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Trout Unlimited in Colorado

Y e a r i n R e v i e w

*Conserving,
protecting and restoring
Colorado's coldwater fisheries
and their watersheds*



Our Mission

**To Conserve,
Protect, and
Restore
Colorado's
Coldwater
Fisheries and their
Watersheds.**

We Get Things Done:

We conserve Colorado's fisheries using four key tactics:

Collaboration. TU brings stakeholders together in partnership to achieve common goals. We develop projects with landowners and irrigators, often resolving diverse and opposing interests.

Focus and Persistence. TU has the staying power to deliver results through multi-year efforts. Long-term campaigns helped secure protections for the Roan Plateau and launch the Learning by Doing partnership for the Colorado headwaters.

Leverage. TU multiplies donor funds and our 10,000 members' sweat equity through grants from federal, state and foundation sources. Every dollar goes further for conservation.

Reliance on Science. TU builds programs on a foundation of solid science and data monitoring. Good research guides restoration designs and river advocacy. ■

From the President

Enjoy reading about and be proud of the highlights from another successful year for CTU presented in this report. We faced some challenges that reduced our unrestricted revenue last fiscal year, but the Colorado TU Board of Directors and Staff redirected our fund-raising efforts to advance our mission objectives and goals for 2016 and to put our organization on strong financial footing, along with a well-qualified staff, as we move forward into 2017.

I have been privileged to serve as the Colorado TU Board President the past two years and to help carry on Colorado TU's legacy as the leading cold-water fisheries and water conservation organization in the state. What led me to get involved?

I moved to Montrose, Colorado in 1991 and immediately fell in love with the Gunnison River in the Black Canyon – a world class, gold medal trophy rainbow trout fishery. But I soon learned of two immediate threats that could have destroyed this valuable treasure: a large hydropower project that would draw off an additional 1000 cfs of Gunnison River water during the winter months; and the potential loss of a 300 cfs senior water right that protected the minimum flows thru the canyon. Either of these projects would have decimated the flows – and fish – through the canyon in below-average snow-pack years.

But Trout Unlimited was visible and active at all levels – local, state and national – in opposing these projects. TU's commitment and effective work sold me on the worth and merit of the organization, and I have been an active member and supporter for over 20 years. And the results? Through advocacy and legal work, TU was successful in protecting the Gunnison River with the defeat of both of those issues. TU was also instrumental in working with Colorado Parks and Wildlife to research and resolve the issues of Whirling Disease in the Gunnison over the past 20 years. Today I am catching large Gunny rainbows (see photo) again in the canyon and am very thankful for all TU has done to restore "my fishing hole"!

For the Gunnison and other rivers across Colorado, TU brings a combination of skilled professional staff, grassroots volunteer dedication, and collaboration with diverse



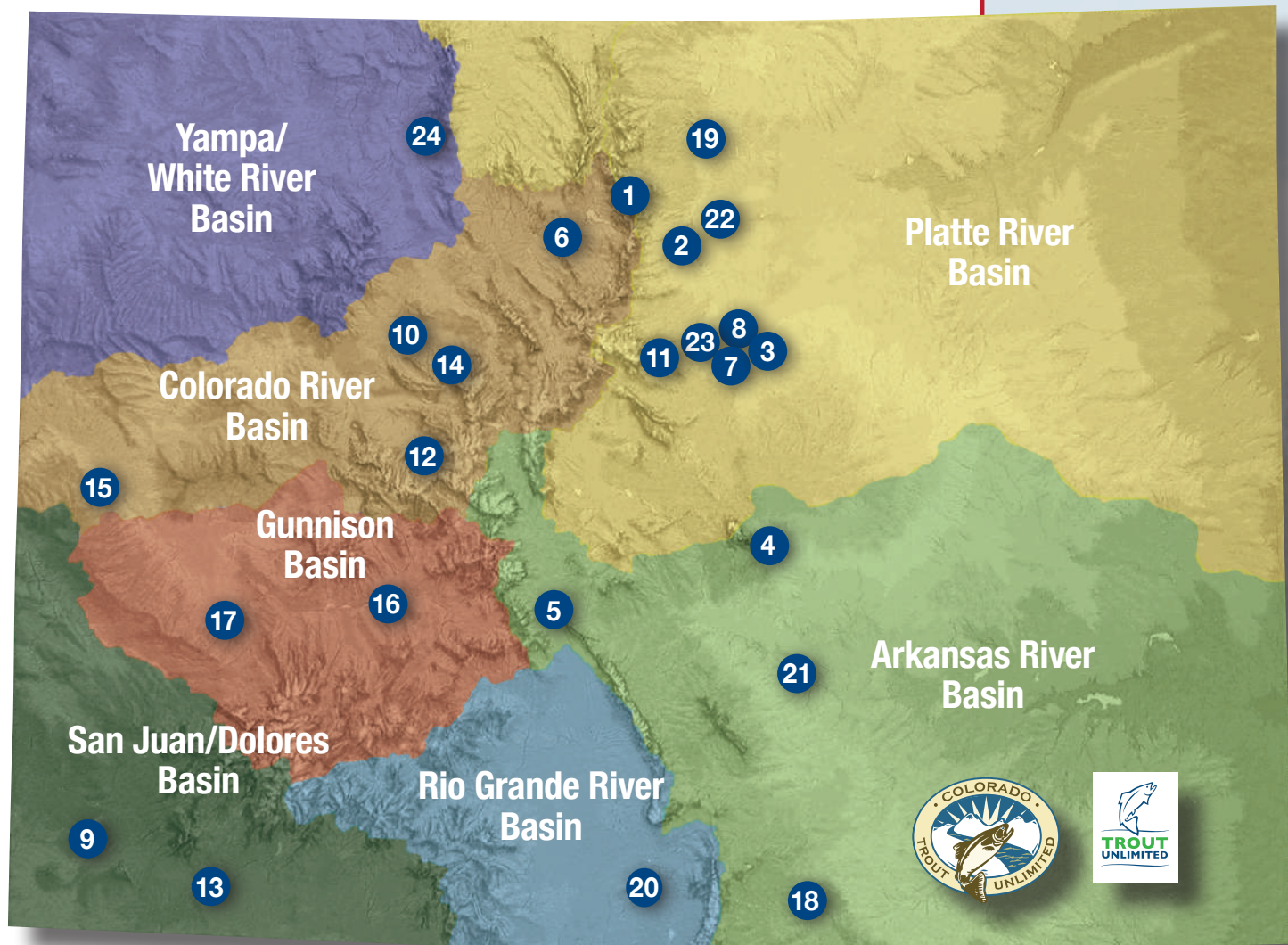
partners to tackle water issues. TU is persistent and effective, with real "sticktuitiveness" that makes rivers healthier and fishing better all across the state's trout watersheds. From mine cleanup work in the Clear Creek drainage to native trout recovery on Hermosa Creek, from agricultural efficiency partnerships that benefit farms and fish in the upper Gunnison to protecting native Greenbacks in Bear Creek by Colorado Springs – TU continues to get results.

And YOU can join us or continue to be our biggest asset. Gifts of "time, talent and treasure" from our members, volunteers and donors provide the foundation for all of our successes! Thank you for helping TU make a difference for Colorado today and tomorrow. ■

Marshall Pendergrass
Colorado TU President



Colorado TU Chapters and River Basins



CTU Chapters

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| 1 Alpine Anglers
– Estes Park | 9 Dolores River Anglers
– Cortez | 17 Gunnison Gorge Anglers
– Delta/Montrose |
| 2 Boulder Flycasters
– Boulder | 10 Eagle Valley – Eagle | 18 Purgatoire River Anglers
– Trinidad |
| 3 Cherry Creek Anglers
– Aurora | 11 Evergreen | 19 Rocky Mountain Flycasters
– Fort Collins/Greeley |
| 4 Cheyenne Mountain
– Colorado Springs | 12 Ferdinand Hayden
– Aspen/Glenwood Springs | 20 San Luis Valley – Alamosa |
| 5 Collegiate Peaks
– Salida/Buena Vista | 13 Five Rivers
– Durango | 21 Southern Colorado Greenbacks
– Pueblo |
| 6 Colorado River Headwaters
– Grand County | 14 Gore Range
– Summit County | 22 St. Vrain Anglers
– Longmont |
| 7 Cutthroat – Littleton | 15 Grand Valley Anglers
– Grand Junction | 23 West Denver
– Lakewood |
| 8 Denver | 16 Gunnison Angling Society
– Gunnison | 24 Yampa Valley Flyfishers
– Steamboat Springs |

Contents/Basins

- Statewide**
Pages 4 – 5
- Platte River Basin**
Pages 6 – 8
- Arkansas River Basin**
Pages 9 – 11
- San Juan/Dolores Basin**
Pages 12 – 13
- Colorado River Basin**
Pages 14 – 16
- Yampa/White River Basin**
Page 17
- Gunnison River Basin**
Pages 18 – 19
- Rio Grande River Basin**
Pages 20 – 21
- Investing in Colorado**
Page 22
- Donors**
Page 23

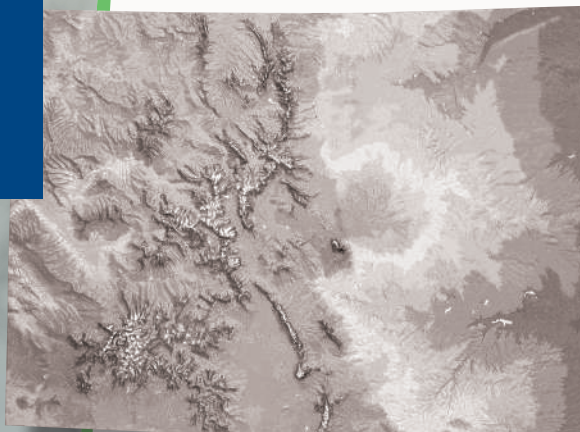
TU in Colorado

Keeping Public Lands in Public Hands

Our federal public lands – National Forests, Parks, Wildlife Refuges and BLM lands – are a critical part of Colorado’s western character. They are the bedrock of our hunting, angling, and outdoor recreation opportunities, driving over \$13 billion in spending every year in Colorado alone. Over the last several years there has been a growing movement to transfer these lands to State ownership. In reality, this is merely an interim step to privatization. Few states, and certainly not Colorado, could afford to manage vast tracts of federal land. Firefighting alone can reach tens of millions of dollars every year.

At the Colorado legislature, we have faced two primary methods of attack on public lands. The first is direct transfer of federal land to the State. Sportsmen rallied against these proposals, with state agencies themselves also resisting the idea. The second attack has come through attempts to assert State jurisdiction over Federal property. Proponents want to allow the State to overrule Federal management decisions – such as decisions restricting certain activities in order to avoid environmental damage. At the 2016 Colorado General Assembly, we successfully fended off these efforts to weaken protection of our public lands.

We expect to see more of these efforts at both the federal and state levels. TU will continue to stand in the forefront in defending our public lands, protecting the hunting and fishing access they provide, and preserving our western heritage. ■



Trut Unlimited and a coalition of agencies, concerned citizens, and conservation and sportsmen groups rallied to defend Colorado’s water quality standards for temperature in coldwater streams. The Colorado Water Quality Control Division (WQCD) proposed changes in standards that would have raised water temperature to levels that could prove fatal to trout in spring and fall seasons and year-round in mid-elevation “transition” waters. The proposal was based on flawed science and failed to adequately protect coldwater fisheries and to address the varied factors that influence temperature regimes in natural streams.

The efforts by TU and the coalition partners, convinced the Water Quality Control Commission (WQCC) to reject the proposed changes, keeping in place the protective temperature standards that currently apply to coldwater streams. It was an impressive team – including Colorado Parks and Wildlife, the Colorado Wildlife Federation, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Western Resource Advocates, and others.

Members of CTU stepped up and sent more than 200 individual comments to the Commission stating their argument against the changes, along with an organization-wide letter co-signed by Colorado TU

Defending Water Quality for Trout Streams

chapter presidents. Members also helped collect data through a citizen science initiative and offered their own testimonies to the issue from various vantage points.

The proposed changes would have weakened water temperature standards for around 1/3 of Colorado’s trout streams, based solely on their elevation, allowing the fish’ stress levels to increase and ultimately cause problems for feeding, growth and movement. According to the EPA, the proposed standards for lower elevation coldwater streams could have actually proved lethal to trout exposed to them over seven days.

Water temperature is always affected by natural conditions like air temperature, seasonal flows and elevation. But often the problem is caused or made worse by human activity, including water diversions, wastewater effluent discharges, and land use practices. Weakening standards and allowing these unnatural causes to further hurt our streams goes against the WQCD’s responsibilities under the Clean Water Act to provide for “fishable, swimmable” waters and to protect aquatic life.

Higher temperature standards also would have been allowed for all trout streams during the “shoulder” months of March and April and October and November. These shoulder months overlap with rainbow and brown trout spawning seasons, when the fish are more sensitive and susceptible to changes in their environment, putting natural reproduction at risk.

Thanks to our great team of volunteers, staff, and partners, we were able to defeat the proposed weakening of standards and keep our fish cool. ■



Trout in the Classroom



Colorado Trout Unlimited's Trout in the Classroom program currently has 6 active sites all over Colorado this year; from Grand Junction to Kersey. The program involves middle or high school level classrooms raising trout from the egg to the fry life stages. At the end of the year-long course, the classroom releases the trout into a local lake or stream- connecting the students back to their local environment.

Colorado TU helps these classroom sites by obtaining eggs, helping teachers develop individual curricula, providing supplies, and helping with the required disease testing prior to the release.

While raising the trout, students are able to learn hands on about water quality, biology, population studies, and environmental issues. "I really like having the tank in my classroom because it's a new lesson every day," said Mike Sanchez, TIC teacher at Academy High School in the Mapleton School District. "There's water chemistry, population dynamics, evolution, ecology, fish anatomy, etc. You can always come up with something to talk about and the kids are genuinely interested."

In some programs, students also learn about how the sport of fly fishing relates to conservation and the need to protect these trout populations. "We also spend a few days enjoying some fishing at local ponds and the stocked Lake Lehow in Littleton," said Sanchez. "Kids appreciate the biology and learning how to fish, it's a great week."

The program allows for teachers to fit their curricular needs. Therefore, each program is unique. TIC has interdisciplinary applications in science, social studies, mathematics, language arts, fine arts, and physical education. The program was designed specifically for teachers who wanted to incorporate more environmental education into their curriculum.

Sites typically receive their eggs in October and November. The release comes in the following spring prior to the school year ending. The tanks require constant cleaning and upkeep by the teachers and students in order to ensure that the classroom trout population can make it to the release. Prior to the release, a sample of trout from each site must go through disease testing required by Colorado Parks and Wildlife.

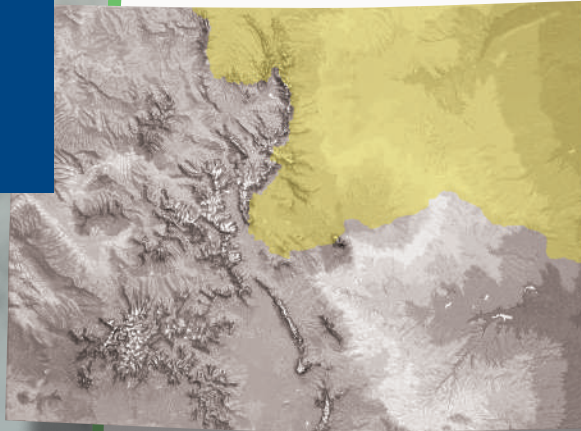
Sites are typically teamed up with a local chapter that will also help with some of the funding and supplying the classroom with the necessary equipment. This allows the chapter to connect with youth in the community and helps connect kids to their local ecosystems. "Trout in the

Classroom helps our chapter engage local middle school students by connecting them to the habitats and ecosystems in their own backyard," said Ben Bloodworth, President of the Grand Valley Anglers. "The program allows students to learn hands-on about challenges facing trout populations and water quality unique to the western slope."

Parents have also gotten into the fun through TIC. "While the program is targeted at the kids, the teachers involved have noted that many of the parents have been excited about the tanks as well, not only keeping up with the egg/fry progress through their children, but visiting the tanks during parent-teacher conferences, involving the whole family in the educational process," said Bloodworth. ■



Platte River Basin



■ Connecting Kids to the Great Outdoors

The Greenbacks and Colorado Trout Unlimited strive to educate, connect with, and influence our next generation to become conservation stewards and active participants in the fly fishing community. In 2016, two youth programs involving inner city youth were held – the first annual Forward Rising camp for inner city girls and a fishing day with Big Brothers Big Sisters of Colorado.

We partnered with Forward Rising Inc, the creator of Forward Rising camp, to conduct a weekend camping trip that focuses on engaging inner city girls through conservation, fishing, and the great outdoors. The camp partnered with Girls, Inc. of Metro Denver – an organization that inspires girls to be “Strong, smart, and bold.”

The events of the camp focused on entomology, fly tying and fly fishing. The girls all got chances to wade into the North Fork of the South Platte

to collect bug samples, fish on a privately stocked pond, and received one-on-one instructions from the Greenbacks volunteers. The camp also contained several personal and team building games and they even got a lesson from a certified survival expert.

CTU and The Greenbacks later teamed up with Big Brothers Big Sisters of Colorado and Denver Parks and Rec to host a fishing day at Lilly Pond in Wash Park. The event featured 20 matches of big brothers and their littles to spend the morning fishing. The kids learned how to fish with spin cast rods, fly rods, and of course learned about safety and proper fish handling techniques.

The pond was stocked by Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) prior to the event. CPW also provided rods and tackle to the kids that they were able to keep. One kid mentioned that he had always wanted to go fishing, but had never had the opportunity or the equipment to go. That’s now changed; for him and many others this past summer.

With help from partners, CTU and the Greenbacks have been able to engage and connect kids to fishing and conservation that may otherwise never get the chance. Through these youth programs, and future programs being developed, there will be a whole new group of kids welcomed into the fishing community. ■



Chapter Spotlight: Alpine Anglers TU (Estes Park)

Dam Removal on the North Fork of the Big Thompson River

In September 2013, the Front Range of northern Colorado received almost a year's worth of rain in just 5 days. Historical flood waters swept through all of the rivers. Following the flood, river beds were stripped of vegetation and left a jumble of boulders, riparian habitat was destroyed, and fish populations were decimated. Out of this enormous challenge, however, the Alpine Anglers Chapter and their local partners found opportunity.

During post-flood survey work, Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) biologist Ben Swigle identified a channel-spanning concrete water diversion structure near a recovery project site on the North Fork of the Big Thompson River. The diversion was built in the early 1900's to supply a state fish hatchery that is now decommissioned. Its presence in the river was a major barrier to fish passage, preventing wild trout in the mainstem of the Big Thompson from accessing spawning habitat in the upper North Fork.

TU, Wildlands Restoration Volunteers, and private landowners joined forces with CPW to do just that – replacing the diversion dam with a gradual series of fish-friendly grade control structures. In conjunction with the overall restoration of the North Fork, this project has now reconnected trout habitat where fish passage had been blocked

for a century. The chapter's partnerships helped TU's impact go further – a \$6,000 cash investment was leveraged into more than \$80,000 through matching grants and in-kind support from Opal Ranch (the landowner), CPW, and Flywater Inc.

The chapter also engaged area youth in the project. One of the area land owners, a teacher in a Greeley middle school, helped bring out more than 250 school children to take part in a day featuring willow planting, hiking, and fly fishing on the Opal Ranch ponds. These kids had the chance to connect with their "home waters" in a way many otherwise never would have experienced. ■



Greenbacks: Spawning the Future

When Greenback Cutthroat trout were found in the wild, there were so few that spawning may lead to a decline in the genetic pool. Therefore when reintroducing these native cutthroats along the Front Range, Colorado Parks and Wildlife biologists work to ensure the genetic pool remains random and the future of Greenback populations will be sustainable.

In the summer of 2016, Colorado Trout Unlimited volunteers teamed up with CPW biologist Boyd Wright and his team to spawn Greenbacks that were stocked in Zimmerman Lake the year prior. The Greenbacks in Zimmerman Lake were the first population reintroduced along the Front Range.

Volunteers helped catch Greenbacks from the lake and organize the fish into different classes to randomize the genetic pool. Classes that helped organize the fish included sex, year of birth, and the cross type. The cross type is determined by a tag in the fish that shows if it was conceived from hatchery and hatchery, hatchery and wild, or wild and wild parents.

When it came time to spawn, males were selected based on their cross type and females were selected at random – ensuring the gene pool remains large and healthy. To add to this genetic diversity, milt from two males was squeezed onto the eggs from one female.

Over 15,000 eggs were extracted and fertilized in just under three hours thanks to the hard work from

CTU volunteers combined with the knowledge, leadership, and expertise from Colorado Parks and Wildlife. These eggs were transferred to the Mt. Shavano Fish Hatchery in Salida where they will grow to be released into different waters along the Front Range. ■



A Plan for South Park

South Park is something special. This vast open landscape in western Colorado was once prized hunting lands for the Ute Indians. Today, the area remains a favorite outdoors playground for Colorado hunters, anglers and recreationists as well as a critical source of water for the Denver metro area.

Trout Unlimited and partners are working to keep it that way.

In September, TU, the National Wildlife Federation and Park County officials met with Sen. Michael Bennet in South Park to discuss the BLM's Master Leasing Plan for the area – part of the agency's new Planning 2.0 approach, which emphasizes gathering



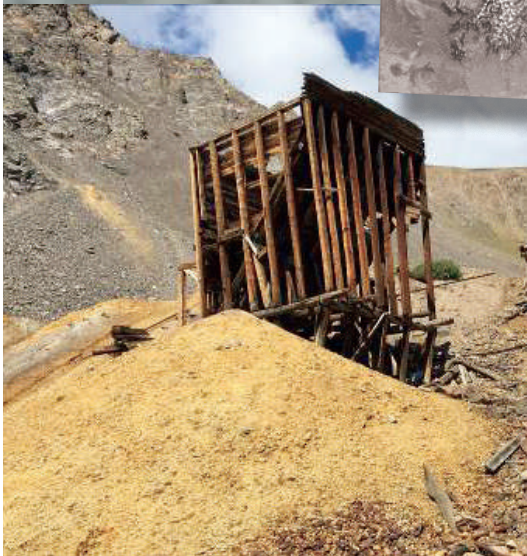
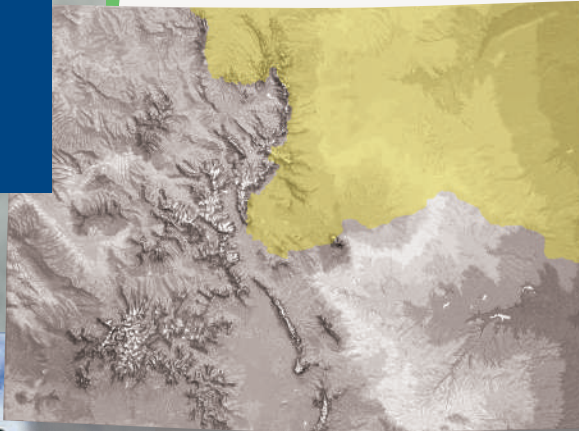
input from local stakeholders early on to avoid, as much as possible, oil and gas leasing controversies. In simple terms, an MLP is a zoning plan to help ensure that we conserve our outdoor heritage, protect water supplies, and see that oil and gas development takes place responsibly and in the right places.

"This is the backyard of the Front Range," Tyler Baskfield of TU's Sportsmen's Conservation Project told Sen. Bennet over lunch in Fairplay. "We have 54 miles of Gold Medal waters, including the Dream Stream and Spinney Mountain Reservoir – and it's within an hour and a half of anywhere on the Front Range." The area, he pointed out, is a "huge driver for hunting and fishing in the state."

After the meeting, Sen. Bennet accepted the group's invitation to fish on the Elevenmile stretch of the South Platte. On the river, Sen. Bennet managed to land the one fish brought to net by the group – a nice brown trout. The senator called the Elevenmile canyon stretch "spectacular."

In 2017, agency officials are expected to deliver the draft MLP for South Park; the plan will then be open to further public input. TU is asking the BLM to stay on track to ensure this important process moves forward in a timely manner. ■

Platte River Basin



Santiago Mine: Ore Bin 1 before (top) and after (bottom) showing re-graded slope and new foundation. All contaminated tailings/waste rock has since been removed with recent seeding and mulching evident in the after photo.

Abandoned Mine Restoration

“The toxic waste was readily accessible to humans and wildlife, making it a priority for cleanup,” said Duncan. The site is also on the state historic registry and is eligible for national historic status.

TU and partners focused on consolidating approximately 4,770 cubic yards of tailings/waste on-site and capping it with clean fill dirt. This helped eliminate non-point source runoff from the previously exposed tailings and waste piles, while also minimizing human exposure pathways.

The project also focused on preserving, stabilizing, and decontaminating the historic structures on site. For example, the interior of the mill building and all equipment were decontaminated while a sealant was applied to the floors to reduce the release of heavy metals into the air.

All of the projects deliver some benefit to watersheds and fisheries. “In some of these watersheds, mine reclamation is the first step to improving degraded stream habitat,” said Willis. “These projects help to incrementally improve the water quality, with the end goal of attaining state standards. Water quality improvement, in turn, helps achieve source water protection and enhancement of surrounding aquatic habitat.” ■

Collaboration in the Poudre Watershed

Following the 90,000 acre High Park Fire in 2012, TU’s Rocky Mountain Flycasters chapter recognized the enormous restoration challenges facing the Poudre watershed – for its fishery, the 350,000 residents for whom it supplies drinking water, and the thousands of acres of irrigated farmland that depend upon it. Post-fire erosion transported tons of additional sediment into the Poudre’s tributaries and mainstem. The scope of needed restoration was far beyond what any one organization or agency could handle on its own. And so the chapter joined with local governments and other partners to pool their capabilities and create the nonprofit Coalition for the Poudre River Watershed (CPRW) in 2013.

Today, CPRW works from the Poudre’s headwaters to its confluence with the South Platte River. Its leadership reflects a cross section of the community through a diverse group of board members from local water utilities, Colorado State University, Larimer County and individuals representing recreation, forestry, project development, volunteer management, civil engineering, business and finance, and of course, Trout Unlimited.

The CPRW has completed extensive fire-related restoration projects, but is now beginning to transition to work more on preventive measures to help reduce the impacts of the next wildfire that may hit the watershed. These new efforts include pilot thinning projects as part of a plan to develop an ongoing funded program for thinning trees in unnaturally-dense forested areas. The Coalition has worked to generate information to guide and prioritize these activities, including a forest health assessment as part of the Upper Watershed Resiliency Plan. Moving forward, TU will work with its coalition partners to extend recovery and resilience planning through the lower Poudre – including addressing impacts from flooding in 2013, improving wildlife connectivity, and restoring healthier floodplains.

Expanding their reach through collaborative conservation, the Rocky Mountain Flycasters are making a far larger difference for their home waters on the Poudre. ■

Arkansas River Basin



Chapter Spotlight: Cheyenne Mountain Chapter TU (Colorado Springs) Protecting Colorado's Rarest Trout

When the last remaining wild population of Greenback cutthroat trout was discovered to be in small Bear Creek near Colorado Springs, the Cheyenne Mountain Chapter of TU (CMCTU) adopted the stream as a major focus for their conservation and education efforts. From youth education to hands-on restoration work, stream monitoring to effective advocacy, CMCTU has been in the forefront of protecting Bear Creek's native trout.

Chapter volunteers and a summer intern helped assemble video stories of the greenback, which have been shared online, with partners, and as part of chapter presentations made to classrooms in local schools. Youth education about Bear Creek's trout got a boost when the chapter secured Embrace-a-Stream funding and prepared a special edition of TU's youth Stream Explorer publication featuring the greenback's story and a trout life-history game. CMCTU printed 10,000 copies and distributed them through schools, fly shops, nature centers, state parks, and with other TU chapters.

The chapter continued its partnership with Pikes Peak Brewing Co. in brewing an annual batch of "Bear Creek Porter" – a rye based beer brewed in small batches of 300 gallons and sold only at the Brewery itself. The seasonal brew includes a gallon of water from Bear Creek, and gives the brewery a chance to educate its customers about Bear Creek and its Greenback cutthroat trout. Looking forward, CMCTU has also secured grant funds to develop a new public outreach program: a scavenger hunt within Colorado Springs for residents and tourists to find metal Greenbacks hidden among local businesses, and upon finding them to learn about greenback cutthroats and their story.

Sediment has been the primary problem for Bear Creek's habitat. To track this concern, CMCTU volunteers have regularly conducted monitoring of the stream and its surrounding environment. This led them to discover mining activity taking place in the drainage. The chapter took photographs to document the activity and bring it to the attention of state and federal agencies with relevant authority. The prospecting operations now appear to be closed.

An unauthorized "social" trail was also found to be

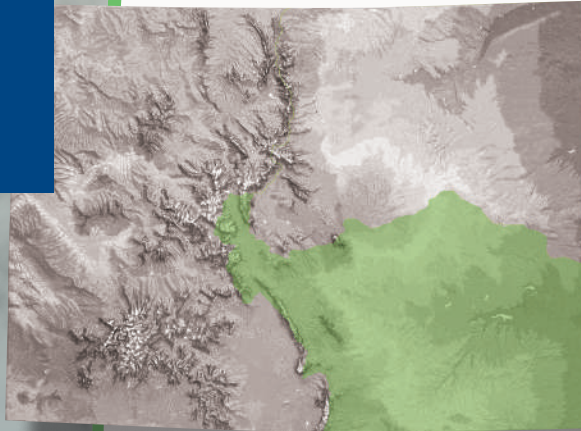
contributing significant amounts of sediment into the stream. With grant funding from the Western Native Trout Initiative, chapter volunteers and a crew from the Rocky Mountain Field Institute were able to close, stabilize and rehabilitate the trail.

More work is coming to address sediment issues in Bear Creek. After years of assessment and review, in June federal agencies completed and approved plans for closing and moving previously authorized trails impacting Bear Creek, stabilizing sediment from High Drive, and conducting stream habitat improvements. Unfortunately, some of the planned trail route – which would have been outside the Bear Creek watershed – proved infeasible on the ground. The modified plans will keep the trail within the Bear Creek drainage; CMCTU volunteers have hiked the area and provided recommendations to keep the trail as far back from the stream as possible to minimize sedimentation.

CMCTU will continue to be an advocate for Bear Creek and its greenbacks, to educate the Colorado Springs community about its unique native trout resource, and to complete on-the-ground work to improve habitat for Colorado's rarest native trout. ■



Arkansas River Basin



Youth Camp Hooks the Next Generation of Conservationist Anglers

and other organizations.

Participants also spent a day in Alamosa where they took a tour of the Native Aquatic Species Hatchery, a facility based around the restoration of Colorado's native fish. Here, over ten thousand fish are being raised with the intention of stocking them into Colorado's rivers in the future. Campers were exposed to the science behind genetics, and were able to see what it takes to bring back a species from endangerment.

The campers also participated in a restoration project in collaboration with the Purgatoire River Anglers. Campers assisted in the removal of invasive Russian Olives from riparian habitat. The rest of the week was spent with kids learning about watershed ecology, macroinvertebrate studies, fly tying, casting instructions, and practicing safe catch and release tactics.

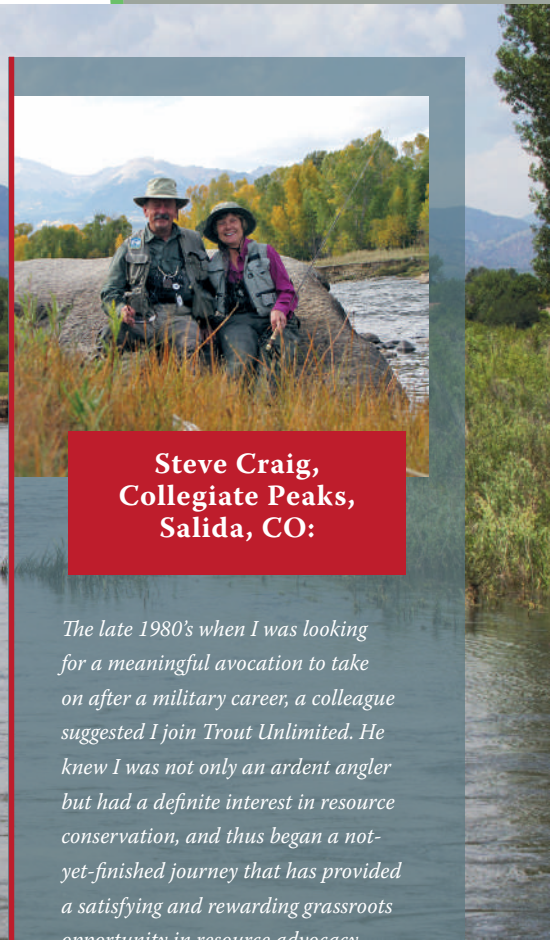
A big thanks to our incredible volunteers from the local chapter and all over the state who helped make the 2016 Youth Camp possible. ■

In June, Colorado Trout Unlimited and our Trinidad-area Purgatoire River Anglers Chapter hosted fourteen youthful and enthusiastic campers for the Conservation and Fly Fishing Youth Camp at Bar N I Ranch.

As the week progressed the campers gained experience in the worlds of conservation and fly fishing and made new connections with others who shared similar passions for the outdoors. Through fishing instruction, and participation in activities such as a fish hatchery tour and a river restoration project, the young anglers learned the relationship between the fish they are able to catch and the conservation efforts of Colorado Trout Unlimited



■ Arkansas Flows: Going for the Gold



**Steve Craig,
Collegiate Peaks,
Salida, CO:**

The late 1980's when I was looking for a meaningful avocation to take on after a military career, a colleague suggested I join Trout Unlimited. He knew I was not only an ardent angler but had a definite interest in resource conservation, and thus began a not-yet-finished journey that has provided a satisfying and rewarding grassroots opportunity in resource advocacy. Tracy and I relocated from Colorado Springs to Chaffee County, dead center in the upper Arkansas River valley, built a home, and began 20 years of volunteer and leadership roles with the Collegiate Peaks Anglers Chapter of Trout Unlimited. Along the way we observed the innumerable hours and days of volunteer efforts contributed by chapter members and effective and efficient management of donated funds. So we became donors as well as volunteers....we could see monies being used wisely to support chapter youth education programs, stream and access projects, kid's fishing events and much, much, more.

- Steve Craig



What makes the Arkansas River a Gold Medal fishery as well as one of the nation's most popular rafting destinations? It's all about managing the flows.

For decades, the Arkansas River offered poor fish habitat because of mining runoff at the headwaters near Leadville. The turnaround began in the early 1980s, when a federal Superfund designation at Leadville began the process of cleaning up the mine runoff. Then, 25 years ago, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, the Southeastern Colorado Water Conservancy District, Trout Unlimited and other users launched the Voluntary Flows Management Program (VFMP), an innovative program aimed at better managing water releases to meet multiple needs on the river, including recreational boating and fishery health.

The flow agreement was renewed in 2016 for another five years, said Drew Peternell, Director of TU's Colorado Water and Habitat Project.

The Arkansas is somewhat unique in Colorado, notes Peternell. "While many rivers in Colorado suffer low flows due to diversions for agricultural, municipal or industrial purposes, the Arkansas generally has more water flow than it would under natural conditions," he says. That's because the Arkansas receives transbasin water diverted from the Western Slope's Frying Pan River – water diverted across the Continental Divide, then delivered down

the Arkansas for municipal and agricultural use in eastern Colorado.

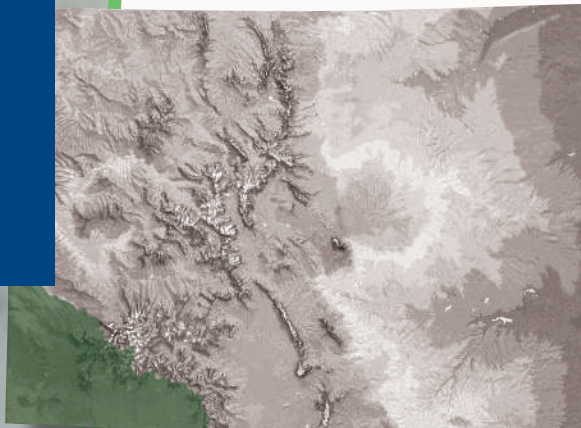
"That extra water in the system gives Arkansas River water managers a margin of flexibility to tweak flows for optimal recreational use and river health," says Peternell.

Under VFMP, the water is released at the top of the valley, at Twin Lakes Reservoir near Leadville, and recaptured in Pueblo Reservoir downstream near Pueblo. From July 1 to Aug. 15, the VFMP manages the flows to provide at least 700 cfs during the height of the summer rafting season – a flow rate that makes most sections of the Arkansas River fun to raft.

The fishery benefits, too, from these infusions of cold, clean water to flush toxins and sediment and reinvigorate the habitat. For the fishery, the VFMP reduces and stabilizes flows at other times: in winter to protect incubating brown trout eggs from dewatering, in spring to accommodate the rearing needs of young trout, and in late summer and fall to enhance the fishing experience of anglers.

In 2014, the Arkansas River was designated Gold Medal trout water – the longest stretch in Colorado. Along with extensive clean-up of abandoned mines at the headwaters, the VFMP deserves much of the credit for turning the Arkansas into fishing gold. ■

San Juan/ Animas/ Dolores River Basin



Chapter Spotlight: Five Rivers TU (Durango)

Restoring Cutthroats & Habitat in Hermosa Creek

Colorado River cutthroat trout restoration in the Hermosa Creek basin started simply enough in 1992, with about two miles of the East Fork headwaters (near Purgatory Ski Area north of Durango) being reclaimed for native trout above a natural 8 foot waterfall. Since that time, the vision and work has broadened to encompass restoration of 23 miles of connected habitat for native trout across the Hermosa headwaters, within the recently designated Hermosa Creek Watershed Protection Area.

Ongoing cooperation among TU's Five Rivers Chapter, the San Juan National Forest (SJNF), and Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) is producing a true native trout stronghold for Southwest Colorado.

In the mid-2000s, reintroduction moved to the main stem of Hermosa Creek above Hotel Draw, with construction of a barrier to prevent up-stream migration of non-natives, removal of existing non-native trout and re-stocking with native Cutthroats. This effort added another 10+ miles of cutthroat water starting from the headwaters of Hermosa Creek's mainstem.

In preparing for further restoration downstream on the mainstem, the partners completed significant habitat and bank restoration along a highly impacted stretch of Hermosa Creek between the Hotel Draw barrier and above its confluence with the East Fork.

More recently, an additional barrier was installed on the East Fork about 4 miles below the natural waterfall to secure another reach for restoration. Non-native fish have been removed from this reach, with stocking of Colorado River cutthroats scheduled for 2017.

The installation of a final barrier – below the confluence of the East Fork and the mainstem – is also scheduled for 2017. This will allow the USFS and CPW to remove non-

natives from the remaining reaches and restock cutthroats – the final piece in restoring 23 miles of contiguous habitat for native trout.

At each step of the way, the Five Rivers Chapter has been an active partner, contributing matching funds for leveraging grants and building community awareness and support. The chapter's volunteers have also been key to the project's success. From installing habitat improvements to replanting native riparian vegetation, their sweat equity has helped the agencies bring back a treasured piece of Colorado's trout angling heritage in an easily-accessible watershed enjoyed by thousands every year. ■



Trout Unlimited in Colorado 2016 Year In Review

Superfund Breakthrough for the Animas

The health of the Animas River got a major boost in 2016 when the Environmental Protection Agency placed the Gold King Mine and 47 other nearby sites on the Superfund cleanup list. Trout Unlimited leaders praised the Superfund designation as a major step forward in efforts to address the 2015 Gold King mine spill and ongoing pollution caused by historic area hardrock mines, which for decades have leached toxic heavy metals into the Animas watershed, degrading water quality and damaging the health of the Animas' Gold Medal trout habitat.

Under the Superfund plan, the present temporary water treatment plant below the Gold King mine will eventually be replaced by a permanent water treatment plant that will tap the runoff of the four worst mines and pipe it to the treatment plant, where it will be brought up to standards and then discharged.

"What's encouraging is that the EPA Superfund designation covers every major polluting mine in the headwaters of the Animas watershed—this solution is comprehensive in scope and impact," said Ty Churchwell, TU's San Juan Mountains coordinator, who will serve on the Superfund remediation team. "If done right, with sufficient collaboration, resources and follow-through, a Superfund designation could finally solve the Animas' chronic mine pollution problem and restore the Animas watershed to its full health and potential."

Good Samaritan legislation also remains a top priority for Trout Unlimited in 2017. Good Sam would create a new discharge permit category that would limit liability and make it easier for qualified Good Sam groups to help clean up abandoned mines. Currently, Clean Water Act liability has been an obstacle to such clean up projects.

Abandoned hard rock mines impair 40 percent of headwaters in the western United States, according to the EPA. ■



Chris Maughan,
Telluride, CO:



"I am proud to be a supporter of TU and the local Gunnison Gorge Anglers chapter. In 2014, Trout Unlimited partnered with the Town of Telluride and the Valley Floor Preservation Partners in order to restore an approximately one mile stretch of the San Miguel River. Reach 1 of the project was completed in October 2016. The chapter also has championed river restoration projects related to dam replacement on the Gunnison River. Each time I float the Gunnison river or walk and wade on the San Miguel I know that my support of TU has made a difference in protecting these places that I love!"

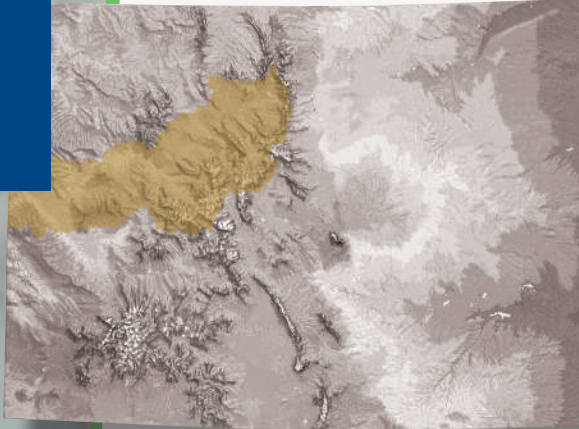
Telluride Valley Floor

The Town of Telluride partnered with TU's Gunnison Gorge Anglers Chapter, Valley Floor Preservation Partners, and the San Miguel Watershed Association to begin restoration of the San Miguel River through the Valley Floor Open Space. In 2016, the first phase of this long-term effort began with approximately one mile of the river on the east end of the valley restored from an artificial, straight conduit back into its historic meandering channel – with greatly improved stream habitat and more than 6 acres of revegetated riparian areas. Gunnison Gorge Anglers raises seed funding for this partnership through its annual "Telluride Troutapalooza" event; through grants and partner contributions TU's \$20,000 investment was leveraged into a \$1.6 million project. ■



photo: Aurelie Slegers / Brandon Green

Colorado River Basin



In November 2016, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) issued its final Record of Decision for the Roan Plateau management plan, adopting a solution that emerged from negotiations between oil and gas development interests and conservation groups including Colorado TU. The decision culminates the long-standing debate over oil and gas leasing on the Roan, including multi-year litigation.

Trout Unlimited has been hard at work on the Roan for more than two decades, with many hundreds of volunteer hours invested by the Grand Valley Anglers chapter on habitat protection and improvement

A Balanced Energy Plan for the Roan

projects from instream structures to riparian fencing and replanting. TU also installed a fish barrier to protect native cutthroat trout habitat being restored by Colorado Parks and Wildlife on the East Fork of Parachute Creek.

Alongside this on-the-ground work, Colorado TU has also been involved in advocacy and litigation to protect the Roan in the face of proposed oil and gas development. Under the plan approved by the BLM, the most sensitive watersheds atop the Roan will remain unleased for the next 20 years, while responsible development will proceed on other areas on and around the Plateau that are closer to existing oil and gas infrastructure. Continued improvements in directional drilling technology over those years could make it possible, by the time BLM next updates the Roan plan, to develop natural gas reserves below the Roan without needing to sacrifice the valuable habitat on its surface. The plan, supported by conservationists and oil and gas leaseholders alike, is a great example of how balance can be achieved when all parties work together honestly and respectfully to craft a solution. ■

Restoring a Long-lost River: The Swan Partnership

More than 100 years ago, the Upper Swan River valley near Breckenridge was full of thick willows where beavers and moose made their homes while native cutthroat trout freely migrated among the river's tributaries. For the past century, however, the valley floor where the river once flowed was instead filled with dredge rock, a legacy left over from the mining days when man and machine ravaged the landscape in search of gold.

In some ways the river still does run: the water is still there, except most of it is buried by thousands of cubic yards of dredge gravels. Imagine a river and its valley basically turned upside down. Dig down 20 feet and you'll find the stream. The river is still fed by snow melt from the Continental Divide, but the channel and habitat for fish and wildlife is mostly gone.

Enter the Swan River Partnership. A coalition including Summit County Open Space & Trails, the Town of Breckenridge, the US Forest Service,

Colorado Parks and Wildlife, the Gore Range Chapter of TU, and others has been working together to begin restoring the Swan River – starting on public lands owned by the Town of Breckenridge and Summit County. In 2016, remaining waste rock was removed from the valley (and stockpiled for milling and future use in construction), the area was re-graded and topsoiled, and over one mile of channel, as well as riparian and upland areas, were restored on a 30-acre parcel along the Swan. Work was completed just before snow came to the area, including hydroseeding so that native grasses should be ready to grow in the recovery area after snowmelt in spring. The team plans to finalize installation of larger native plantings on this restored reach during spring 2017.

Restoration of the full valley will be a challenging long-term effort – but through local partnerships, the first big steps have been taken. For this first reach, the long-absent Swan River flows again. ■



Summit County Open Space





Chapter Spotlight: Grand Valley Anglers TU (Grand Junction)

Willows on the Roan

The Grand Valley Anglers chapter, with just nine volunteers, had a successful montane willow planting with the Bureau of Land Management on Trapper Creek on the Roan Plateau. The chapter got 200 willows in the ground and caged. GVA has been working on Trapper Creek for almost 30 years, securing



and restoring habitat for native Colorado River cutthroat trout. The newly-planted willows will provide protection, food, and shelter for the cutthroats in Trapper Creek, helping sustain the population. Trapper Creek is one of the areas protected under the final BLM decision on the Roan Plateau ■

Colorado River Project Secures \$8 Million Grant

TU's ambitious vision for restoring the upper Colorado River received a huge boost in December, when the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) announced \$7.75 million in funding for a slate of projects to address the impacts on the Colorado River from trans-mountain diversions of water from the West Slope to the Front Range.

Trout Unlimited was the lead partner on the Colorado River Headwaters Project grant application to the NRCS's Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), which awarded the funds. Led by an array of partners representing conservation interests, agriculture, local government, water providers, state agencies, and landowners, the Headwaters Project will create a bypass channel to reconnect the Colorado River at Windy Gap Reservoir, make channel and habitat improvements downstream of the bypass near Kremmling, Colorado, and improve irrigation systems as well as soil and water quality.

When fully implemented, the Headwaters Project will directly benefit more than 30 miles of the Colorado River and 4,500 acres of irrigated lands that provide sage grouse habitat and make available up to 11,000 acre-feet of water to improve the river during low-flow conditions.

"This is a huge win for the Colorado River," said Drew Peterzell, director of Trout Unlimited's Colorado Water and Habitat Project. "We're seeing an exciting and ambitious conservation vision for the upper Colorado become reality. With this funding, we'll be able to put the ecosystem pieces of the upper Colorado River back together and restore the river and its trout fishery to health."

Local ranchers wanted to address irrigation problems caused by low flows as well as improve river health, said Paul Bruchez, a Kremmling-area rancher who organized his neighboring landowners into the Irrigators of Land in Vicinity of Kremmling (ILVK) group, a key project partner. The project will install several innovative instream structures designed to provide adequate water levels for irrigation while also improving critical fish habitat. This will be the first project in the country to demonstrate these stream engineering practices on a significant scale.

"This news is life-changing for the headwaters of the Colorado River and those who rely on it," said Bruchez. "Years ago, water stakeholders in this region were at battle. Now, it is a collaboration that will create resiliency and sustainability for the health of the river and its agricultural producers. Healthy ranches need healthy rivers, and the RCPP funding

will help sustain both."

The Windy Gap Reservoir bypass and the Kremmling area river improvements address several pieces of the puzzle in TU's long-term, regional vision to restore the upper Colorado River. Other pieces include agreements that TU helped negotiate with Denver Water and the Northern Colorado Water District that contained significant river protections as well as an innovative, long-term monitoring and adaptive management process (called "Learning by Doing") that requires stakeholders to work together to ensure the future health of the river (see page 16).

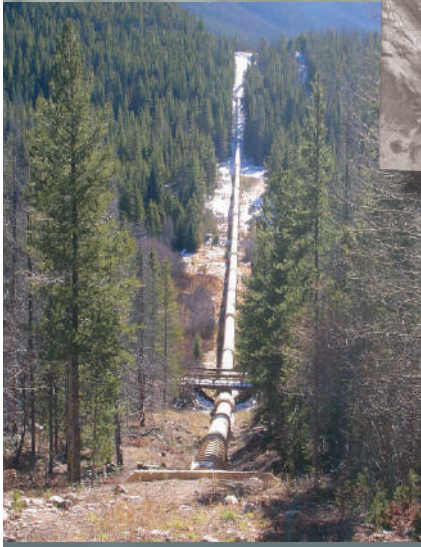
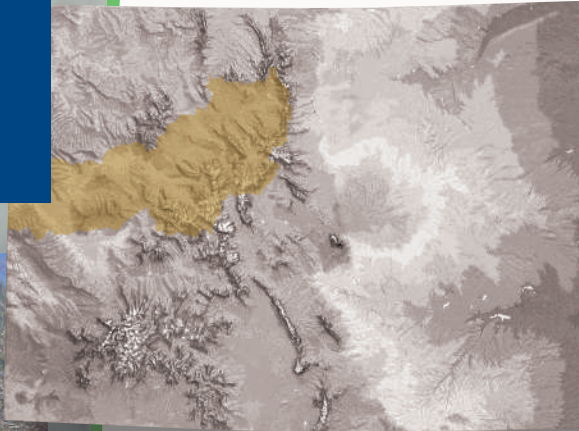
That progress and collaboration is all the more remarkable coming after years of conflict between West Slope interests and conservation groups concerned about the health of the river; and Front Range water providers seeking to divert more water across the Divide.

"What's happening on the upper Colorado shows that water users can work together to ensure river health while meeting diverse uses," said Peterzell. "This project is a model of what cooperation and collaboration can achieve in meeting our water challenges in Colorado and the Colorado River Basin."

Other Headwaters Project partners who will provide assistance include the ILVK, Northern Water Conservation District, Denver Water, Colorado River Conservation District, Middle Park Soil Conservation District, Colorado Water Conservation Board, Grand County, and Colorado Parks and Wildlife. ■



Colorado River Basin



‘Learning by Doing’ Boosts Fraser River

River just south of County Road 83 outside of Fraser. Of particular benefit to Grand County residents, the section upstream from CR 83 will open for public fishing once the restoration project is completed in spring 2018.

This \$200,000 project is funded by a combination of funds committed to the LBD cooperative effort from Grand County, LBD partner contributions, a private landowner, and a Fishing Is Fun grant from Colorado Parks and Wildlife.

In spring 2017, project partners will begin revegetation along the Fraser Flats reach. LBD partners will recruit volunteers to harvest and replant willow stakes and other native plants to improve bank stability and provide cooling shade along this open meadow stretch of the Fraser River.

In fall 2017, restoration work in the river will concentrate flows into a narrower channel and provide a series of riffles and pools to enhance fish habitat.

The Fraser Flats River Habitat Project is just one example of the benefits LBD will deliver. In summer 2016, the group worked with Denver Water to secure additional flows in Ranch Creek, Vasquez Creek and the Fraser River to benefit aquatic life during critical low flow periods.

Full operation of LBD is expected to start in 2018 when approximately \$2 million and 1,000 acre-feet of water to improve stream conditions will be dedicated to the cooperative effort after Denver Water and Northern Water receive final project permits.

“The Fraser Flats project really shows what LBD can accomplish,” said Kirk Klancke, president of TU’s Colorado River Headwaters chapter. “By working together, we’re finding pragmatic solutions that will keep this river alive and healthy.”

To learn more about Learning By Doing and the Fraser Flats project, go to www.grandcountylearningbydoing.org/ ■

Sportsmen Win Victory on Thompson Divide

In November, TU and the sportsmen community hailed the decision by the Bureau of Land Management to remove the immediate threat of oil and gas drilling in Colorado’s Thompson Divide, a spectacular backcountry area prized for its fish and wildlife resources.

The BLM decision canceled 25 leases within the Thompson Divide, while allowing 40 oil and gas leases outside of the Thompson Divide to remain in place. Those leases tend to be closer to existing oil and gas infrastructure.

The Thompson Divide is a near-pristine 221,500 acres of federal land in Pitkin, Garfield and Mesa counties that contains some of the most productive habitat for big game, cutthroat trout and numerous other native species. The area is used by more than 10,000 resident and nonresident big game hunters every year and serves as the headwaters to some of Colorado’s most popular and prolific fisheries, including the Roaring Fork, North Fork of the Gunnison and Crystal rivers.

“This decision demonstrates how influential a united sportsmen’s community can be in ensuring future access to healthy habitat and strong fishing and hunting opportunities,” said Steve Kandell, director of Trout Unlimited’s Sportsmen’s Conservation Project. “Sportsmen joined with ranchers, local businesses, environmentalists, mountain bikers, and off-highway vehicle users to develop a local solution that balances energy development with habitat protection.

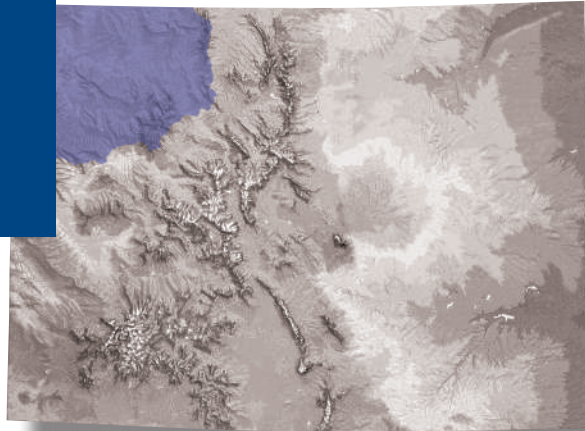
Sportsmen, local economies and residents will benefit from this decision.”

The victory was a satisfying conclusion to a long conservation struggle. For nearly a decade, Trout Unlimited and the Sportsmen for the Thompson Divide coalition have been working with hunters and anglers, the oil and gas industry and the Roaring Fork Valley community to develop an equitable solution concerning 65 contested oil and gas leases in and around the Thompson Divide within the White River National Forest, just south of the Roaring Fork Valley.

Although the leases within the Thompson Divide were canceled, there is still more work to be done to ensure permanent protection of its incredible wildlife and water resources. To that end, Congress needs to pass legislation that secures permanent protection for the Thompson Divide to remove the possibility of this land being leased by oil and gas companies in the future.

“TU and its membership want to ensure we are not battling for the future of this great place again,” said Tyler Baskfield, TU’s Colorado sportsmen’s coordinator. “TU will continue to work with the Thompson Divide Coalition, elected officials such as Sen. Bennet, local businesses, land management agencies and all of the other voices to make sure permanent protection comes to fruition. We want sportsmen to be secure in the fact that the Thompson Divide will be providing outdoor recreation opportunities for generations to come.” ■

Yampa/ White River Basin



Hodge Receives Fisheries Award

In 2016, the U.S. Forest Service and the Routt National Forest announced that TU's Brian Hodge was among the recipients of the 2015 Rise to the Future Awards for excellence and leadership in fisheries restoration.

Hodge, an aquatic restoration biologist with TU's Western Water and Habitat Project, works out of Steamboat Springs in the Yampa and White River basins with the primary goal of restoring healthy stream flows and habitat. His projects have resulted in 12 miles of habitat restored, 13 miles of habitat connected, 165 acres of watershed improvements, three barriers constructed, and helped improve habitat and populations for several sensitive species, including the native Colorado River cutthroat trout.

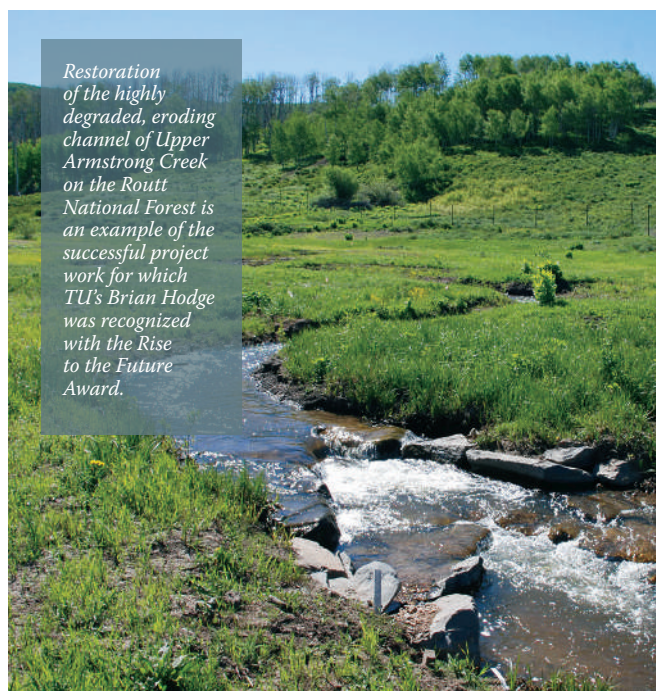
"Since he arrived in 2010, Brian has become an integral advocate, partner, and colleague," said Rick Henderson, Routt National Forest Fishery Biologist. "He has been involved in 19 stream and riparian restoration projects either on or immediately adjacent to the Forest, represented Trout Unlimited on numerous teams, and become a recognized leader in aquatic restoration within the region."

"Brian is one of the real stars of Trout Unlimited's Colorado staff," said Drew Peternell, the director of TU's Colorado water program. "An outstanding biologist and project manager, Brian is making a big difference for fisheries in northwest Colorado. He understands that collaboration and building partnerships are key to getting conservation work done on the ground, where it counts." ■

Congratulations, Brian!



Restoration of the highly degraded, eroding channel of Upper Armstrong Creek on the Routt National Forest is an example of the successful project work for which TU's Brian Hodge was recognized with the Rise to the Future Award.



Chapter Spotlight:

Yampa Valley Flyfishers TU (Steamboat Springs)

Yampa Valley Fly Fishers Youth Programs

Yampa Valley Fly Fishers chapter of TU is working to ensure that conservation efforts and mentality are transferred to our next generation of stewards. The chapter has been working with various schools in the area- including taking 30 teachers from Craig, Granby, Meeker, Walden, and Kremmling to teach "Why to Incorporate Fly Fishing into your Curriculum." The goal of this teacher meeting was to get watershed focus folded in the curriculum of all teachers in the area. The chapter helps instruct these teachers how to start up a fly fishing club, the youth resources available to teachers provided by Trout Unlimited, Entomology, and Fly fishing Basics. The chapter also holds twice a month meetings at the local middle school to teach fly tying, casting, entomology, and fishing to roughly 30-40 students. ■



Gunnison River Basin



Chapter Spotlight: *Gunnison Angling Society TU (Gunnison)* **Adopt-A-Trout**



The Gunnison Angling Society Chapter of TU partnered with Colorado Parks and Wildlife and Gunnison Watershed School District to Adopt-A-Trout (AAT) in Tomichi Creek, a tributary of the Gunnison River.

For this project, the chapter and partners purchased 15 RF tags that were surgically implanted into various fish in the selected area. By attaching the RF tags to the fish in the creek, the chapter, CPW, and the partners involved could follow these trout and see what kind of movement they made and provide more information as to what causes fish to move.

The AAT program supports the dual goals of youth education and fisheries research that will contribute to the understanding of local aquatic ecosystems. AAT is a national Trout Unlimited sponsored program. The program represents an inclusive approach to repairing and maintaining a healthy watershed that combines education, research, and on the ground restoration.

The project was initiated in the Gunnison watershed to help study trout movement and involve kids in the learning process. When the project started there were two Gunnison High School classes that were involved and over 25 students have been on field trips to help track the movements. Through the project, students have the opportunity to develop an understanding of issues affecting their watershed, explore their connection with ecology, and engage in the scientific process in a real world research project.

"I wanted to get the program going locally to help students develop more awareness and appreciation for our watershed and I thought the experience might generate some interest in resource management career paths," said Jesse Kruthaupt, Upper Gunnison Project Specialist for TU. "In addition to those benefits, understanding trout behaviors in this area will be a very useful discussion making and monitoring tool for future restoration work. TU couldn't have done this alone, Colorado Parks and Wildlife and the Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District deserve a big 'Thank You' for helping to make this happen." ■



Saving Water for Fish and Farms

For more than a decade, farms and cities that depend on the Colorado River have faced a looming crisis, with water being depleted by increasing demand and decreasing supply. The result has been critically low levels in Lakes Mead and Powell, the major storage reservoirs in the Basin, and low flows for fish and aquatic habitat.

Finding ways to make the Colorado River's finite water resources go further in the face of drought – that's the goal of the System Conservation Pilot Project. Launched in 2014 by Denver Water and three other major utilities, as well as the Bureau of Reclamation, SCPP encourages agriculture and municipal users to reduce water use in the basin through voluntary, compensated and temporary reductions in water use.

In the last two years, TU has been a leader in partnering with agriculture producers to launch SCPP projects in Colorado – primarily in the Gunnison River Basin, a major tributary of the Colorado – as well as in Utah and Wyoming. TU's collaborative partnerships with ranchers and farmers have focused on three main ways to conserve water: a change to a less water-intensive crop, deficit irrigation, and fallowing crops.

For example, in 2016, TU's Cary Denison worked with farmer David Harold of Olathe on a project to reduce water consumption on about 50 acres of historically farmed ground by implementing a low-water use, short-season cover crop. The water

savings from this year are in excess of 66 acre-feet of water.

TU's Jesse Kruthaupt, working in the upper Gunnison, a major tributary of the Colorado, enrolled two producers in the program. They agreed to shut off their irrigation on July 1 – about 20 days ahead of schedule – and were compensated for the water conserved after that date. Their participation made a huge difference for local streams and fish.

"By July 7, the flows in area streams had plummeted," said Kruthaupt. "In one case the stream would have dried up if the producer had not enrolled in the program."

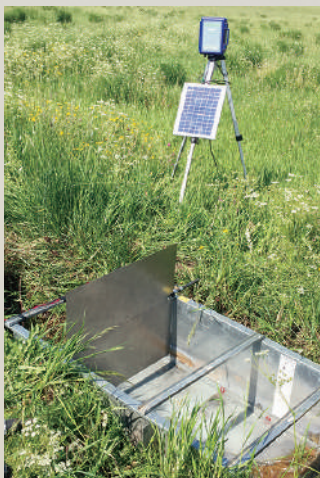
Over the last two years, TU has facilitated over 22 projects that resulted in the conservation of more than 7,500 acre feet of water in the Upper Colorado River Basin.

In fall 2016, TU submitted 32 project applications in the third and latest round of proposals for 2017 pilot projects. Taken together, these transactions would conserve almost 23,000 acre-feet of water.

"The important thing we've learned is that many agricultural producers are willing to undertake voluntary curtailment for compensation," said Drew Peternell, director of TU's Colorado Water and Habitat Project. "TU has helped show that the potential is there – our next great challenge is finding the money to fully fund the program and meet the demand." ■

Measures Help Save 7,500 Acre Feet of Water

TU partnered with the Kubiack Ditch to install new structure on the ditch, complete significant repairs on the ditch, and to install a stock tank on the range pasture. Collectively these improvements boost production and reduce labor for ranchers, while helping reduce diversions during low flow periods.



(Auto-tarp): This prototype auto-tarp mechanism is an automated irrigation check structure that can open or close based on communication with soil moisture sensors installed in the irrigated field or based on a timer installed with the structure. The auto-tarp can provide a cost-effective alternative to improve irrigation efficiency.



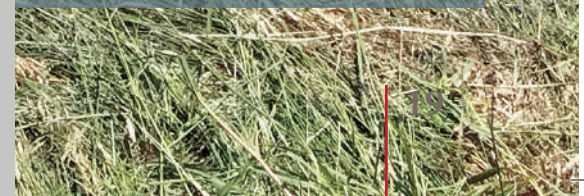
Kubiack Ditch pre repairs. ▲



TU's Jesse Kruthaupt, helped water users on Castle Creek to install flumes with sensors that provide twice-daily flow data by satellite, allowing irrigators to monitor what is happening at the headgate and helping them prevent the creek from being dried up.

Derek R. Kehmeier, Black Canyon Anglers/ Gunnison River Farms Austin, CO:

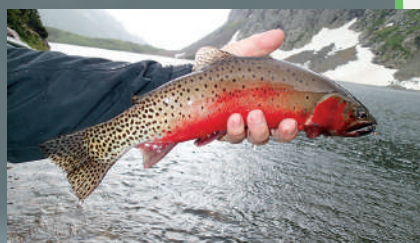
"Black Canyon Anglers and Gunnison River Farms support Trout Unlimited because they protect the river that we depend on for our outfitting and farm operations. Healthy flows and good water quality are essential to both parts of our business and TU is making the Gunnison better for farms and fish."



Rio Grande Basin

Great Sand Dune Cutthroats

Most people associate the Great Sand Dune National Park in southern Colorado with sand, not trout. But TU's Kevin Terry has taken a lead role in studying how to reintroduce native Rio Grande cutthroats to Sand Creek, a beautiful and remote watershed on the north side of Great Sand Dunes Park where these natives once flourished.



The project involves evaluating multiple high elevation lakes and numerous miles of mainstem and tributary habitats for suitability in reintroducing Rio Grande cutts. With the help of partners, including the National Park Service, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, and the USGS, Terry's work on Sand Creek could help provide an important additional refuge for Rio Grande cutts in the face of rising temperatures and climate change.

Terry's creative conservation work earned him a prestigious Gila Trout Award in 2016 at the annual Wild and Native Trout Conference in Phoenix. The nomination cited Terry's "remarkable work with Rio Grande Cutthroat trout and his contributions towards public education and protection/proliferation of the species," and praised Terry's gift for building "strong working relationships" with a variety of stakeholders, from water providers to recreational interests, ranchers to state and federal agencies. ■



A Sportsmen's Vision for Rio Grande National Forest

Trout Unlimited to let the voices of our members be heard, and are powerful tools to achieve our mission of healthy coldwater fisheries and watersheds on our most valuable resource – public lands," said Garrett Hanks, TU's Colorado coordinator on forest planning.

Trout Unlimited, with local stakeholder input, has developed a "Sportsmen's Vision" for the Rio Grande National Forest that includes several broad goals:

- Identifying key watersheds for habitat conservation and restoration to support native fish and other aquatic species.
- Establishing Sportsmen's Emphasis Areas that provide quality opportunities for angling and hunting by protecting and restoring fish and wildlife habitat for key species.
- Recommending watersheds as candidates for improvement and future restoration projects.

These special management areas would protect and enhance key fish and wildlife habitat while providing opportunities for traditional sporting values, said Hanks. ■

Forest planning provides a way for sportsmen and women to engage with the largest public land manager in Colorado – the U.S. Forest Service – and help guide decisions affecting habitat, wildlife and outdoor opportunities. Under a new 2012 Planning Rule, forests nationwide are revising their management plans and public involvement is encouraged.

The Rio Grande National Forest is in the midst of revising a 20-year-old Forest Plan and accepting public comment. This plan will set guidelines to what management activities happens where on the forest, and identifies natural resource priorities across 3 million publicly owned acres in southern Colorado.

"These forest plan revisions provide an avenue for

Flyathlon

Over the last several years, Colorado Trout Unlimited has partnered with an ambitious group of volunteers to host the Middle Creek Flyathlon in a remote watershed in the San Luis Valley. A Flyathlon is an event that fuses the seemingly incongruous disciplines of fly-fishing and trail running, all washed down with delicious Colorado craft beers. The primary goal of the Flyathlon is to expose a new audience to fly-fishing and coldwater conservation in a relaxed and fun environment. Additionally, in the lead up to the event, "flyathletes" raise funds from their own networks to benefit native trout projects with top fundraisers winning prizes donated from a diverse array of sponsors.

In June 2016, with money raised during the 2015 Middle Creek Flyathlon, Colorado Trout Unlimited partnered with Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado to rehabilitate several miles of trail in the Middle Creek watershed. Nearly a dozen past Flyathlon participants and volunteers showed up for this three-day service weekend. During this weekend, we also

installed the first of a Flyathlon-funded series of Rio Grande cutthroat trout



educational signs at the Middle Creek trailhead.

In August 2016, the 3rd Annual Middle Creek Flyathlon was held near Saguache, Colorado. The event, which sold out in less than a day, brought more than 50 flyathletes to a challenging course in the San Luis Valley with opportunities to catch and release Rio Grande cutthroat trout. Incredibly, due in large part to the coaching of volunteer master guide Ben McGee, everyone who participated in the event caught and released a trout, some for the first time ever. In total, the Middle Creek Flyathlon raised nearly \$25,000, money that will be put to work on native trout projects in the San Luis Valley by Colorado TU and conservation partner Western Native Trout Initiative (WNTI). One such project involves significant cattle exclusion and riparian revegetation effort on Jim Creek near La Jara Reservoir, a project spearheaded by TU employee and Flyathlon volunteer Kevin Terry.

In September 2016, a new Flyathlon event was debuted on the Lake Fork of the Gunnison River near Curecanti National Recreation Area. This sold-out event ran flyathletes five miles down the picturesque Gateview Canyon stretch, where large rainbow and brown trout lurk. Complicated only slightly by cold weather and challenging fishing conditions, the weekend was a great success, raising more than \$10,000 for native trout projects through Colorado TU and WNTI. Another highlight of the weekend came in the form of our women's race winner, 13-year old Isabella Garcia!

Finally, after three years of working under Colorado TU's auspices, in late September 2016, the volunteer organizers of the Flyathlon race series were awarded their own 501(c)(3) status. This new nonprofit, Running Rivers (www.runningrivers.org), will continue to partner with CTU and WNTI to hold Flyathlon events in 2017 and beyond, including helping to grow the Flyathlon model into new states. You can learn more at www.flyathlon.org. ■

Chapter Spotlight: San Luis Valley TU (Alamosa)

Hidden Mile of the Conejos

The Hidden Mile of the Conejos project was completed this year by the San Luis Valley Chapter of TU. The initial portions of the project involved a large amount of fence construction to fence out trespassing cattle and provide parking and access. Fencing materials were provided by the Forest Service and TU volunteers worked side by side with Forest Service personnel to complete the fencing construction. This included the installation of a floating fence on the upper and lower ends of the project.

This section of the river is a relatively unnoticed section bordered on the upper and lower boundaries by private land. There was no designated access to the river or signage of any kind. This section of the river is in an area where the grade flattens out. Years of trespassing cattle had severely damaged the riparian area and there was very little structure, and consequently very few fish.

San Luis Valley TU applied for and received a grant for approximately \$80,000 from The CPW Fishing is Fun program. The chapter provided additional funding in order to hire a company to design the restoration work and provide oversight of the in-river work. ■



■ Winter flows on Conejos

The Conejos River has always been an undervalued gem among Colorado's trout rivers – in the upper sections of the river, it's almost Gold Medal status. But for years, the river has fallen short of its potential because of chronic low flows in the winter, which suppress trout populations.

When biologist Kevin Terry joined TU's Colorado staff in 2013, one of his charges was improving flows in the Conejos. He has delivered with the Conejos Winter Flow Program (CWFP).

After talking to numerous stakeholders and learning more about the history and regulations of the river system, Terry launched the CWFP to provide healthier flows for fish year-round, focusing on the 15-mile stretch between Platoro Reservoir and the south fork of the Conejos, where low flows and winter ice forced fish to pack into crowded holes.

Under CWFP, Terry worked with local water districts and irrigators to voluntarily adopt more flexible schedules for their water deliveries, to provide more sustained flows during the fall and winter. The target was putting an extra 3 cubic feet per second (cfs) of water in the Conejos during winter months – an almost 42 percent boost in river flows during that period.

The revamped water management provides multiple benefits for both fish and recreation and also the water users on both the Rio Grande and Conejos Rivers. "Everyone benefited from taking a closer look at how water could be managed for a greater impact," Terry said. "The valley is really getting behind this program because we are taking care of our fish and our farms too." ■



Courtesy Conejos River Anglers



Willis Honored for Kerber Creek

Jason Willis, TU's Mine Restoration Project Manager, was awarded the 2016 Excellence in Project Implementation award from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's Water Quality Control Division for his work cleaning up abandoned mine pollution on Kerber Creek.

The completed project has restored almost 11 miles of stream through installation of in-stream and bank stabilization structures,



as well as treatment and revegetation of over 85 acres of mine tailings along the floodplain. This puts the restored portion of Kerber Creek at 43 percent of the total 25 miles in length from headwaters to confluence with San Luis Creek.

"It's gratifying to receive an award like this from a partner organization in front of all of my peers at the Sustaining Colorado Watersheds Conference, especially when there are so many other talented people working in this field," said Willis. "It also means a lot to TU because not only does it highlight a great project achievement, it also recognizes the ability of Trout Unlimited to conceptualize and carry-out successful mine reclamation clean-up projects." ■

Investing in Colorado

2016 Financials

Income

Individual and
Corporate Donations
\$522,000

Chapter Fundraising
\$834,000

Grant Funding
\$3.25 Million

Events & Other
Leveraged Funds
\$177,000

Total Income
\$4.78 Million

Expenditure

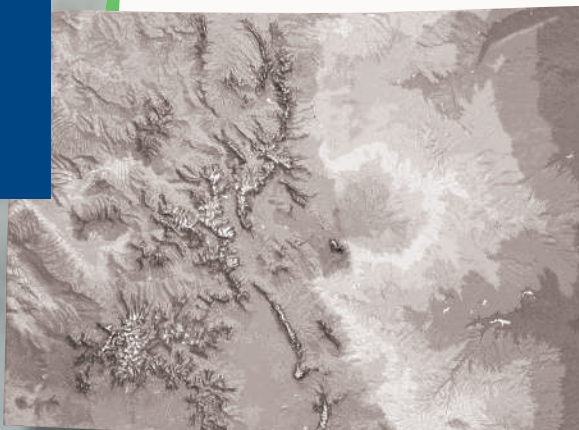
Program Services
\$3.92 Million

Administrative
\$469,000

Development
\$239,000

Total Expenditure
\$4.63 Million

(Net income applied toward
reserves for future projects.)



In fiscal year 2016, Trout Unlimited in Colorado invested more than \$4.6 million toward its conservation and education programs, on-the-ground projects, and chapter support. These funds included the work of the Colorado Council and its chapters – from legislative advocacy at the General Assembly to an annual youth camp to post-flood restoration projects; as well as Colorado-based National Trout Unlimited programs and staff working on initiatives for river conservation, agriculture partnerships, public land protection, and abandoned mine reclamation.

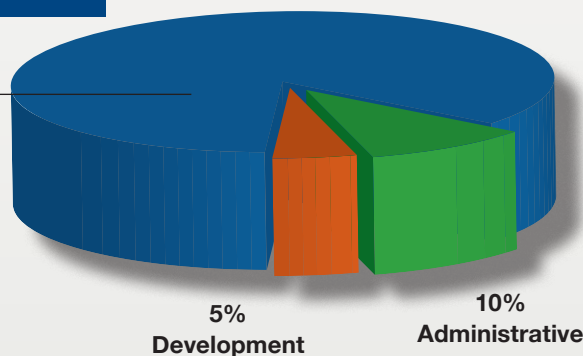
Through the leveraging power of partnerships and grassroots contributions, TU helps make every donor dollar go farther for our conservation

mission. Corporate and individual donations of \$522,000 were leveraged by \$4.26 million in leveraged funds from grants, events, and other matching funds. TU cash funds in Colorado were complemented by an additional \$1.18 million in “sweat equity” – the value of more than 45,000 volunteer hours contributed through our grassroots volunteers. In total, more than \$10 of conservation value was generated from each \$1 of individual and corporate support.

The vast majority of TU funds go directly into programs for conservation, education, and grassroots engagement. For fiscal year 2016, 85% of TU in Colorado funds were directed toward program services, 10% for general administration, and 5% for fundraising. ■

Expenditure

85% - Program
Services



Income



**More than 10:1
Leveraging of Your
Commitment!**

\$522,000 –
Individual and
Corporate
Donations

Your Support Makes the Difference!

The River Stewardship Council (RSC) is Colorado Trout Unlimited's flagship donor program. With annual gifts of \$1000 or more, this core group of donors sustains Colorado TU's work on native trout restoration, youth education, engagement with our 24 chapters, and more. This community of over sixty donors is committed to conserving, protecting, and restoring Colorado's rivers and watersheds and enjoys exclusive trip invites and an annual donor dinner.

The Griffith Circle honors the legacy of National Trout Unlimited's founders while raising essential resources to continue the march toward their vision. Griffith Circle members show their commitment to all of Trout Unlimited's important work nationwide by making annual contributions of \$1,000 or more. Your gifts will support the full range of Trout Unlimited projects—conservation science as well as environmental education, advocacy, hands-on restoration work, and much more.

The Silver Trout Foundation was established through a generous bequest from former Colorado Trout Unlimited president Steve Lundy. With a voting membership made up of past recipients of the prestigious Silver Trout award, the Foundation manages endowment funds for the long-term benefit of Colorado Trout Unlimited and its conservation mission. The Silver Trout Foundation provides donors interested in making endowment gifts a vehicle for leaving their own legacy of coldwater conservation.

For more information or to join RSC or the Griffith Circle, or to discuss legacy giving through the Silver Trout Foundation, please reach out to Shannon Kindle, Colorado Trout Unlimited Development Director, at skindle@tu.org or **303-868-3276**.

Thank you!

Thank You!

Trout Unlimited thanks the generous individuals, businesses, and foundations whose support – along with yours – makes our successes possible:

Griffith Circle/River Stewardship Council Donors

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