

CARIBOU-TARGHEE NATIONAL FOREST FISHERIES PROGRAM 2003 ANNUAL REPORT

C-T Forest Fish Bios



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Featured External Partners



US Bureau of Reclamation



Trout Unlimited



US Fish and Wildlife Service



Idaho Department of
Environmental Quality



Jackson Hole One Fly



Idaho Dept Fish & Game



Bureau of Land
Management

Fish Distribution Surveys Completed Across Entire C-T National Forest

Since its inception over 4 years ago, the Caribou-Targhee Forest Fisheries Program has emphasized data collection, analysis, and dissemination. By the end of the 2003 field season, the Forest Fisheries Crew had completed the 4 year effort to survey every stream on the Forest with a standardized, universal fish distribution survey. The survey methodology was developed by fisheries biologists and statisticians from the Forest, Idaho Dept Fish & Game, and Idaho State University. In addition to fish distribution, the survey also documented population density and general habitat conditions. Genetic samples were taken from fish in many streams to determine cutthroat trout genetic integrity. U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Jackson Hole One Fly, Federation of Flyfishers, Idaho

Dept of Environmental Quality, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service provided substantial support for this Herculean effort over the last 4 years. The survey reports help guide the protection and restoration of aquatic and riparian resources on the Forest.



The Forest Fish Distribution Crew electroshocking Icehouse Creek during the 2003 field season.

Sawtell Creek: First Steps for Natives

A fish distribution survey performed in Sawtell Creek in 2002 identified the stream as a prime candidate for Yellowstone cutthroat trout reintroduction to benefit the species and the Sawtell Creek ecosystem. They reported the historic native fish population was replaced by non-native brook trout, Sawtell Creek was in good condition, and the stream no longer connected to the Henry's Fork where additional non-native fish species occur.

prior to native Yellowstone cutthroat trout reintroduction. In addition to the biological aspect of the project, aquatic habitat within the system will be improved for cutthroat trout rearing.

The C-T Forest, in partnership with Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Henry's Fork Foundation, and others, applied the first treatment of piscicide to Sawtell Creek to eradicate non-native brook trout. At least one more treatment to the stream will occur



Piscicide drips from a bucket stationed along Sawtell Creek during the 2003 treatment.

The Transformation of Pritchard Creek

During the summer of 2003, Caribou-Targhee National Forest Fisheries Personnel began work on the Pritchard Creek Watershed Restoration Project. Pritchard Creek is a tributary of the South Fork Snake River. In 1999, the Forest Fish Distribution Survey Crew identified Pritchard Creek as a Yellowstone cutthroat trout stronghold stream and documented restoration opportunities that would directly benefit the population through sedimentation reduction. The Forest, in partnership with Trout Unlimited, capitalized on these opportunities.

An abandoned 7-acre irrigation pond bed was recontoured, the associated dam was removed, eroded stream banks within the pond bed were stabilized, a narrow trail segment paralleling Pritchard Creek was closed to ATVs, and native vegetation was planted. Cattle were permanently excluded from the stream with the installation of a solar-powered pump to deliver water to them on the other side of a unit fence in the uplands. In 2004, a trail bridge will be built to replace a ford crossing, planting and weed eradication will continue, and effectiveness monitoring will begin.



Pre-project (above) and post-project (below) Pritchard Creek as it flows through the old irrigation pond bed. Above, note dam on left side and unstable, vertical banks along stream. Below, those areas were restored.



Bonneville Cutthroat Benefited in 4 Streams



At Beaver Creek on Montpelier Ranger District, campsites located in the riparian area were delineated to define the acceptable limit to motorized traffic. This decreases sediment delivery to the stream.

Sediment reduction projects occurred on Eightmile Creek, Beaver Creek, Mill Creek, and Cub River to benefit Bonneville cutthroat trout, a Sensitive species that occurs on Montpelier Ranger District. Nearly 700 boulders were placed around dispersed campsites and roads along Eightmile Creek to eliminate damage to the riparian area by motorized vehicles. In Beaver Creek, boulders were placed around 3 dispersed campsites and to block off an illegal road to keep motorized vehicles from riparian areas and streams. In Mill Creek, near Nieber Springs, an illegal ATV trail that encroached upon the stream was closed with boulders. Boulders were also placed along Cub River and a tributary to eliminate damage from motorized vehicles. These projects are intended to reduce sediment delivery to the streams, directly benefiting Bonneville cutthroat trout.

Sediment Reduction Projects for Yellowstone CT

Motorized vehicle use near streams can have significant impacts upon aquatic and riparian habitat by damaging vegetation and delivering sediment. Two different methods were used to address these impacts to Yellowstone cutthroat trout habitat on the Soda Springs Ranger District.

At McCoy Creek, a user-created motorized crossing near Box Canyon was blocked with boulders to decrease erosion and sedimentation along McCoy Creek and Box Canyon. Along the Blackfoot River, magnesium chloride was applied to the Blackfoot River Road in the Narrows to harden the road surface, decreasing sediment runoff into the river. Both McCoy Creek and the Blackfoot River Systems are considered by the Caribou-Targhee National Forest to be Yellowstone cutthroat trout strongholds.



The Blackfoot River Road in the Narrows encroaches upon the Blackfoot River, important habitat for Yellowstone cutthroat trout. The Caribou-Targhee National Forest, in cooperation with Caribou County, hardened the road to decrease sediment delivery to the river.

Free Fishing Day Brought Great Weather and Fishing

The Caribou-Targhee National Forest hosted 4 Free Fishing Day Celebrations throughout Southeast Idaho in June 2003. Free Fishing Day is an opportunity to share the value of our fisheries resources and instill proper sport ethics in children. The Free Fishing Day Events were held at Mill Pond in Island Park, the Little Lemhi Boy Scout Camp near the South Fork Snake River, Kelly Park Pond in Soda Springs, and Trail Creek Pond near Victor. Nearly 375 children and their parents participated in the events. Event partners included IDFG, City of Soda Springs, Monsanto, J.R. Simplot, and Nu-West Industries.

Kids' prizes were contributed by local and national merchants, including Dave's Tackle and Sports, Alco Discount Stores, Jama Villa, All Seasons Angler, Big 5 Sporting Goods, 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. Look for the C-T National Forest Free Fishing Day Events at the same four locations as last year on June 5, 2004.



A trio fish for trout in the lake and children gather around the prize table at the Little Lemhi Boy Scout Camp to claim their new fishing gear provided by local merchants.

Garden Creek Restoration Project Gets Underway

During autumn of 2003, construction began at Garden Creek through Conant Valley Ranch, to restore the stream channel between the Forest and the South Fork Snake River. The stream channel was excavated through the ranch. Irrigation pivots were installed to replace the inefficient flood irrigation system to conserve water for aquatic habitat.

The intent of the project is to re-establish connectivity between the resident Garden Creek Yellowstone



The newly excavated channel for Garden Creek meanders through Conant Valley Ranch between the South Fork and the Forest. Note gravels from old stream channel were uncovered

cutthroat trout population on the Forest and the cutthroat trout in the river, increasing the long term viability of the Garden Creek fish population. Past irrigation and livestock activities on the ranch eliminated the structure and function of the stream channel, isolating the Yellowstone cutthroat trout population in upper Garden Creek.

In 2004, a large culvert will be installed by the Idaho Transportation Department at the Highway 26 crossing of Garden Creek, the stream and its riparian area will be fenced to exclude livestock, native vegetation will be planted, and a fish screen will be constructed at the new irrigation headgate. Annual water use coordination meetings between Conant Valley Ranch, Trout Unlimited, and the Forest will help incorporate consideration of fish needs into daily water use on the ranch.

This project is a partnership between Caribou-Targhee National Forest, Trout Unlimited, Conant Valley Ranch, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Idaho Transportation Department, Bureau of Land Management, and others. It is a feature project of the Trout Unlimited South Fork Home Rivers Initiative.

New Settlers in North Twin Creek

During the 2003 field season, 5 additional beaver were reintroduced into North Twin Creek on Teton Basin Ranger District 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 was initiated with a beaver reintroduction feasibility study. The source beaver were trapped from large populations that were affecting road drainages or other infrastructure elsewhere on the Forest. Monitoring of transplants from last year documented they remained in the stream they were placed and were building dams. Monitoring will continue to determine project effectiveness.



A young beaver waits for the rest of its family to join him in the North Twin Creek acclimation pen, prior to release.

Fish Passage Restored in Trail Creek



Before the project, an irrigation sill and concrete approach blocked fish passage from the Teton River and lower Trail Creek to quality fish habitat on the Forest.



The project removed the concrete sill and added stream roughness to restore upstream fish passage.

In September, fish passage was restored to more than 6 miles of Trail Creek in the Teton River Subbasin. An abandoned irrigation weir and its concrete approach spanning Trail Creek, at the Cedron Bridge near the town of Victor, acted as a barrier to fish migrating upstream from lower Trail Creek and the Teton River. Based on Forest fish distribution and physical habitat surveys, upper Trail Creek provides some of the best quality fish spawning habitat in the Teton River Subbasin.

The concrete weir was removed and the stream channel was roughened to facilitate upstream fish passage. Downstream of the weir, stream banks were stabilized and in-channel habitat was improved. This project directly benefits Yellowstone cutthroat trout, a Sensitive species on the Forest.

Project partners included Jackson Hole One Fly, Friends of The Teton River, Teton Valley Trout Unlimited, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Teton County, Trail Creek Sprinkler Company, and private landowner Terry Johnson.

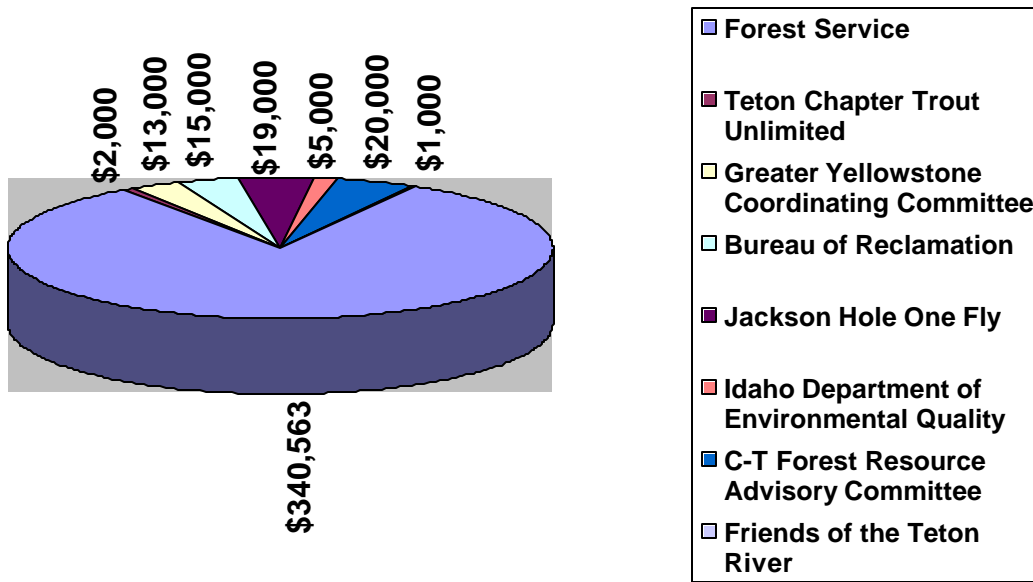
Thomas Fork Safe Fish Passage Project Update

In 2003, a consulting firm was hired to design fish screens and bypass channels at the 3 irrigation diversion structures that span the Thomas Fork. These structures are the Esche, Thomas Fork, and Taylor Diversions. They were documented blocking Bonneville cutthroat trout spawning migrations upstream to the Forest and their associated irrigation ditches entrain downstream-migrating fish, leading them to farmers' fields to die. A partnership was formed between the C-T Forest, Trout Unlimited, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, and water users in the Thomas Fork Valley to address the problems. At least one and possibly two structures will be fixed in 2004. The remaining structure(s) will be addressed in 2005.



The Talyor Divers ion, near Geneva, Idaho, has diverted and killed more than 50% of the post-spawn Bonneville cutthroat trout returning to the Bear River.

2003 Caribou-Targhee Forest Fisheries Program Funding



You Have to Look Back Sometimes

As you can see, the Caribou-Targhee National Forest Fisheries Program and its partners are effective at getting significant conservation actions accomplished on the ground. With all of our efforts and our plates always full, it is easy not to look back on the year that passed. It would probably be more comfortable to just keep going. Most of us operate that way. But I think you have to look back sometimes. That's the purpose of our annual report. It puts last year in perspective and further documents what we have achieved. It gives us an opportunity to learn from the past and celebrate the journey we have taken thus far with our partners and friends.

We couldn't have made these strides forward without our partnerships. Lee, Louis, Ted, and I thank you for your continued support of our conservation efforts. We look forward to working with you in 2004.

James Capurso
C-T National Forest Fisheries Biologist



Bill Dart (Blue Ribbon Coalition), Matt Woodard (Trout Unlimited), and Capurso inspecting trails at Burns Creek.

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