



TU New Mexico Council Thanks GRTU for Supporting Cutthroat Trout Conservation

The Trout Unlimited New Mexico Council would like to express its appreciation to the Guadalupe River Trout Unlimited (GRTU) Chapter for its support of conservation efforts to benefit cutthroat trout in New Mexico and Colorado.

Our Watershed and Conservation Project

Willow Creek, a Pecos River tributary near the village of Tererro, New Mexico, is about 5 miles long and was historically occupied by Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout (RGCT). Over the past several decades, the cutthroats have been replaced by the non-native brown trout. The land through which Willow Creek flows is owned by New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF) and a single private landowner. The private landowner approached NMDGF and wanted to restore the stream to a RGCT habitat. With the support of the landowner and the U.S. Forest Service, the restoration of Willow Creek began in 2020, entailing the construction of a fish passage barrier and eradication of non-natives through the use of the piscicide rotenone.

Willow Creek is within the old Tererro Mine footprint. The road going up the creek was built on mine tailings and had rough impacts on Willow Creek and the mainstem Pecos River. A huge remediation project occurred in the late 1990's which, in addition to the relocation of mine tailings, included a "fish barrier" as an erosion control (photo attached).

This was a good start, but over time, this barrier became dysfunctional. A large pool beneath the barrier enabled fish to jump upstream, or swim around the barrier during high water events. In 2020, NMDGF decided to hire our barrier engineer to design a new structure and secure a restored RGCT population that would endure far into the future.

Construction began in September of 2020, starting with diverting the stream around the new barrier site. The old barrier was removed, and the footprint was dug out for a larger and more stable structure. Stone-filled gabion baskets were installed, and concrete was poured for the weir, splashpad, and other areas for structural integrity. Construction was completed in December 2020, at a total cost of a little over \$476,000.

Rotenone treatments were conducted in June and July 2021, consisting of about 8 days of work with a crew of 15 NMDGF staff. The NMDGF is optimistic that they removed all of the non-natives but will follow up with Environmental DNA sampling to confirm that no non-natives remain, after which we plan to stock the stream with Pecos strain RGCT. If all is clear, stocking will take place in 2022.

GRTU Support

Chris Johnson, currently the Conservation Committee Chair, came to TU New Mexico and suggested that we work together with GRTU for funding. A proposal was developed for the GRTU Board and was unanimously approved to provide five grants for \$4,000 each and sent in by New Mexico Trout Unlimited's four chapters, and the San Luis Valley Chapter in Colorado for a total of \$20,000.

"While GRTU is a chapter based in Texas, we recognize the need to support conservation efforts across the country, and we are proud to work with other chapters on these meaningful conservation projects on their home waters," said Chris Johnson.

Though vital for the completion of the Willow Creek project itself, GRTU's generous contributions free up New Mexico Department of Game and Fish resources for us to address RGCT restoration elsewhere throughout the range of the fish.

Once the Willow Creek project is officially complete, we look forward to entertaining GRTU partners on a tour, perhaps wetting a line in the spirit of true partnership.

Harris Klein
New Mexico Council Chair
President Trout Unlimited Bosque Chapter
712 Charles Pl NW
Los Ranchos, NM 87107
hknm@comcast.net
(505) 974-0232



