

# CARIBOU-TARGHEE NATIONAL FOREST FISHERIES PROGRAM 2006 ANNUAL REPORT

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Fisheries Biologists



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Trout Unlimited



US Fish and Wildlife Service



Idaho Department of  
Fish and Game



Wyoming Department of  
Game and Fish



US Natural Resources  
Conservation Service



Henry's Fork Foundation

## Native Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout Returned to Sawtell Creek

Forest Fisheries Personnel have been working with their partners on the Sawtell Creek Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout Reintroduction Project in the upper Henry's Fork for the last couple of years. The previous years' activities included eradication of non-native brook trout and improvement of habitat in the system.

The multi year restoration project achieved its primary objective in 2006 with the transplanting of over 700 Yellowstone cutthroat trout from Tygee and Corral Creeks. Tygee Creek is a nearby tributary of the Henry's Fork and Corral Creek is in the neighboring Sinks Drainage. These two streams are believed to have populations of Yellowstone cutthroat trout that are remnants of historic Henry's Fork Yellowstone cutthroat trout

populations. The fish reintroduction in Sawtell Creek adds approximately 6 more stream miles in the Henry's Fork system inhabited by Yellowstone cutthroat trout. This project was a partnership between Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Henry's Fork Foundation, and Natural Resources Conservation Service.



Trapper Bradshaw, Idaho Department of Fish and Game Fisheries Biologist, releases native Yellowstone cutthroat trout into North Sawtell Creek

## Flow Returned to Mail Cabin Creek

Years ago, Mail Cabin Creek jumped its banks and began flowing down the Mail



An excavator returns Mail Cabin Creek to its channel from an old road, decreasing erosion and sedimentation.

Cabin Creek Road. The road had since been closed but the erosion had continued. This year, stream flow was restored to its natural channel. A large tree and boulders were placed on the road, redirecting the water to its natural channel, and willows were planted. The old road into this area traveled across the front of a road fill for the Teton Pass highway and had been draining into Trail Creek along with its sediment load. This section of road was re-contoured to eliminate improper drainage and re-seeded. This project has decreased the sediment load in the stream and improved access for fish to the upper watershed.

# Fish Passage Restored at Burns Creek

In August, fish passage was restored for Yellowstone cutthroat trout in Burns Creek, a tributary to Palisades Reservoir on the South Fork of the Snake River. Historically, upstream-migrating fish from the reservoir were blocked from Burns Creek at the McCoy Creek Road Crossing. An innovative fish passage culvert designed by Fish Passage Engineer Don Porior replaced the old perched culvert. Forest Engineers supervised the culvert installation. The new culvert that was pre-fit with baffles to collect

bedload and create a simulated stream bottom, facilitating upstream passage of any aquatic organism. In the spring, effectiveness monitoring of the 2005 Trout Creek Passage Project, located next to Burns Creek, documented the passage of Yellowstone cutthroat trout spawners from the Reservoir into upper Trout Creek. We expect the same success at Burns Creek when we visit it this spring for effectiveness monitoring. Project partners included Trout Unlimited and US Fish and Wildlife Service.



Burns Creek culvert outlet under McCoy Creek Road prior to replacement (2005).



A fish passage culvert is installed under McCoy Creek Road to restore fish passage at Burns Creek, near Palisades Reservoir.

# Native Wetland Vegetation Returning to Pritchard Creek



Matt Woodard, TU Home Rivers Initiative Coordinator, stands in natural wetland vegetation along the restoration reach of Pritchard Creek.

In 2003, the Forest Fisheries Program and Trout Unlimited removed an old irrigation dam, converted the pond bed to a meadow, and restored the stream channel in Pritchard Creek, a tributary to the South Fork of the Snake River. Cattle were excluded from the project area and water was provided upslope with a solar pump and trough system. The results of ongoing effectiveness monitoring continue to please us. In addition to the vegetation that was planted along the stream and in the uplands, native vegetation is naturally re-establishing along the stream. Bulrush and coyote willow are particularly noticeable. The stream channel continues to develop new floodplains, establish gravel beds, and retain less fine sediment, benefiting this Yellowstone cutthroat trout stronghold stream.

## Dispersed Campsites improved to Benefit Fall Creek Riparian Areas

In a continuing effort to decrease sedimentation in Fall Creek, a tributary to the South Fork Snake River, Palisades Ranger District Recreation Staff defined acceptable motorized vehicle access along Fall Creek with the placement of boulders at more than a dozen heavily used dispersed campsites. As recreational use in Fall Creek continues to increase, so did the size of these streamside campsites and the disturbed ground associated with them.

In the summer of 2006, boulders were strategically placed around and gravel was placed on areas acceptable for motorized vehicle and camp trailer parking. It is expected that this project will decrease erosion and sediment delivery to Fall Creek and benefit important riparian vegetation. It compliments previous work to better manage cattle use along upper Fall Creek with fencing and water developments. The decrease in sedimentation and stream channel improvements is expected to benefit Yellowstone cutthroat trout that inhabit the stream. The project was a partnership between the Forest, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation.



A trailer parked extremely close to Fall Creek at a dispersed site in 2005 (above) is an example of typical encroachment. The placement of boulders at the site in 2006 (below) is expected to eliminate this type of impact to the stream banks and vegetation.



## Dam Removed on the Bear River



Pre-project Cove Dam and Reservoir on the Bear River, August 2006

Through the Bear River Hydroelectric Settlement Agreement negotiated with PacifiCorp in 2002, Cove Dam was removed from the Bear River, near Grace, Idaho last summer. The demolition work was performed by PacifiCorp contractors and the project was a partnership between all the signatory agencies and organizations of the settlement agreement, including the Caribou-Targhee National Forest. The removal of Cove Dam helps to restore river hydrology and aquatic organism passage in this segment of the Bear River, benefiting Bonneville cutthroat trout, including those that spawn in streams on the Forest.

# Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout Take up Residency at Conant Valley Ranch

In the spring of 2006, flow was restored to the historic channel of Garden Creek through Conant Valley Ranch, reconnecting an isolated Yellowstone cutthroat trout population upstream on the Forest with the South Fork Snake River. Effectiveness monitoring during the spawning season identified large Yellowstone cutthroat trout from the river spawning in upper Garden Creek, indicating they have found their way back into the stream from the South Fork. Fall effectiveness monitoring found the new Conant Valley Ranch segment of Garden Creek seeded with several age classes of Yellowstone cutthroat trout (probably from upstream). No rainbow trout were observed, but one-year old brown trout were collected in a backwater area at the mouth of the stream. Annual monitoring will continue. This project was a partnership between the Forest, Trout Unlimited,

Conant Valley Ranch, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Idaho Transportation Department, and others.



Garden Creek flows in its new channel through Conant Valley Ranch during Spring 2006.

## Riparian Vegetation Returns to the Old Skinner Creek Feedlot

A cattle feedlot was removed from along Skinner Creek, a Bonneville cutthroat trout stronghold tributary to the Bear River, to decrease erosion and sedimentation. The feedlot is on the Alleman Ranch, located downstream of the Forest and was relocated upslope from the stream. An alternate water source was provided. Chris Hoag, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Riparian Restoration Expert, directed the riparian planting in the fall. The stream will be fenced to exclude livestock. The Alleman Family contributed their time and equipment for riparian revegetation and fencing. The project was funded through the PacifiCorp settlement agreement funds from the relicensing of their hydroelectric facilities on the Bear River. In addition to NRCS, the PacifiCorp Settlement Agreement Environmental Coordinating Committee and the Alleman Family were project partners.



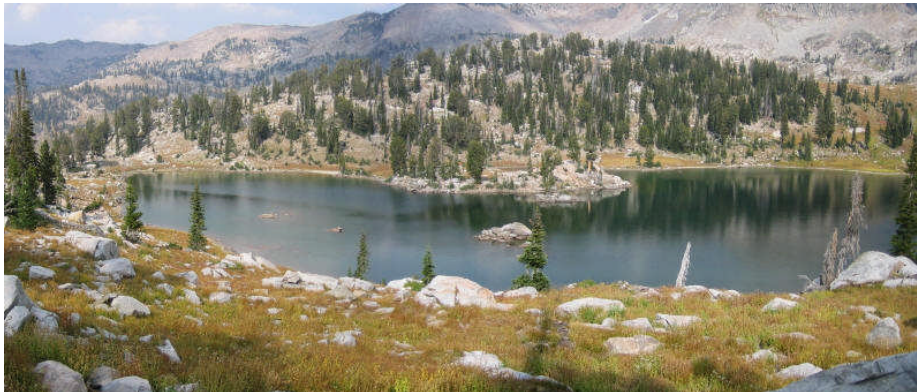
Spring 2005 pre-project Skinner Creek feedlot (above). Paul and Kent Alleman contributed equipment and labor in 2006 to revegetate the old feedlot (below)



# Fisheries Management within our Wilderness Areas

In the winter of 2006, a Wilderness Fishery Management Plan was completed for the Jedediah Smith and Winegar Hole wilderness areas. The preparation of the plan was required through the Targhee Revised Forest Plan. The plan was a summary of known Wyoming Department of Game and Fish (WDGF) and Forest direction and management as it pertains to fisheries and sets a common basis and understanding of future management. It was reviewed by Rob Gipson (WDGF Regional Fisheries Manager), Megan Bogle (C-T NF Wilderness Program Manager), and Lee Mabey (District Fisheries Biologist). The plan highlighted some knowledge gaps where more information is needed, identifying the need for lake surveys.

In the late summer of 2006, Fisheries Biologists from WDGF and the Forest jointly surveyed the South Leigh Chain Lakes. These 7 glacially formed lakes are all located in a beautiful alpine setting near tree line. The lakes had originally been stocked in the 1960's with no surveys to document existing conditions since that time. This year's survey determined that all lakes were fishless. The largest lake (# 5) appeared that it should support fish. However, the water chemistry indicated it is a lake with extremely limited productivity and access to spawning habitat is lacking. Wilderness lake surveys will continue each year to augment our understanding of existing conditions and document baseline conditions.



South Leigh Chain Lake # 5, the lake most likely to support fish in the system, was found to be fishless during this year's survey effort.

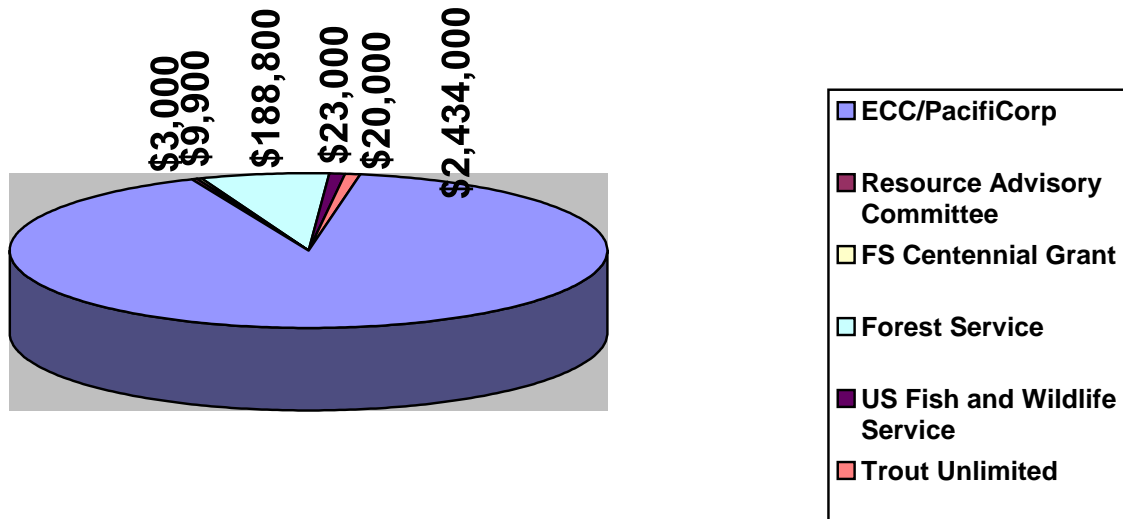
## Working in Partnership to Protect Henry's Fork Fisheries

The Forest Fisheries Program has been participating in a working group to review and comment on the license application to retrofit the existing Chester Dam for the production of hydropower. Others in the working group include Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Henry's Fork Foundation, Trout Unlimited, and Greater Yellowstone Coalition. The group is working in partnership to ensure aquatic resources in the Henry's Fork, including the economically valuable Henry's Fork fisheries, are protected and enhanced through the Federal Energy Regulation Commission licensing process.



Chester Dam and the Last Chance Diversion on the Henry's Fork

# 2006 Caribou-Targhee Forest Fisheries Program Funding



## Thanks for Another Great Year of Fisheries Conservation!

Thanks to all who assisted us with fisheries conservation projects in 2006. We highlighted some of our major projects in this newsletter and we're sorry we didn't have room to feature more. Some other fisheries-related projects completed on the Forest in 2006 included establishing livestock exclosures on Giraffe Creek, Nieber Spring, and Davis Canyon to benefit Bonneville cutthroat trout populations, stream monitoring at Dubois and Soda Springs Ranger Districts, providing Fisheries support to numerous projects throughout the Forest, and planning restoration projects for 2007 and beyond. In addition to all of that, Lee was rather busy in fire suppression efforts and I

had fisheries details to the National Forests of North Carolina (to assist in post-storm restoration efforts) and the National Office (to serve as the National Fisheries Program Leader). Corey did well keeping things together at home when we were away. We look forward to working with folks in 2007 to further benefit our aquatic resources in Southeast Idaho, the Greater Yellowstone Area, and wherever else our assistance is needed.

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