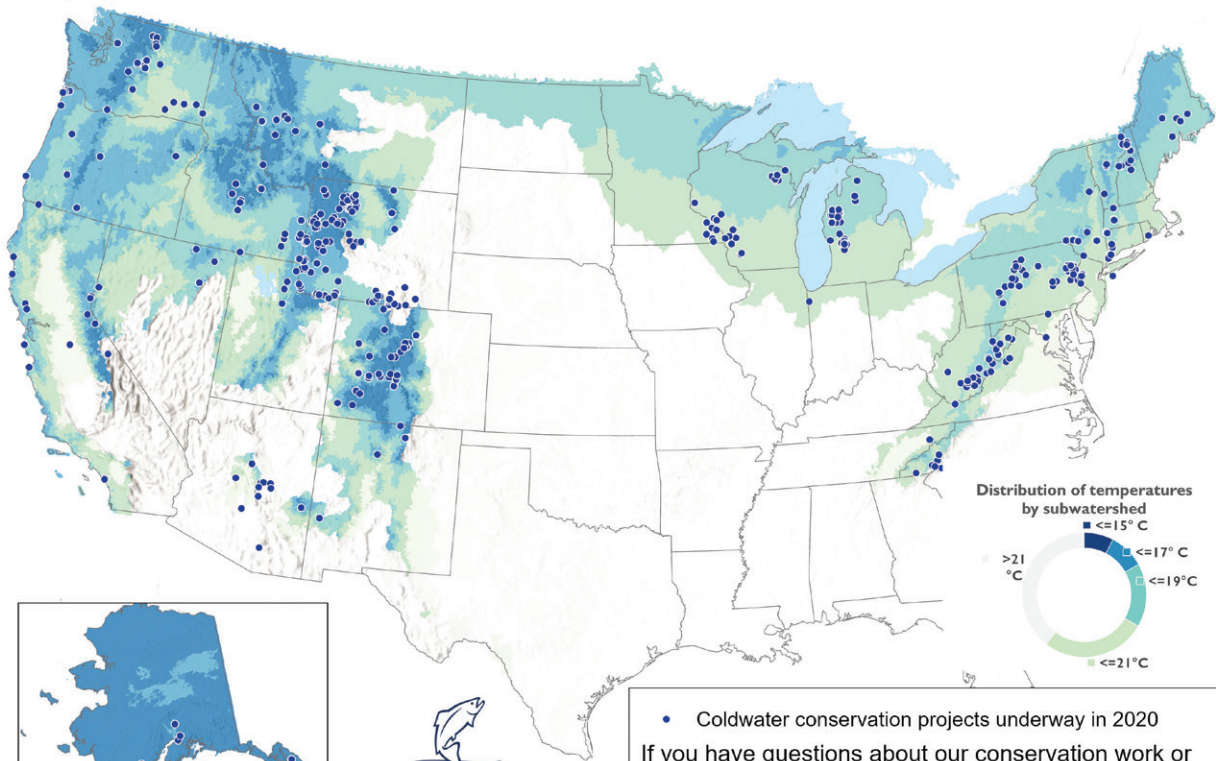




2020 Conservation Report

Prepared June 2020

Your Griffith Circle Donation Supports Trout Unlimited's Work Across the Nation



• Coldwater conservation projects underway in 2020
If you have questions about our conservation work or efforts near you, don't hesitate to contact Libby Earthman: libby.earthman@tu.org; 415-638-2017

OUR MISSION:

To conserve, protect and restore North America's coldwater fisheries and their watersheds.

Progress in the West

Conservation work in western watersheds continues at a remarkable clip. We are at the forefront of restoration in the west and deeply appreciate your enthusiasm for and support of this work.

On the Olympic Peninsula of Washington state, Trout Unlimited fish biologists are gathering data and sharing the incredible progress we're seeing on the **Elwha River**. It's truly astounding and there is much to be learned and, we hope, replicated.

After the removal of two Elwha dams in 2013, no one was certain how the fish would respond. Few expected the “genetic memory” of rainbow trout trapped above the dams for 100 years to kick-in but, incredibly, these extraordinary fish have re-emerged as summer steelhead. In just seven years, a robust run reestablished itself in the Elwha—demonstrating the positive impact of removing unneeded dams and the resilience of fish. Now, with continued scientific monitoring by Trout Unlimited biologists and partners, we will share this success, proving to others that nature can and will recover given the opportunity. The Elwha now boasts one of the most robust summer steelhead populations in the region. Our wildly popular recent film, *Rising from the Ashes*, documents this comeback and the potential of dam removal. *With your support*, TU will continue to monitor the Elwha, taking advantage of a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to understand fish response to dam removal, gather critical data and, most importantly, continue to share this incredible story and thereby convey the tremendous value of removing unneeded dams as we seek to encourage and pursue similar efforts elsewhere.

Trout Unlimited is similarly hard at work in the Columbia River watershed where we are seeking the removal of four dams. The Columbia drains an area about the size of France and produces the most salmon in the lower 48. However, it has been drastically altered by human activity, and its salmon populations are a shadow of what they were 100 years ago. Dams, irrigation, and channel dredging have taken a toll on this iconic river.

The Columbia's largest tributary, the **Snake River**, has four large dams in its lower reaches that have turned the river into a 140-mile stretch of slackwater. These dams—the benefits of which can



be provided in other ways—are preventing the recovery of salmon and steelhead. We’ve made more progress toward an agreement to remove the dams in the past two years than in the two decades prior—and we’ve been able to do so because of donor support. *With your continued generosity, we will keep pursuing dam removal on this iconic western river.*

To fully rebuild the Snake’s wild salmon and steelhead populations that are the anchor of this region’s cultural and historic heritage, we must do more than remove dams. Thus, Trout Unlimited established critical streamflow and habitat restoration projects on lower Snake River tributaries to improve habitat upstream of the dams. This restoration work stretches across northeast **Oregon and Idaho**. It encompasses strategic efforts on the **Umatilla, Grand Ronde, Clearwater, Lochsa, Wallowa, Yankee Fork, Lemhi and Pashimeroi rivers**. These rivers offer incredible steelhead and chinook salmon habitat. What’s more: their high elevation and cold water will keep them productive even as the climate warms. There is much to be done and great progress to be made and *we cannot continue this work without your support.*

Further south in Oregon at the headwaters of the Klamath River, our teams are hard at work preparing the upper river to welcome salmon home after the removal of four downstream hydropower dams in 2022. Upper Klamath Lake is a large, shallow lake above the dams, and a seasonal home to the record-sized rainbow trout that make the upper river famous. As the shallow lake water heats up in the



summer, the rainbows migrate upstream into cold spring-fed habitats—providing a good proxy for studying what salmon will do upon their return.

Working in partnership with Oregon State University, Trout Unlimited staff radio-tagged 100 of these large rainbows to track how fish utilize both the lake and the rivers that feed into it. Monitoring these fish gives us a better understanding of how to best direct restoration efforts for the salmon homecoming. For example,

learning where the rainbows migrate and congregate has provided information to help direct a massive habitat restoration project. We are now working with the cattle rancher who owns the land around the largest spring to which the fish migrate for the summer.

This is just one example. We’ve learned that juveniles rear in large numbers in multiple locations that were previously unknown. This information arms us for the next phase of habitat restoration in the coming months and beyond. When the dams come down, we want to ensure the habitat upstream is ready to begin rebuilding what was the third-largest salmon run on the west coast. We have not paused in pursuit of that goal and, *with your support*, we can continue to ready the upper watershed for the homecoming of these ocean-running fish.

Your support is equally essential on the Yellowstone River.

The Yellowstone is the longest free-flowing river in the continental United States and an awe-inspiring symbol of our nation’s wild heritage. As the climate warms and human demands on water resources continue to increase, fish populations have suffered. In 2016, Montana’s Department of Fish and Wildlife shut down the fishery for the first time in history because low water and high temperatures caused a massive fish kill. Thankfully, your support enabled Trout Unlimited to secure a 3-billion-gallon instream flow dedication from Kinross Gold, a mining company, to increase streamflow in Yellowstone tributaries but there is much more to do. *With your support*, we will complete at least three large habitat and flow projects on the Yellowstone in the coming months and hire a dedicated project manager for the river who can secure millions in public funding to continue to improve fishing on this iconic river.



In Alaska, our team continues to lead the fight to prevent the Pebble Partnership from obtaining critical federal permits.

With support from individuals around the country, we’ve held Pebble mine off for more than a decade. However, 2020 has brought new challenges that make Pebble the closest it has ever been to becoming a reality. Despite Congress and the President turning their attention to keeping our country healthy and safe during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Army Corps of Engineers has maintained that their timelines to permit Pebble will not change or be extended. *We need you to join us* in blocking the Army Corps from issuing a permit essential to starting development of the mine. Please consider making a special gift today to help us keep Bristol Bay a world-class fishing destination.



East of the Mississippi

With your support in 2019, TU's Eastern Conservation program protected 450 acres of watershed land and 812 miles of streams, reconnected 191 miles of previously fragmented stream habitat, and restored 73 miles of waterway. To accomplish this, our Eastern field staff leveraged your generosity by a ratio of \$3 in foundation and government funding for every \$1 in private donations. Private funding is the backbone of TU field work – thank you for your partnership.

In Maine, our TU teams have surveyed over a hundred coastal streams, discovering dozens of hitherto unknown populations of sea-run brook trout. Native brook trout are at the heart of much of our work in the East, often found in surprising places including one trickle of a stream adjacent to the L.L. Bean store in Freeport. Adding wood to streams enhances habitat. Fallen trees, old stumps and branches add complexity to a river's habitat and are a key ingredient for a healthy brook trout population. A joint study by TU and the **Vermont** Fish and Wildlife Department demonstrated that brook trout populations rebounded by 150 percent in streams improved with large wood habitat. In the past year, we added large wood to dozens of miles of streams in **New England, the Mid-Atlantic, and the Great Lakes states**, and we're gearing up to do more.



Thanks to the support of people like you and a grant from the Natural Resource Conservation Service, TU will add more wood to streams, address invasive species, and plant more native riparian vegetation. This massive effort will benefit seventy-five stream miles in the region over the next four years. *Help us make the most of this opportunity by sending in your generous, special gift today.*

On Vermont and New York's Battenkill River, we just launched a new Home Rivers Initiative, embedding a professional staff person in the watershed to engage the community and improve the fishery. In the 1990s, anglers noticed the decline in brown trout—declines that were confirmed by scientific surveys. Improved management and the addition of wood brought that fishery back from the brink of collapse. Although adding wood kick-started habitat improvement, it's only part of a long-term restoration strategy. A recently completed watershed assessment has indicated that we also need to complete riparian plantings and improve habitat connectivity.

As we begin our 2020 field season, *we hope you will join us by making a special gift.* Your gifts ensure that our Battenkill staff can leverage every private dollar by securing an additional three dollars in public funding for watershed improvement—launching the initiative with success.

Nearby on the Upper Delaware River, flow management is limiting the potential of this storied wild trout fishery. Trout Unlimited is working with partners to improve water management in reservoirs, in hopes that better management will mean improved temperatures and flows. This same water feeds **New York City**, so there are many interests at the table and the stakes are high. With your support, we can ensure the voice of anglers is heard as parties continue to negotiate management of these waters. *Your Griffith Circle gifts do just that.*

Farther south in the West Virginia headwaters of the Potomac River,

our restoration efforts with hundreds of farmers will realize our collective vision of bringing back big native brook trout. The fish in the photo is evidence that we are well on our way to succeeding.



With your support, we can do a lot more in the **Potomac** in the coming months. We can restore at least fifteen miles of stream, fix two fish passage barriers to reconnect eight miles of stream to their headwaters, plant 30 acres of riparian habitat, and sample the abundance and size of the brook trout populations in 30 streams. We will grow the impact of your generosity by engaging 100 volunteers to help with documentation. And we will leverage your gift with public funding.

Even further to the south in North Carolina where remaining brook trout populations are mostly on National Forest lands, TU has built a partnership with the US Forest Service to restore the streams in which these, the most threatened and vulnerable native brook trout in the US, live.



Our staff have collaborated with local communities to develop a focal area called Sky Island. The Sky Island Focal Area includes the headwaters of the **Pigeon, Tuckasegee, North Fork French Broad, Cathey's Creek, Davidson and North and South Fork Mills Rivers**, and a small portion of the **Cullasaja River**. It has some of the largest intact high-quality habitat and some of the more robust populations of native brook, wild rainbow and brown trout in North Carolina.

TU-trained volunteers assessed hundreds of potential fish passage barriers and identified sources of excessive sedimentation that are impairing our streams. *With your generous gift*, we can finish gathering field data this summer and generate the conservation plan this fall. This plan will identify 30 to 40 conservation projects to be implemented over the next 10 to 15 years. The Sky Island Conservation Plan

will enable the region's TU chapters and our partners to team up on a strategic, large-scale conservation initiative, and to take lessons learned through work in the Sky Island focal area and apply them on their local rivers and streams.

Further west on Wisconsin's Peshtigo River, TU has reconnected over 80 miles of tributaries to the main river, so that brook trout can grow in the main river but find cold water and clean gravel when they need to escape the heat or spawn. *With your support*, we can continue to work with the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest in northeast Wisconsin to reconnect important headwater habitat for native brook trout. This year, we have the opportunity to remove two barriers in the Peshtigo River watershed that will reconnect over six miles of coldwater habitat, and *we need your support* to ensure we can successfully complete the effort. This adds to a total of more than 80 miles reconnected in the watershed since 2017, opening important spawning, feeding, coldwater refuge, and juvenile habitat for brook trout.

The Driftless Area Restoration Effort in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, and Illinois has been under way for 15 years. An average of three stream miles were being restored each year. Last year,



nearly 20 miles of stream were restored, and it is not uncommon for monitoring to demonstrate a tenfold increase in trout numbers post-restoration.

This spectacular expansion of the Driftless effort has been possible because we have taken your donations and leveraged millions of dollars in restoration funding. In fact, private donor funding is helping us hire a new staff person in Southeastern **Minnesota** to further increase our impact in the Driftless. We are fortunate to be able to raise tremendous public support for stream restoration via the Minnesota Outdoor Heritage Program although we are still about 10 percent short on funding the costs associated with the staff person. *Please send a generous gift today to help us successfully launch this new position and support our work in the Driftless.*

On Michigan's legendary Pere Marquette River, we have embarked on a multi-year strategy to use citizen scientists – volunteers, anglers, fishing guides – to address fisheries data gaps. In our first two years, volunteer scientists surveyed spawning areas, and by conducting these counts annually we will gain a better understanding of the fishery, enabling us to prioritize restoration and measure success. *With your support*, we can survey 23 stream sections this year, and conduct a temperature assessment to evaluate coldwater habitat suitability to guide future restoration. Through the use of volunteers and donor-funded scientific tools, we can turn your support into an actionable plan to improve this remarkable fishery.

In spite of the pandemic, our work continues. Fish and rivers are blissfully unaware of the pandemic impacting human communities, but they are absolutely aware of impacts to their habitats—both good and bad. With your help, we can continue this critical conservation work this year and beyond.

Advancing Policy

Not all Trout Unlimited work is done instream wearing waders. TU staff are working in the Midwest to mobilize support for constructing the proposed barrier to prevent invasive Asian carp from getting into the Great Lakes; these extraordinarily destructive fish have been found only 10 miles away from **Lake Michigan** near Chicago.

Another invasive species threat, this one in **Maine**, is the introduction of non-native fish to trout waters through the use of live bait. We successfully advocated for new angling regulations that prohibit the use of live fish for bait in Maine's northern region. And in **Pennsylvania**, we helped protect more than 650 stream miles over the last year through our collaboration with the state's Unassessed Waters Initiative, which systematically documents previously unknown wild trout populations across the state. Wild trout streams are given special protections under state law, and through this program, more than 7,000 miles have been identified and listed over the past decade with TU's help.

Meanwhile, the push for energy dominance has grabbed headlines, though the Trump Administration's efforts to ramp up the production of critical minerals has been largely unheeded. Nevertheless, we face a very real threat of having environmental safeguards eliminated, bedrock environmental laws circumvented, and new mines developed in important fish and wildlife habitat on federal lands. Notably, the distribution of critical minerals has a concerning overlap with coldwater habitat. From brook trout of Appalachia, to cutthroat trout of the Interior West, to salmon and steelhead of Southeast Alaska, the presence of critical minerals seems to coincide with our last, best coldwater habitat.

Like any commodity, it is crucial that extracting critical minerals be done responsibly with an emphasis on avoiding and mitigating impacts. To this end, Trout Unlimited has launched an ambitious campaign to address this growing threat, and we need your generous partnership to ensure we continue to make the voice of anglers and conservationists heard as these minerals are developed in and near critical habitats.

Conclusion

Nationwide, the work of Trout Unlimited continues unabated during these difficult times. Staff are on the ground, in the field, working in the safest manner possible to continue to pursue a future that will include cold, clean, fishable water. Please continue to stand with us in this endeavor as we press on.