



WESTERN NATIVE TROUT INITIATIVE



2020 ANNUAL REPORT

DEAR FRIENDS,

Thank you for being a part of the Western Native Trout Initiative (WNTI) in 2020. To say 2020 was an unprecedented year feels like an understatement, but WNTI was able to continue our work with only minimal delays due to COVID-related restrictions. We could not accomplish all that we do without the continued support and dedication of our partners and donors.

Perhaps one of WNTI's biggest stories in 2020 was inclusion and passage of the **National Fish Habitat Partnership (NFHP)** in the America's Conservation Enhancement (ACE) Act. The ACE Act passed the House and Senate with bipartisan support and unanimous consent and was signed into law by the President on October 30, 2020, and reauthorizes the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) and codifies NFHP, two of the most successful voluntary conservation efforts in the nation. **WNTI is one of 20 nationally recognized Fish Habitat Partnerships under the NFHP program.** bit.ly/3rWExK6

In 2020, WNTI and our partners funded **eight habitat restoration projects benefiting our focal species** with a total of \$223,700 in NFHP funds and \$209,501 in other partner contributions leveraged to a total projects value of \$4,685,651. In addition to the 2020 project funding provided by WNTI through the NFHP program, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service National Fish Passage Program, American Sportfishing Association's FishAmerica Foundation, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Office of Habitat Conservation, and WNTI's Western Native Trout Challenge each contributed funding toward these important projects this year.

An ongoing partnership with the Resources Legacy Fund (RLF), through their Open Rivers Fund, continued to support our ongoing work on **nine projects in the Upper Bear River in Utah and Wyoming to benefit Bonneville Cutthroat Trout**, recreational fishing, and local communities and ranchers who divert water for irrigation. Open Rivers funding of \$432,000 was matched by \$2,268,005 in other private and public funding, for a total projects value of \$2,700,005. A new RLF grant was approved late in 2020 to continue our work in 2021-2022.

WNTI's partnership with RLF to execute an ambitious **watershed-scale restoration effort in the Warner Lakes Basin in southeast Oregon** also continued in 2020. This partnership benefits Warner Lakes Redband Trout (State Sensitive and Federal Species of Concern), Warner sucker (listed as Threatened under the Endangered Species Act), recreational fishing, ranchers, and landowners. The partnership will ultimately fund 10 restoration projects to open 38 stream miles in the Warner Basin by 2025. The second year of grant funding, for \$300,000, will support construction to remove/replace the first four diversion dams opening 5.57 miles of stream and engineering design plans for the next two projects. This year's grant was matched by \$1,722,600 from other partners.

A new partner in 2020 was the NOAA Office of Habitat Conservation and the Recreational Fisheries Initiative. Funding of \$32,897 supports a **three phased project benefitting Coastal Cutthroat Trout in Washington** that includes outreach presentations, genetic data collection, and habitat restoration – all involving professional fish biologists, recreational anglers, licensed fishing guides, and citizen scientists. Data collected will help fill gaps in the rangewide Coastal Cutthroat Trout Assessment co-funded by WNTI and completed in 2016.

Continued on next page

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Letter from front, continued

A new collaboration and generous donations from the Guadalupe River Trout Unlimited Chapter, the New Mexico Trout Unlimited Council, and the Fredericksburg Fly Fishers, helped fund an important barrier project on Willow Creek, New Mexico, to benefit an important conservation population of Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout.

Collectively, projects funded in 2020 will remove or bypass nine barriers to restore access to 29.3 miles of stream for fish passage, restore 13 miles and 560 acres of riparian habitat, complete eight habitat assessments, and assess 15 fish populations and 11.7 stream miles. Barriers will be constructed in two separate projects in Montana to protect 13 miles of high priority habitat for Westslope Cutthroat Trout and other native aquatic species and one barrier in New Mexico to protect a conservation population of Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout and five miles of high priority habitat in the Pecos River basin.

Thank you for making 2020 another successful year for WNTI. We look forward to continued success in 2021!

Sincerely,

JULIE MEKA CARTER
Chair, WNTI Steering Committee

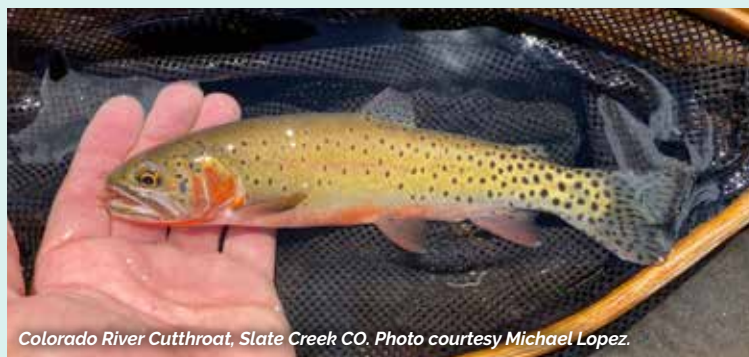
THERESE THOMPSON
Coordinator

Projects

Additional information for all 2020 National Fish Habitat Partnership WNTI funded projects can be viewed at westernnativetrout.org/2020-funded-projects

PROJECTS FUNDED THROUGH NATIONAL FISH HABITAT PARTNERSHIP FUNDS IN 2020

- Greater Williams Prairie Restoration Area (Redband Trout), OR
- Dalton Creek Cutthroat Trout Passage (Bonneville Cutthroat Trout), UT
- Deep Creek Starveout Diversion Project (Redband Trout), OR
- Jim Creek AOP Project (Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout), CO
- Wall Creek Fish Barrier (Arctic Grayling, Westslope Cutthroat Trout), MT
- Eagle Creek Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout Connectivity, MT
- Spread Creek Fish Passage Project Phase 2 (Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout), WY
- Cottonwood Creek Fish Passage Barrier Project for Native Fish Security (Westslope Cutthroat Trout), MT



Colorado River Cutthroat, Slate Creek CO. Photo courtesy Michael Lopez.

ONGOING PROJECTS FUNDED IN THE WARNER BASIN (BENEFITTING WARNER BASIN REDBAND TROUT)

- Starveout Diversion, OR
- Taylor Weir Diversion Fish Passage Screening, OR
- Relict Weir, OR
- O'Keefe, Givans, and Middle Diversions, OR

ONGOING PROJECTS FUNDED IN THE BEAR RIVER (BENEFITTING BONNEVILLE CUTTHROAT TROUT)

- Deadman Creek Native Aquatic Species Restoration, UT
- East Fork Hilliard Canal, UT
- Bear River Restoration Phase 2 (Lower and Upper Almy Diversions), WY
- Booth Diversion Restoration Project Phase 2, WY
- Salt Creek Fish Passage and Restoration, WY
- Evanston Town Historic Dam, WY
- Lewis and Homer Diversions, WY
- Pine-Grove Crown Diversion, WY

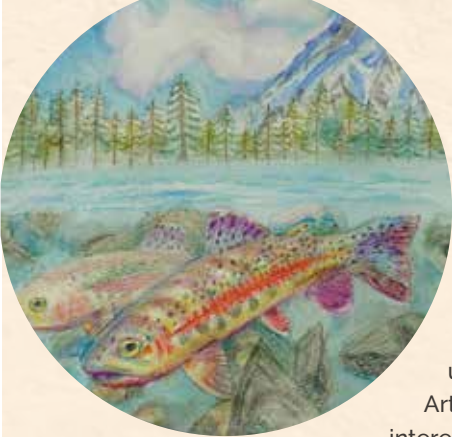
PROJECT FUNDED BY NOAA

- Coastal Cutthroat Trout Habitat Restoration Project, WA

PROJECT FUNDED BY DONATIONS

- Willow Creek Barrier (Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout), NM

Outreach Activity Highlights



WILDLIFE FOREVER

The Wildlife Forever Fish Art Contest partnered with WNTI in 2020 to highlight the diversity of native trout in the western United States. This partnership connects youth to the assortment of native trout utilizing the Art of Conservation®. In honor of this collaboration, the Fish Art Contest created a new Western Native Trout Award. Young people interested in competing for this award select one of the 14 trout species native to the western United States listed on the Official Fish List. Winners will be selected in four grade categories, Kindergarten-3rd grade, 4th-6th grade, 7th-9th grade, and 10th-12th grade and awarded a prize package from the Western Native Trout Initiative. wildlifeforever.org/home/state-fish-art



WESTERN NATIVE TROUT CHALLENGE

WNTI launched a major new program in 2019 called the Western Native Trout Challenge. The program celebrates the native trout and char species of the West and invites anglers to catch each species in its native or historic range and is a lifetime challenge for each individual who registers. Participants catch native trout and char in each of 12 western states. WNTI provides education, resources, inspiration, and prizes. The purpose of the Challenge is to strengthen angler awareness of these unique native species, help anglers understand what is being done to conserve native trout and grow the community of trout fishing aficionados. As of December 2020, 639 anglers have registered for the Western Native Trout Challenge. Residents of California lead the states, followed by Utah, Arizona and Oregon. A total of 77 individuals have completed one or more levels of the Challenge. Of these "completions", 76% are Expert Casters (catch and photograph six species across at least four states), 19% are Advanced Casters (catch and photograph 12 species across at least eight states) and 5% are Master Casters (our highest level where anglers have to catch and photograph 18 species across all 12 states).

Learn more and register at WesternNativeTroutChallenge.org
Follow the action on:

WNativeTrout WesternNativeTrout westernnativetrout



Sheldon and Crew Clouse with their Expert Caster hats and certificates after catching native trout in AZ, CA, CO and NM. Photo courtesy Clouse family.

Eric Jeter in his Expert Caster hat, near Jackson, Wyoming. Photo courtesy of Tyler Blackmon @hot_dang.



Upper Bear River.

ONGOING PARTNERSHIPS IN THE BEAR RIVER WATERSHED

Resources Legacy Fund released a short film in 2020 about partnering with WNTI to reconnect parts of the Upper Bear River in Utah, Idaho, and Wyoming. The partnership benefits Bonneville Cutthroat Trout, recreational fishing, and ranchers who divert water for irrigation. Once completed, the restoration projects will open or reconnect 90.85 miles of river. bit.ly/BearRiverWorkingWaters

Later in 2020, the Intermountain West Joint Venture released an article further describing this broad partnership that is successfully collaborating in the Bear River watershed and was a focus of the five-year NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program.

iwjv.org/partnership-shines-in-bear-river-rcpp





Photo courtesy Mark Hutchings

About WNTI

The **WESTERN NATIVE TROUT INITIATIVE** is a public-private Fish Habitat Partnership that works collaboratively across 12 western states to conserve (protect, restore and recover) 21 native trout and char species.

To achieve this mission, WNTI works together with its on-the-ground partners to:

Establish Joint Priorities for Native Trout Conservation

Covering over 1.75 million square miles of public and privately managed lands, WNTI and our partners combine science-based assessments along with expert and local knowledge to establish joint priorities for native trout conservation at a landscape scale.

Coordinate Investment and Collaborative Action

WNTI provides a forum for partners to coordinate and invest their collective assets and capacity toward completing the highest-priority, native trout conservation efforts across the West. Proposed and led by local communities and resource agencies, these projects are funded and supported through WNTI's grant programs and in-kind contributions by our partners.

Education, Outreach and Stewardship

WNTI seeks to support and sustain the ongoing efforts of our on-the-ground partners by raising awareness for the importance of healthy native trout watersheds and facilitating greater public support for native trout conservation within local communities. Through our **Campaign for Western Native Trout**, WNTI helps encourage private investment and involvement in native trout projects and regional native trout conservation initiatives.

The future of native trout conservation depends on the generosity of individuals like you who care about sustaining healthy western watersheds. When you give to WNTI, 100% of your donation is leveraged to support on-the-ground, locally led projects.



Photos left to right courtesy Daniel Ritz, Cameron Cushman, Anastasia Coleman

STEERING COMMITTEE

Operating under the guidance of the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, the Western Native Trout Initiative is governed by a Steering Committee that represents 12 western state fish and wildlife agencies, 3 federal resource management agencies, tribes, and nonprofit fisheries conservation organizations.

Julie Meka Carter, Chair
Arizona Game and Fish Department

Jon Sjöberg, Vice Chair
Nevada Department of Wildlife

Martin Koenig
Idaho Department of Fish and Game

Craig Burley
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

Bruce McIntosh
Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

Paul Dey
Wyoming Game and Fish Department

Gillian O'Doherty
Alaska Department of Fish and Game

Kirk Patten
New Mexico Department of Game and Fish

Andrew Cushing
Utah Division of Wildlife Resources

Matt Nicholl
Colorado Parks and Wildlife

Roger Bloom
California Department of Fish and Wildlife

Pat Saffel
Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks

Melissa Dickard
U.S. Bureau of Land Management

Yvette Paroz
U.S. Forest Service

Robert Clarke
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Warren Colyer
Trout Unlimited

Chris Cantrell
Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies

STAFF

Therese Thompson
Coordinator

THANK YOU 2020 PARTNERS AND SUPPORTERS

Alaska Dept of Fish and Game
Americanfishes.com
American Sportfishing Association
Fish America Foundation
Arizona Game and Fish Dept
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Basin+Bend
California Dept of Fish and Wildlife
California Fly Fishers Unlimited
Clark Fork Coalition
Coastal Cutthroat Coalition
Coastal Cutthroat Trout
Interagency Committee
Colorado Parks and Wildlife
Copper River Watershed Project
Federation of Fly Fishers – Southwest Council
Fredericksburg Fly Fishers
Fish Focus Photography
Friends of the Teton River
gaiacreative
Guadalupe River Chapter of Trout Unlimited
Hood Canal Salmon Enhancement Group
Idaho Dept of Fish and Game
Intermountain West Joint Venture

Lake Country Umbrella
Watershed Council
Living Waters Fly Fishing
Lower Clark Fork Watershed Group
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
National Fish Habitat Partnership
Native Trout Addicts
Nevada Dept of Wildlife
New Mexico Council Trout Unlimited
New Mexico Dept of Game and Fish
NOAA Office of Habitat Conservation
North Fork John Day Watershed Council
Okanogan Land Trust
Oregon Dept of Fish and Wildlife
Orvis
Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission
Pheasants Forever
RepYourWater
Resources Legacy Fund (Open Rivers Fund)
Rocky Mountain Flyathlon (Running Rivers)
Santa Clara Pueblo – Forestry Division
Sierra Pacific Fly Fishers
South Fork John Day Watershed Council
Spokane Riverkeeper

Trout Unlimited
Turner Endangered Species Fund, LLC
U.S. Bureau of Land Management
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
U.S. Forest Service
U.S. Geological Survey
U.S. National Park Service
Utah Division of Wildlife Resources
Washington Dept of Fish and Wildlife
West Hills Community College District
Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Wild Fish Conservancy
Wyoming Game and Fish Dept
Yaak Valley Forest Council
Yellowstone Forever Foundation

And all the individual donors who contribute to WNTI!

Thank you!