



# Funding the Future of Fish and Wildlife

by Colorado TU Staff



Anglers and hunters have long paid the way for fish and wildlife management in Colorado and in other states – through purchase of licenses, and through federal excise taxes paid on equipment used by hunters and anglers that is allocated to state fish and wildlife agencies. Many take pride in contributing to the conservation and professional management of the fish and wildlife species we enjoy as sportspeople.

In recent years, Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) has seen its resources becoming increasingly squeezed. The last resident license fee increase took place in 2005 – and since that time, expenses have climbed by more than 25% and the number of people living in Colorado has grown rapidly, putting more and more pressure on fish, wildlife, and their habitat. The agency has cut or defunded 50 positions and sliced \$40 million from its wildlife budget – without new funding, further cuts will be required.

CPW will be approaching the Colorado General Assembly in 2018 with a fee authority package to allow them to raise fees to offset the loss of value to inflation, including adjusting future fees to track

inflation. We approached CPW to find out what kinds of projects or programs will benefit from the increase in funding – what new dollars from fee increases can make possible. Several of those major angling investments are described here.

## Modernizing Colorado Fish Hatcheries

Colorado Parks and Wildlife has 19 fish hatcheries located across the state – averaging more than 75 years in age. While some maintenance has been done over the years, it hasn't kept up with the aging process. An example is the Durango Hatchery, one of the oldest in Colorado. The facility raises about 150,000 catchable trout and more than 1.2 million native cutthroat, kokanee, and brown trout each year for stocking in southwest Colorado.

The Durango hatchery has several thousand feet of concrete raceways in various state of disrepair, with an estimated repair cost of \$700,000 to \$1 million. Aging water collection systems, pipelines, valves and other necessary infrastructure has an estimated replacement/repair cost of another \$500,000. And all of this does not include building

maintenance or repair. Without a significant amount of repair in the next few years, catastrophic failure could result in losing hundreds of thousands of fish and potentially having to close the facility.

The cost of completely modernize the Durango hatchery with state-of-the-art aquaculture technology would be \$3-4 million. Although not all 19 hatcheries are as old or in as much disrepair, more than half are in a similar situation. Without reinvestment in hatchery infrastructure, CPW's ability to provide fish for stocking programs – catchable trout in reservoirs, native cutthroat for recovery efforts, fingerling fish for put-and-grow programs – will decline over the years ahead.

## Reservoir Repairs

The dam on Lake John (in



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the North Park area of northern Colorado) is the responsibility of CPW – and it is in need of repair and maintenance. The trout fishery in Lake John is one of the most productive in the state and is highly valued and used by anglers. It is estimated that fishing at Lake John results in an economic impact to Colorado of over \$2.5 million annually. Other dams that are need of repair include Steamboat Lake, Tarryall Reservoir, and Skaguay Reservoir – all recognized for their fishing and recreational value to many of our citizens and visitors (and with a combined \$3.25 million of economic benefits to the state). Unfortunately, without needed repairs on these dams, they will become unsafe and may be placed under restriction by the Division of Water Resources – meaning that they could no longer safely store the water that supports their outstanding lake fisheries and would instead need to be drawn down.

## "Fishing is Fun"

For three decades, CPW's Fishing Is Fun program has invested in angling improvements across Colorado, opening up new fishing opportunities and improving existing ones. Through more than 350 projects, Fishing Is Fun has made angling available from urban settings to rural towns to the mountain streams and rivers for which Colorado is famous. Projects are sponsored by angling organizations such as TU chapters, local governments, parks and recreation departments, water providers and others. Historically, local match has covered more than 40% of the to-

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tal project costs, so the boost to local angling projects is nearly double each dollar invested. Unfortunately, as agency funding has tightened, Fishing Is Fun grants have been cut by more than half, from \$900,000 annually to \$400,000.

Examples of the work Fishing is Fun has supported – and that can increase with restored funding - include:

Clear Creek has grown as a brown trout fishery in recent years as mining pollution problems have been addressed. But despite its proximity to the Denver metro area, and good quality existing or potential fish habitat, angler access was difficult and limited. Over the last ten years, Fishing Is Fun has supported projects stretching from Golden up to Silver Plume that make it easier for anglers to get into the water. Improvements include rock stairs to navigate steep banksides, short access trails, safe off-road parking, and stream habitat improvement.

Multi-year investments in the Blue River north of Silverthorne, the Yampa River around Steamboat Springs, and the Arkansas River in Pueblo have turned those stretches into major fishing destinations. In fact, Fly Fisherman magazine cited the Arkansas River near Pueblo as one of the Top 10 tailwater trout fisheries in the United States.

It does not necessarily take years of work and multiple projects to create noticeable improvement in fishing opportunities. A recently completed Fishing Is Fun-supported project addressed habitat limitations on a 1 mile stretch of the Fraser River near Tabernash. A CPW electrofishing survey after the project completion found major increases in fish biomass -- more than a 400% jump for brown trout and more than 250% for rainbow trout. As the area biologist reported, “this reach is now obviously much more desirable real estate for adult trout to set up shop, and they’re not wasting any time doing it.”

Fishing Is Fun also is an important source of funding for flat water projects that are often where youth are introduced to angling and learn fishing skills. Projects in the pipeline right now will open new ponds in Thornton, Penrose (southwest of Colorado Springs) and Akron (on the eastern plains) over the next two years. All the ponds are centrally located, allowing easy access by young anglers and families, and for hosting high-visibility fishing clinics.

## Colorado's Native Trout Heritage



Like Colorado TU, CPW is committed to restoring healthy populations of Colorado’s native cutthroat trout in suitable habitats within their historic ranges – so these unique fish are available for anglers to enjoy now and in the future. From designing and installing barriers to protect native habitat from downstream non-native fish, to removing non-natives to prepare new waters for restoration, to rearing cutthroats in state hatcheries in preparation for their release back into the wild – CPW is at the heart of native trout recovery in Colorado. CPW’s personnel costs on Greenback recovery alone totals around \$250,000 per year.

Enhanced funding will help CPW support growing programs for restoring Greenback, Colorado River, and Rio Grande cutthroat trout. In one notable example, CPW resources will be needed for fish removal and subsequent stocking as part of the ambitious multi-year plan to restore Greenback cutthroat trout in the Poudre headwaters – agency support that will total in the hundreds of thousands of dollars over the project’s lifetime. Through CPW partnerships with Trout Unlimited, the US Forest Service, Rocky Mountain National Park, and other stakeholders, this project will help bring Colorado’s state fish back to some 40 miles of connected streams and high mountain lakes.

## Providing Fishing Access

While Colorado is blessed with excellent fishing on federal public lands and state-owned properties,

many popular fishing waters are available for public angling through CPW's program of leasing access from private landowners. One example: CPW holds a fishing lease on the White River that is up for renewal in 2018. It has the benefits of being close to Meeker, is known for large brown trout, and also is home to other important native species of conservation interest. Another CPW fishing lease on Boedcker Reservoir (375 acre reservoir near Loveland) is set to expire in 2020 and provides good opportunities for warmwater fishing along the northern Front Range. Stabilizing CPW funding will provide resources to maintain these kind of opportunities – and to pursue new waters for public access leases.

## Restoring the Upper Colorado River

The Upper Colorado is home to Gold Medal waters on State Wildlife Areas like Kemp-Breeze – but it is also a river challenged by reduced flows as water is diverted to meet urban and agricultural needs on the eastern slope. Through its mitigation and enhancement plan processes, CPW is engaging water users in broad efforts to address those impacts through large-scale river restoration partnerships along the Colorado and key tributaries like the Fraser.

CPW biologists have developed the concept of creating a “channel within the channel” for the Colorado that will help provide quality fish habitat even at lower flows, while also functioning during peak flow runoff periods. In partnership with Northern Water, Grand County, TU, the Upper Colorado River Alliance, and others, the agency is also working toward reconnecting the Colorado River around Windy Gap Reservoir with the “Windy Gap Bypass” project – an effort that will restore fish passage, improve water quality, and create a new restored reach of about one mile around the reservoir – reconnecting Colorado's namesake river around a dam that has severed it for decades. CPW's ability to contribute both in-kind and cash toward these partnership efforts depends on secure, stable funding.



### TO LEARN MORE.

To learn more about this story and Colorado Trout Unlimited, visit, [www.coloradotu.org](http://www.coloradotu.org).

