



# Rooted

Fall Newsletter



Hamilton home showcases an irrigation ditch and Water-Wise, drought-tolerant landscaping

Fall 2023



## Staff

**Heather Barber**  
Executive Director

**Joey Krejci**  
Office Coordinator

**Rachel Jensen**  
Development Coordinator

**Meagen Larson**  
Project Manager

**Alex Ocañas**  
Community Engagement  
Coordinator

**Jenny West**  
Bookkeeper

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# DIRECTOR'S NOTE

I have to start by expressing my heartfelt gratitude to all the incredible individuals whose hard work and donations have brought us to where we are today. For three decades, community support has been central to our conservation efforts. Because of you, we have made an incredible impact for our waters—and we're just getting started.

Each new staff member at the Water Partnership brings a fresh perspective and deep commitment to our mission, infusing our organization with energy and ideas. Their passion and expertise are invaluable assets that will continue to lead the way to bigger and better conservation successes.

Every project brings us closer to our vision of clean, ample water for people and healthy habitats. A yearslong effort to restore fish passage and improve stream health just wrapped up this year, and thankfully we have more great work in the pipeline. From road rehab to a plethora of plantings—all aimed at improving habitats and maintaining clean, cool waters—our work continues, day in and day out, for the future of our waters.



None of these achievements, past or pending, would be possible without our amazing community of supporters. Your trust, generosity, and passion for conservation empower us every day. You are the backbone of our success, and for that, we thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

Sincerely,

Heather Barber  
Executive Director

# WHAT WE TALK ABOUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT WATER

*Creating a space to encourage learning, reflection, and action around our waters*



This initiative is funded by Colorado State University's Center for Collaborative Conservation.

Our local leaders agree on the challenges coming our way – water scarcity, unbridled development, changing climate impacts, and more. A resilient community depends on the strength and quality of relationships that exist among us, requiring that that we understand each other's unique values, perspectives, needs, fears, capacities, and aspirations. To work collaboratively in water conservation, we must create spaces and processes that facilitate listening to and learning from one another.

Our initiative seeks to create a collaborative, multi-media, interactive exhibit to utilize as a tool to promote discussion, shared understanding, learning, connection to landscape and people, and inclination toward water conservation in the Bitterroot Valley.

We're eager to test these exhibit components in 2024 to help each other reflect on the serious matter of water conservation in engaging ways!



*Have you seen us piloting this project?*

This component invites community members to weave their water value into our tapestry, showcasing how our values - for wildlife, agriculture, recreation, and more - complement each other.

**Ready to put your creativity toward conservation?  
Contact [alex@bitterrootwater.org](mailto:alex@bitterrootwater.org) to see how you can help us create more activities like this!**



## Meet our New Team Members!

*From left to right*

**Meagen Larson**  
Project Manager

**Joey Krejci**  
Office Coordinator

**Rachel Jensen**  
Development Coordinator

# Restoring Habitat Connectivity for Westslope Cutthroat Trout

Wheelbarrow Creek,  
Stevensville, Montana



The westslope cutthroat trout is Montana's beloved state fish, one that countless anglers fish for, and a key component in our thriving stream ecosystems. With reduction in its range due to hybridization with other fish and habitat degradation, the species is listed as a Montana Fish of Special Concern. And while the Bitterroot hosts thriving populations, research concludes that ensuring the long-term persistence of genetically pure strains requires restoring habitat today.

Understanding that enhancing trout habitat improves water quality for *all* aquatic species, we eagerly completed a stream connectivity project along Wheelbarrow Creek this summer. To improve passage for cutthroat trout, we removed the undersized tunnel pictured above (a culvert) and constructed a bridge in its place to allow free, full passage for water and wildlife.

Several natural boulder structures were strategically placed in the stream to slow and redirect water, which can help prevent streamside erosion while allowing fish to pass.

## *Troubled Roads Mean Troubled Waters*

Westslope Cutthroat spawn in the spring in flowing waterways, burying their eggs in a small gravel nest called a redd, and leaving them to hatch in a few weeks to a couple of months. Like many other species, their eggs are susceptible to suffocation by pollution from sediment and fine debris. Often, that fine debris can come from improperly maintained dirt roads. So, improving the road-stream interface and returning abandoned roads to true, vegetated habitat has been a top priority of ours for years.

To reduce sediment pollution and restore aquatic habitat at Wheelbarrow Creek, we partnered with Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks to stabilize 1.7 miles of gravel road to ensure proper water drainage. This project was made possible by Montana FWP, the Future Fisheries Program, Montana DEQ, and the Neiberg Family.

# Restored Vegetation Set Free at North Burnt Fork Creek

Like all summer seasons, this one was spent tending to recent stream restoration projects, including those at Skalkaho Bend Park, John Owen Fishing Access Site, North Burnt Fork Creek, and Cameron Creek. We work with volunteers to maintain watering, weeding, and monitoring. Now, we get to share just one of our favorite days.

## Restoration Takes Time

In 2020-21 Water Partnership volunteers planted over 120 seedlings and plants and 300 willow cuttings along a mostly exposed streamside habitat (see left picture). Just a few years later, a new brigade of volunteers wrestle with 7-foot-tall plants in effort to release them from their

protective fencing. These plantings are well on their way to do what only streamside habitat can do for water quality!

North Burnt Fork Creek is one of many in our Valley where aquatic life and habitat suffers from sediment pollution. The growing roots from these plantings are helping residing landowners, and incredible partners, Jay and Colleen Meyer, keep surrounding land intact. In other words, roots hold land together that could otherwise be washed away and accumulate in the form of sediment pollution downstream.

As small as this restored section may be in the scheme of the massive, interconnected waterways of the Bitterroot, the impact it can have for fish

and wildlife, and for the people and communities in the Bitterroot, is tangible - and a huge step in the right direction for water quality in the Bitterroot. We're prepared to launch more efforts like this in 2024 - with private landowners, public land partners, and you!

**Before restoration**



**2023 update**



*Volunteers from First Interstate Bank removed browse protectors and invasive weeds from North Burnt Fork Creek.*

# Celebrating 30 Years in Conservation

## And the Value of Water Partnership



*Water-Wise Landscaping Workshop participants learn through installation of a demo garden.*



*High school volunteers clear non-native weeds from Skalkaho Bend Park.*



*Volunteers remove 1300+ lbs of litter in 2023 Bitterroot River Clean Up.*

This year we made the necessary update to our organization's name, proudly moving from the incredible foundation of the *Bitter Root Water Forum* to the ever-awesome potential of the *Bitterroot Water Partnership*. Partnership has always been at the core of our conservation successes because, despite folkloric sayings, water is a way of *connection*; it's a bridge that unites.

We recognize that the communities we serve, the conservation challenges we address, and the approaches we must take are different than they were 30 years ago. So, we've made updates to best position us to work in continued, strategic partnership with you, and for the benefit of this vibrant Valley we all love.

There's no denying that the cultural and ecological landscapes in the Bitterroot have been and will continue to change. It remains true that it's the collective responsibility of all to conserve and protect our waterways and shared habitat. Each year, there are more people living here who care about this place.

Our Fall Water-Wise Landscaping Workshop (pictured above) hosted only one of twenty participants who was born in this Valley. This distribution demonstrates an intense local commitment to partner in conservation - one that the Water Partnership is proud to lead.

Thank you for being a major contributor to this partnership. We hope you'll help us continue to grow our impacts by inviting your friends, neighbors, and colleagues to be a part of this incredible commitment.

***The Bitterroot Water Partnership envisions a vibrant Valley where community members are inspired and engaged as partners to help ensure the need for clean, sufficient water is met for our wildlife, agriculture, and communities, and we are all able to thrive together for generations to come.***

# Special Thanks

## 2022 Business Partners

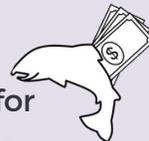
Our Business Partners are invested in helping us care for our Bitterroot waters and they support our conservation engagement and restoration efforts through matching donations, donations, event partnership and so much more!

To join us as a Business Partner, please contact [rachel@bitterrootwater.org](mailto:rachel@bitterrootwater.org).



**All gifts, big or small, make a difference for our waters!  
Donate today at [bitterrootwater.org/donate](https://bitterrootwater.org/donate)**

## CASH for CUTTHROATS



### 2023 Cash for Cutthroats Guides

Next time you or your friends book a trip on the Bitterroot, please consider these guides that have given back to help keep our streams clean, cool, and flowing.

#### Bitterroot River Guides

Jed Fitzpatrick  
Alex Hibala  
Chris Rockhold  
Dan Kimzey

#### Fishes Eddy O

Eddie Olwell

#### Independent

Andrew Drasch

#### Freestone Fly Shop

Andrew Hettick

#### Montana Trout Outfitters

Tony Reinhardt

#### Fly Fishing Always

Rick Thomas  
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discuss your giving options.*

## Partner Spotlight

*The Bitterroot Aquatic Center hosted our 20  
Water-Wise Workshop participants and adopted this  
demonstration garden for years to come!*

**Sign up to volunteer at [bitterrootwater.org/volunteer](https://bitterrootwater.org/volunteer)**



**Fall 2023**