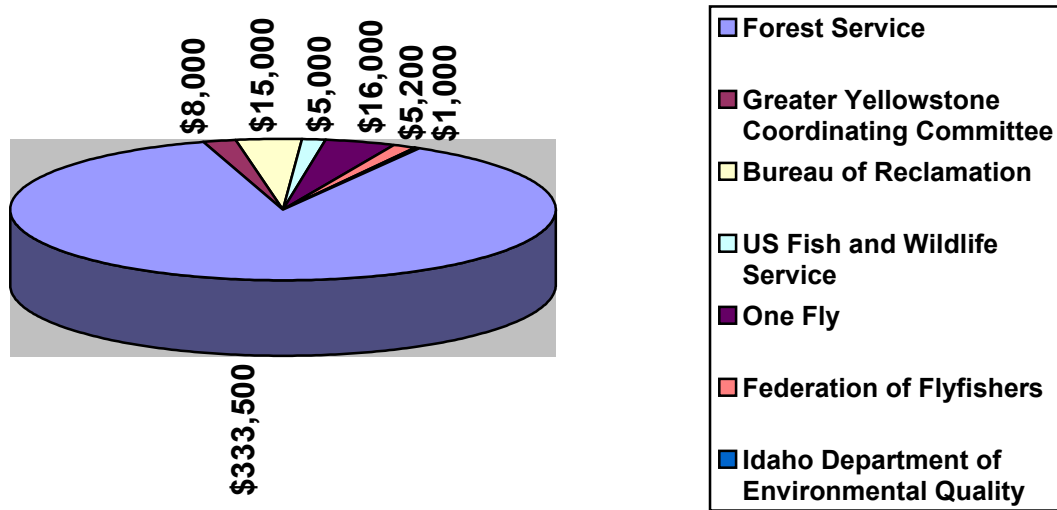
In 2002, a partnership was developed between the Caribou-Targhee National Forest, Idaho Department of Fish & Game, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Trout Unlimited, and the Flyway River Ranch to construct a fish passage facility over the diversion structure and screen the diversion to protect downstream-migrating fish. Idaho Department of Fish & Game designed the structure during the winter of 2002 and the structure will be constructed in 2003. This project will increase the long term viability of Bonneville cutthroat trout populations in Thomas Fork tributaries managed by USDA Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management.

## Other Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout Restoration Projects

In 2001, the Fall Creek Watershed Analysis was completed. A top fisheries management recommendation in the interdisciplinary report was the restoration of Fall Creek, a tributary of the South Fork Snake River. The Forest Fisheries Program has proposed to exclude cattle from upper Fall Creek and provide off site water sources. In addition, popular dispersed camping sites along lower Fall Creek are proposed to be delineated with rock and/or fences to define acceptable motor vehicle access in riparian areas. This work is proposed in partnership with Trout Unlimited and is part of the South Fork Home Rivers Initiative.

The 2002 fish distribution surveys determined Sawtell Creek, in the upper Henrys Fork Drainage, to be a prime candidate for our next Yellowstone cutthroat trout reintroduction project. The stream, within the historic range of Yellowstone cutthroat trout, is currently occupied by non-native brook trout. The Forest Fisheries Program, in cooperation with Idaho Department of Fish & Game and others, propose to eradicate the brook trout and reintroduce Yellowstone cutthroat trout. Habitat restoration work will also occur. The project is proposed for 2003.

# 2002 Caribou-Targhee Forest Fisheries Program Funding



## Outreach is an Important Forest Fish Program Element

I describe fisheries programs I am responsible for as having three important components; Exploration, Protection, and Restoration. Everything we do fits into one of those three components. Outreach is an essential element in the Protection component. I see outreach as a form of preventative medicine or a kind of proactive maintenance. It's reaching out to adults with our conservation message during presentations at fishing group meetings, Forest Leadership Team Meetings, or annual reports to make the difference today. It's delivering our conservation message to children during scout meetings or Free Fishing Day Derbies for an investment in the future.

In 2002, Forest fisheries personnel have put an emphasis on outreach, as we have done in previous years. We have presented at professional fisheries meetings, Trout Unlimited and Federation of Flyfishers Chapter meetings, The Nature Conservancy Flat Ranch, and Boy Scout meetings. In addition to Free Fishing Day, one of our favorite gatherings for outreach is the Annual Fly Tying Expo, where fly fishers from all over the country come to show off their fishing skills and

gear. At the 2002 expo, we unveiled our latest outreach tool, the C-T Forest Stream Simulator. It's an actual running stream in a box we use to teach the importance of stream complexity and healthy riparian areas. Kids and adults are really attracted to it.



The C-T Forest Stream Simulator

Whether it is the exploration, protection, or restoration of our Forest fisheries resources, we look forward to working with you in 2003.

**James Capurso**  
 Forest Fisheries Biologist  
 C-T National Forest



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