

Conserving, protecting, and restoring coldwater fisheries in Montana's Missouri, Little Blackfoot, and Smith River watersheds.

PBMIR NEWS

PAT BARNES MISSOURI RIVER TU • www.patbarnestu.org • WINTER 2009

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PAT BARNES MISSOURI RIVER CHAPTER
Chapter No. 055
PO Box 275
Helena, MT 59624-0275
patbarnestu@gmail.com

– Thank you for your continued support of the Pat Barnes Missouri River Chapter of Trout Unlimited. –

Save the date!

What: Trout Unlimited Banquet

When: Saturday, March 20, 2010

Where: Helena Civic Center

- Great food by Chili O'Brien's
- Terrific live and silent auction items
- Chances to win great prizes
- An all around good time!

Your support at this banquet helps to sponsor the many local projects coordinated by the Pat Barnes Missouri River Chapter of Trout Unlimited.

Want to help or donate? Call Nola at 495-2675 or email nolafreestone@yahoo.com.



Thank you for your continued support of Trout Unlimited
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Time to bundle up

Summertime is over and it is time to put away the boats I suppose. I went back and looked to see how I did at my goal of floating a river at least once a week this past season; 26 weeks from May thru October, and 35 days floating on the water somewhere. Not always a different week, but who's counting? At any rate, it is always good to be on the water enjoying the flows and casting a fly. I already look forward to next season.

The summer months were relatively quiet for the chapter with the exception of four notable projects; developing the Upper Missouri River Reservoir 10 Year Fisheries Management Plan (see page 8) concluding work on Merritt Spring Creek (see page 7), beginning work on the Little Blackfoot Project on the R/V Ranch (see page 6), and kicking off the Healing Waters Program (see page 5) for the chapter. Each of these projects is highlighted in articles of this issue, and are worth the read.

Our involvement with the Missouri River Reservoir Plan development is managed by PBMR board members Arne Wick and John Wilson and is heading into the final stages. Final comments on Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks' draft plan were due on October 23, and I hope trout anglers weighed in with the department. Take a close look at the information in this issue regarding future management plans on these bodies of water. They are literally in our back yard, and proper management strategies now can make a huge difference in the future and health of the Missouri River's world class trout fishery.

The 2010 banquet is set for March 20 at the Civic Center in Helena, so Mark Your Calendars. Nola Freestone is managing our marquee fund raiser and hopes to surpass the successful banquet she managed last year.

Look for announcements about specific dates and locations for our monthly programs:

- January: Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks presentation on the status of the Missouri, Smith and Little Blackfoot Rivers
- January/February: Chapter Film Festival
- February: Annual Fly Tying Clinic
- March 20: Annual Banquet (Helena Civic Center)
- April: Missouri River Cleanup
- May: Annual Fly Casting Clinic

Also, a couple of important personnel announcements: Garrett Fawaz has replaced Art Keeler as Vice President of the board. Garrett is also serving as our liaison for the Healing Waters Program. Chris Hunter is taking over our Trout in the Classroom program as Geof Ferguson steps aside after six years of support! Thanks Geof for his past work, and Garrett and Chris for their commitment to the Chapter.

I hope you all had a productive warm-weather fishing season. For those that like to brave the cold with their fly rods instead of their skis, good luck and bundle up—it's going to get cold out there.



Tony Herbert is a long time Helena resident and conservation-minded fisherman.

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Articles, letters, and artwork related to conservation, restoration, and preservation of Montana's coldwater fisheries are welcome. The editor reserves the right to reject or edit any material submitted. Guidelines for submission format, methods, and deadlines are available upon request by emailing patbarnestu@gmail.com, or calling publications coordinator, Melissa Brown 406/495 2309.

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To reach board members by email, send messages with the board member's name in the subject line to patbarnestu@gmail.com.

Board of Director Meetings are held the 4th Wednesday of each month from September through April. Non-board members are invited and encouraged to attend.

Trout in the Classroom: Hunter Takes the Helm as Coordinator



Fishing guide and long time PBMRTU board member Geof Ferguson has managed the Chapter Trout in the Classroom Program here in Helena for the past six years, and during this time the program has become the envy of other trout chapters in the state. Through Geof's leadership TIC has grown from growing trout in tanks in 4 local schools to now supporting 10 Helena schools. These include our elementary to our high schools, and last year Geof also supported the Whitehall school district and helped launch their first TIC program.

PBMRTU and kids throughout the community owe a debt of gratitude to Geof for all his hard work and patience with this program. From the first pick up of eggs in January at the Arlee fish hatchery, to the ultimate release of 2" to 4" trout in Spring Meadow Lake, Geof has helped teachers and students alike learn the importance of proper water temperature, chemical balance, and habitat in the development of healthy fish.

Replacing Geof, beginning this year, will be Chris Hunter, a long time Helena resident, and past Administrator of the Fisheries

Division of FWP. When I learned that Chris was interested, I thought "well, he may have a certain context for this type of work". Recently retired from the state, Chris is looking forward to maintaining the successes that Geof has created, and working with the Chapter, the schools, and the community to continue this great program.

On behalf of all PBMRTU members I thank Geof for his devotion to the Helena TIC Program, and welcome Chris on board.

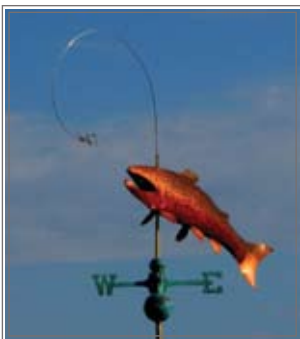
Save the Date: Missouri River Cleanup Day

PBMRTU will team with the Missouri River Flyfishers of Great Falls for a cleanup of the Missouri River and the adjacent frontage road. The event will be held on April 17, 2010. Fishing Outfitters Association of Montana (FOAM), an organization of fishing guides, may also join in the effort. Hopefully this annual effort will include many outdoor sporting organizations.

Anyone wishing to participate can either jump in a boat and police the riverbank or choose a stretch of the frontage road and pick up the trash for a mile or so. A luncheon BBQ of bratwurst and burgers for participants will be hosted by Frank Cooper and Shirley Cleary. More information, such as specific assignments, availability of trash bags, and location and time of the luncheon, will be available in early April.



Dennis Cates Cleaning Up on the MO



Custom Tin by Nick Pipinich

Check out the custom tin work done by Custom Tin, who specializes in this brown trout eyeing a grasshopper the size of you first! Donated at our last banquet, this item brings a reminder of "the take" throughout the year, and in all directions. For more information on these One-and-Only weather vanes, call Nick Pipinich, 442-7255, P.O. Box 212, 7285 Belmont Drive, Marysville, MT 59640.



PBMRTU Kicks Off Project Healing Waters

by Jim Smith

The new PBMRTU *Project Healing Waters* program had its first set of events on August 18, 19 and 20 here in Lewis and Clark County. Eight veterans, six men and two women, participated in two evenings of fly tying and fly casting instruction, and then spent a day on the Missouri trying out their new skills and flies in catching some great Big Mo trout.

Garry and Joan Stocker proprietors of Montana Fly Goods here in Helena hosted the fly tying and casting evenings, helping the vets get comfortable with the new skills of tying flies and casting a fly rod on the lawn by their shop on Dredge Drive. Several volunteers were there each evening to help out in the casting lessons and give a few hints about what to expect on the river. The Helena area Marine Corps League Auxiliary supplied snacks and drinks for both evenings and for the day of floating on the Missouri. All the vets said they really enjoyed the fly tying lessons, and were given basic fly tying kits, including vises and tools, from the national *Project Healing Waters* organization.

On Thursday, August 20, the eight vets all met at the Headhunters Fly Shop in Craig at 8:00AM to meet up with their guides and a volunteer to help them on the water with fishing. Big Sky Expeditions, the outfitting service that Garry and Joan also own and run, coordinated with Headhunters Fly Shop and seven other professional guides to give each vet a great day on the River.

The guides were Mike Kuhnert, Jesse Kolar, John Arnold, Mark Raisler, Ben Hardy, Casey Phelps, Garry Stocker and Beau Stratham. The guides volunteered their time for the day, and Izaak's Restaurant in Craig supplied a fantastic lunch for all twenty-four participants, as the eight boats spent the entire day



A Montana National Guard disabled veteran displays his catch for the camera while Headhunters Fly Shop guide Ben Hardy looks on. (Photo by Garrett Fawaz)

on the water hunting for the elusive and always picky Missouri River rainbows and browns. Each vet was given a beautiful Three Forks Outfitters fly rod and reel setup to keep, as a special *Project Healing Waters* gift.

The weather was perfect, in the eighties and with just a breeze for most of the day, and all of the vets had success in hooking and landing nice trout. Rainbows and browns, most in the 14 to 17 inch range, were landed and even a couple in the 20+ inch range were brought in by the vets. Splitting up to cover different sections of the river, all the vets said they had a great time and would love to "do it all over again!"

At the end of the day, all the

participants and a few more folks all converged on the Woodcock House, a fishing lodge owned by Jay Moss, on the Missouri River for a fantastic BBQ meal supplied by Big Mouth BBQ of Great Falls. As the vets, guides, and volunteers all sat around and ate and recounted the day's fun and successes, it was clear that the week's events had accomplished the goal of giving the veterans a new experience and a set of skills that they can use for the rest of their lives.

Every vet said they had a great time, would love to do it again, and found that fly fishing took them to a completely different place for the day. The smiles and camaraderie during the day and at the dinner were fabulous, and some new friendships were also made.

PBMRTU *Project Healing Waters* program has other events planned for the future. *Project Healing Waters* Fly Fishing, Inc. is dedicated to the physical and emotional rehabilitation of disabled active duty military personnel and veterans through fly fishing and fly tying education and outings.

Please be sure you continue helping support this ongoing effort by volunteering and contributing to the PBMRTU *Project Healing Waters* program. To make a tax deductible contribution mail checks to:

Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing, Inc.
PBMRTU *Project Healing Waters* Program
Post Office Box 275
Helena, MT 59624

Be sure to specify that you want your donation to be used for the Pat Barnes TU *Project Healing Waters* program.

Lastly, a big thanks to the volunteers, guides, outfitters, and all the other people who made this event possible, and to the vets for what they have given to all of us and our country.

To learn more about Project Healing Waters, visit their website:

www.projecthealingwaters.org



Upper Little Blackfoot River Restoration Project Completed

by John Wilson

The Little Blackfoot River is a favorite angling spot for PBMRTU members and an irreplaceable fisheries resource deserving of our best stewardship efforts. Home to a relatively healthy population of brown trout, the river also hosts native westslope cutthroat and bull trout.

PBMRTU joined financial and volunteer resources with the Deer Lodge Conservation District over the past year to successfully complete a project restoring fish habitat, stream channel integrity, and riparian health in a 2.6 mile section of the Little Blackfoot River from Telegraph Creek to the Highway 12 crossing near Elliston. This stretch of the river is completely on the RV Ranch and was flagged as in need of restoration due to degraded fish habitat, unstable channel geometry, eroding stream banks, degraded riparian vegetation, and infestations of noxious weeds. These conditions stem from a combination of the effects of historical floods, past stream channel and stream bank alterations, and livestock over-utilization. The project importantly includes a riparian fencing component designed to protect the benefits gained through the restoration work well into the future.

We are especially appreciative of the landowner and ranch manager's willingness and cooperation in making this needed and important project a reality.

The Little Blackfoot River from its headwaters to its

mouth has been identified as a "core area" for native bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*), while westslope cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarki lewisi*) are present throughout the entire Little Blackfoot watershed but in limited numbers. This project will improve habitat for all life stages of westslope cutthroat, bull trout, and other salmonid species in the upper Little Blackfoot River, enhance fish passage to upstream and downstream reaches of the river, increase production of fish food organisms, stabilize stream banks, restore riparian vegetation and riparian wildlife habitat, decrease sediment loading and in-stream sedimentation, improve water quality, and decrease water temperatures.

Restoration measures implemented as part of this project included: 1) pre- and post-restoration weed controls, 2) installation of more than 7,000 feet of riparian fencing to allow control of livestock access within the project area, 3) installation of approximately 50 fish habitat improvement structures, 4) stabilization of approximately 2,300 feet of eroding stream banks, 5) adjustments to channel geometry in localized areas, 6) extensive replanting of riparian vegetation, 7) project effectiveness monitoring and documentation, and 8) post-implementation public tours of the project area to demonstrate project effectiveness and restoration methods.

Increased recreational

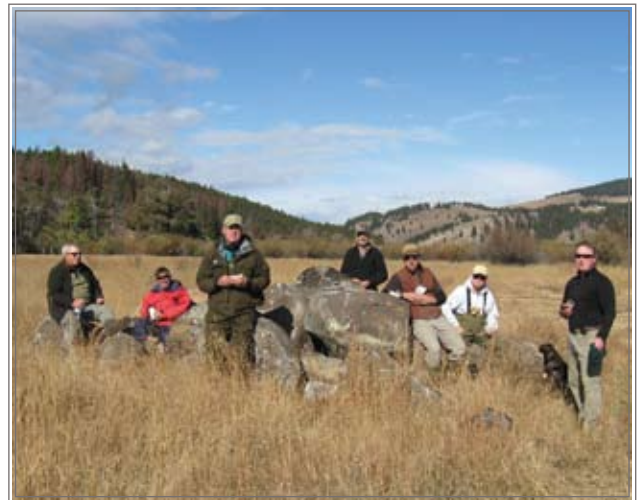
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Bank Stabilization -Log vanes, constant radius curve and willows plantings



Rootwad bank stabilization



Chapter willow cutting volunteers

Spring Creek Tributary to Lake Helena Restored for Spawning



Pictured above (left to right): Newly created channel - note spawning gravel placement; Before new channel; After new channel.

Merritt Spring Creek has long been a candidate for habitat restoration as this represents one of a limited number of spawning tributaries to Hauser Reservoir and Lake Helena. Over many years the spring creek had been straightened and rechanneled for agricultural purposes. PBMRTU was invited to join with PP&L Montana and the cooperative landowner (David Brown) in re-establishing the channel sinuosity and specifically creating spawning areas for reservoir trout, with the goal of attracting migratory trout and salmon from Hauser Reservoir and Lake Helena, thereby propagating a self sustaining strain of wild trout. Grazing agreements which protect the integrity of the rehabilitation work were part of the overall conservation effort.

The original intent of the project was simply to add spawning gravel and limited habitat improvement features at selected locations along 2,800 feet of the straightened section of the creek. However, the landowner agreed to allow the straightened channel to be returned to its original meandering location at the upper and lower ends of the project area. This re-routing into the old channel in these locations resulted in a new channel length of 5,445 feet, nearly double the straightened length.

Additionally, 180 gravel "lifts" were created with a design which encourages and enables spawning usage. That design includes providing nearby sanctuary areas which include cover from above for adults and woody debris for security for both

adult and newly hatched fingerlings. The woody debris provides essential rearing habitat for young trout.

While a resident fishery may establish as a result of this rehabilitation work, we will keep close watch over the "new" spring creek for rainbow and brown trout spawning activity. Many thanks to Steve Leathe and PP&L Montana for their leadership on this project. The overall project cost was \$47,000, PBMRTU covered the cost of woody debris purchase, transport and installation. Allen McNeal of McNeal Resources designed and supervised the project completion.

For more information contact PBMRTU Conservation Committee Chair, John Wilson at jwiltmt@msn.com

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opportunities associated with sport fishing will also be realized as a result of this project. The project is designed to enhance fisheries, water quality, fishing, and recreation for a considerable distance downstream of the project area. The proposed project will complement a planned restoration of a 2.5-mile section of the lower Little Blackfoot River. Benefits accruing from this project will be maintained over the

long term through improved grazing management, ongoing weed control, and continuing monitoring.

The PBMRTU Conservation Committee successfully obtained a \$9,500 Embrace-A-Stream grant for fish habitat restoration using \$1,500 of the chapter's money and volunteer labor as match. Overall, PBMRTU's contribution to the project was in excess of \$15,000 when volunteer time and labor is included. Nine PBMRTU volunteers logged an estimated total of 60 hours

of cutting and preparing willows for bank stabilization transplanting.

The overall project cost is estimated at \$290,000, with funding coming from a number of partners including PBMRTU, The Natural Resources Conservation Service, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (Future Fisheries), Little Blackfoot Watershed Group, the Tri-State Water Quality Council, the Upper Clark Fork River Basin Steering Committee (NRD), and the landowner.

Public demonstration tours

of the project area will be conducted in 2010. PBMRTU will notice the availability of the tours as they are scheduled. Our thanks go to Gary Ingman and Andrea Pipp of PBS&J Consultants for their professional efforts in making the project a success and enabling PBMRTU participation.

Missouri River Trout Fisheries Threatened

Tony Herbert—President, PBMRTU

Conn McKelvey—President, Missouri River Fly Fishers

Montana Department of Fish Wildlife and Parks (FWP) recently accepted comments on a proposed new ten-year plan for managing the Missouri River fisheries which includes the Canyon Ferry, Holter and Hauser reservoir system. Trout fishers would be wise to pay attention as the new plan attempts to stabilize a new walleye fishery and could detrimentally impact the long-standing world-class Missouri River trout fishery. The plan is available at <http://fwp.mt.gov>.

The current ten-year plan, adopted in 1999 and allowing walleye populations to grow, has been riddled with problems leading to significantly reduced trout and perch populations, a resultant drop in angling days on the reservoir system, economic loss to the businesses and communities that surround this fishery, and below average angler satisfaction. The combined fishing pressure of all reservoirs in 2007 was the lowest on record (183,580 angler days) declining steadily from 1999 (267,939) and a pre-walleye average of 251,048. These are not speculative opinions; all are substantiated by FW&P's fishery data and angler and economic surveys.

Recently FW&P biologists conducting annual electro fishing trout population census in the Missouri River below Holter Dam reportedly captured (and released) over 100 walleyes in a 3 mile section! This is a chilling development for a world-class wild trout fishery that depends on small trout recruitment to survive and thrive. Biologists recognize that walleyes migrate out of the reservoir system over the dams into the river system. Walleyes are predatory fish which eat trout and perch.

In addition to the loss of trout and perch, walleyes in Canyon Ferry have largely depleted their food sources and are now stunted and small. So walleye anglers are unhappy as well.

The root of our current fisheries declines lies in what many concede was a pressured decision back in 1999 to legitimize illegally introduced walleyes. Fisheries professionals from across the west were consulted and none had been successful managing these species side-by-side in the same system. Despite significant warnings and dire predictions, the decision was made to stop eradicating walleyes and use liberal angler harvest limits to manage their numbers as a sport fishery side-by-side with perch and trout.

We want to be clear that the FW&P fisheries managers and personnel have absolutely made honest dedicated efforts to make the current ten-year multi-species plan a success. But fisheries managers have been put in an apparent biological no win situation. The management of walleyes side-by-side with trout and perch hasn't worked elsewhere and it isn't working here, despite FW&P fisheries managers' best efforts.

Now we are presented with a new draft ten year plan to manage this fishery and there are several glaring problems. Recognizing that walleyes in Canyon Ferry are stunted because they have basically eaten themselves out of house and home, walleye advocates would like to see the introduction of new exotic forage species for walleyes to eat. Surprisingly, the new plan potentially enables this. This would be a particularly dangerous move for the world-class wild trout fishery that exists above and below the reservoir system and should be forcefully opposed by trout anglers. Eventually any new species will make their way over the dams and spread throughout the system. They bring

with them competition and potential disease for wild trout. Not a good idea. There are numerous examples of well intentioned but failed introductions of exotic forage base. The mysis shrimp introduction to the Flathead Lake fishery is a stark example of adverse impact to fisheries through well intentioned forage introductions. To protect the world-class trout fishery the plan should unequivocally state that no exotic forage species will be introduced anywhere in the system.

Instead of trying to add walleye food supply through introduction of exotic forage species, it is obvious that walleye numbers should be balanced with available food. There are too many walleyes for their food supply. Reduce their numbers and the fishery will be healthier and the walleyes won't be stunted. The proposed plan does just the opposite. It revises the daily limits on walleyes downward from 20 per day to 10 per day. This will result in more walleyes (likely still stunted) and continuing erosion of the forage base. Until the existing forage base recovers, walleye numbers should be reduced, not increased. This new proposed daily angler limit reduction adds to the overall fishery problems and should be opposed.

The apparent rise in the numbers of walleye in the Missouri River below Holter Dam has very dangerous implications for the wild trout fishery. The new plan should reclassify the river fishery below Holter Dam as primarily a trout fishery and not a walleye fishery, and institute walleye suppression measures.

Both Montana TU and PBMRTU continue to actively seek revision of the proposed plan through consultations with FWP management and Commission as well as the Governor.

View PBMRTU's comments at: <http://www.montanatu.org/issuesandprojects/recent.htm>