Conserving, protecting and restoring Colorado's coldwater fisheries and their watersheds
From the President

A series of "Cs" played a big role in Trout Unlimited's successes in Colorado for 2015.

Conservation continues across the state through the work of our grassroots volunteers in our 24 local chapters. Combine that with the dedication of our skilled professional staff and active board of volunteer directors, you then have a winning team combination.

Collaboration is at the heart of many of our efforts, as we teamed with irrigators on conservation projects and flood restoration, engaged with public and private grantors to stretch the impact of our donors' generous support, and partnered with agencies and water users to launch the cooperative "Learning by Doing" effort to conserve the Colorado River headwaters. The local relationships built by our 24 local Chapters allow TU to be an effective partner with these efforts all over the state.

Colorado Water Plan — Trout Unlimited played a key role in development of the Plan by serving on 6 of the state's 9 basin roundtables and submitting detailed comments and suggested changes on each working draft that was issued. We pressed hard for Stream Management Plans and strong water conservation goals, and these were included in the final Water Plan presented to the Governor on November 19, 2015.

Congress - off to Washington D.C. last October to participate in TU's Clean Water fly-in! I was privileged to represent Colorado in support of proposed Rulemakings for the Clean Water Act. Two days of meeting/lobbying with Congressional delegations resulted in successfully defeating a bill that would roll back the proposed rules.

Challenges — In August of last year we awoke to headlines and dramatic pictures of an orange Animas River. The deluge of mine wastes flowing down the river channel through several states brought a deluge of responses from local, state and national TU members. The event also energized political entities at all levels to not only remediate the initial impacts, but also to establish long term Good Samaritan legislation to address the west-wide problem of abandoned mines.

And the biggest C of all — our contributors. 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
Floods, Fish, & Teamwork

From September 10th to 13th, 2013, multiple days of severe rain pummeled the Front Range, and caused catastrophic floods. The small town of Lyons took the brunt of the storm's might, receiving more than 17 inches of precipitation. Unparalleled rainfall caused the otherwise tame St. Vrain Creek to rise to around ten times its normal water volume.

In the aftermath of the flooding, the St. Vrain Anglers Chapter and Colorado TU partnered with irrigators on the South Ledge and Meadow Ditches to help them rebuild their diversion structures in a more river-friendly way. Instead of building a dam blocking the entire river channel, TU and irrigators partnered on a project that provided a more natural river channel and maintained fish passage for trout and native fish, while reliably delivering water to the ditch users.

The Meadow and South Ledge Ditch Diversion Reconstruction and Fish Passage Demonstration Project was completed in May 2015. TU helped leverage initial contributions of $7,500 with state and federal grants totaling $290,000, along with a $30,000 in-kind contribution from the ditch companies. In addition to rebuilding an improved diversion, the project included installation of features to help stabilize stream banks and improve fish habitat.

CTU and our members continued to partner with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) in 2015 to assess and document stream conditions on Northern Colorado forests damaged by the 2013 floods. Two years later, there is still debris along the rivers and degraded habitat in many watersheds. More than 70 trained TU volunteers, interns, and staff collected very detailed scientific data at hundreds of river sites to help the USFS develop a plan for restoring more resilient watersheds.

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“...the team did not simply fall back on obsolete, damaging, and easy solutions, but took the time to explore beyond the traditional, identifying new project designs that support the broad stakeholder community along the South St. Vrain.”

- Erik Wilkinson, President, St. Vrain Anglers TU

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2015 Colorado Cane Conclave

St. Vrain Anglers TU partnered with South Creek LTD to co-sponsor the 2015 Cane Conclave. Proceeds from the event exceeded $28,000 and will be dedicated to restoration efforts at the Button Rock Preserve along North St. Vrain Creek west of Lyons.

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What’s Next?

In 2016, CTU, our local chapters, and community partners are moving forward with further projects in flood-impacted watersheds, including on North St. Vrain Creek at the Button Rock Preserve, restoring an urban reach of Boulder Creek, and designing improvements for fish passage on the lower Big Thompson.
Lower Creek Flood Restoration Project

The U.S. Forest Service and Trout Unlimited partnered to stabilize and restore a half-mile section of flood-damaged stream in the Left Hand Canyon trails area on the Roosevelt National Forest northwest of Boulder. The popular trails system has been closed since the September 2013 flood washed out access roads and primary trails, saturated hillsides and permanently altered stream courses. The area was a former illegal shooting area, so TU’s Mine Restoration team led the project due to their experience in dealing with metals pollution and stream restorations.

Before, during, and after photos from Lower Creek, shot looking upstream at a lone remaining cottonwood tree. Steep, contaminated slopes appear on the left side of the top photo, while stabilized, treated slopes and a developed floodplain can be seen after construction (below). The before photo also shows the absence of a stream channel from flood damage, while a developed bankfull channel can be seen after construction.
Restoring Mine-Impacted Streams
Partnerships for Leavenworth Creek

Leavenworth Creek provides drinking water for Georgetown and supports a brook trout fishery. This remote and idyllic watershed has a rich mining history from the 1860s through the 1950s, at the Waldorf, Vidler and Santiago mines. Today, some of the remnants need to be cleaned up in order to ensure a healthy headwater ecosystem.

During mining, a large area of dispersed mill tailings was created via slurry channels stemming from the Waldorf mill. The tailings were dispersed down valley and continue to leach high levels of metals and sediment into the highly braided channel of Leavenworth Creek. The goal of TU’s restoration project was to consolidate runoff and decrease its velocity, reducing the metals running into Leavenworth Creek, and removing the most contaminated tailings away from wet areas.

With funding from the U.S. Forest Service, Freeport-McMoRan Inc., and the National Forest Foundation, TU successfully completed construction of 2,500 feet of single-thread channel, removed approximately 5,400 cubic yards of mine tailings from the floodplain, and buried the tailings at two on-site repositories. Large boulders and woody debris also were used in the channel to provide habitat diversity and reduce flow in steeper sections of the channel. A ten foot clean-cap floodplain bench was created on both sides of the channel to promote native vegetation establishment. This buffer zone now acts as a floodplain to slow down high flows associated with spring runoff and summer rainfall events. Also, a large wetland was created using locally harvested willow transplants and sedge mats that will help filter sediment and provide stability for the lower project reach. Combined, these efforts will improve both habitat and water quality in a key tributary in the Clear Creek watershed.

What’s Next?
A 2016 TU project will continue the restoration of Leavenworth Creek, tackling metals contamination at the Santiago Mill.

Native Cutthroats Return to the Roan!

For years, Colorado TU and volunteers with the Grand Valley Anglers Chapter have worked to protect and restore fish habitat on the Roan Plateau near Rifle, and to allow for native cutthroat trout to be returned to portions of the Parachute Creek watershed where they had been displaced by brook trout. In 2015, our partners at Colorado Parks and Wildlife completed their first stocking of native cutthroat above a TU-installed barrier on the East Fork of Parachute Creek — marking a major step forward for native trout in this iconic Colorado landscape.
Defending Clean Water

With strong support from TU and other conservation and sporting organizations, the Environmental Protection Agency issued a new Clean Water Rule ensuring that Clean Water Act protections apply to our vital headwater and feeder streams. Built on the common sense proposition that water quality downstream depends on water quality upstream, the Rule restores protections that were in place for decades but that were put into question by more recent court rulings. Hundreds of CTU members weighed in with Colorado’s Congressional delegation, TU contributed articles to regional papers touting the rule’s benefits for water quality, and CTU President Marshall Pendargrass flew to Washington, DC to lobby on behalf of water quality. While Congress ultimately passed legislation attempting to block the rule, the President vetoed the bill and efforts to override the veto failed. Senator Michael Bennet was a key vote in upholding the President’s veto and the Clean Water Rule.

“We are the Animas”
Mine Spill Brought TU, Community Together

The images shocked the nation: a cherished Western river turned sickly orange by mine pollution. The Gold King mine spill into the headwaters of the Animas River in August was a wake-up call to the nation about the threat of toxic mine pollution to our rivers, streams and community water supplies.

The spill, caused by an EPA crew probing a mine opening, sent more than 3 million gallons of mustard-colored heavy metals gushing down Cement Creek near Silverton into the Animas. Hours later, the plume moved through the town of Durango’s Gold Medal trout waters. Fortunately, the spill did not inflict immediate damage to the Animas’ trout population, although the long-term impacts to the river remain unknown. But the incident underscored the urgency of finding a solution to the scores of abandoned hardrock mines that leach poisons, day in and day out, into the Animas headwaters, stunting aquatic life for miles downstream of Silverton.

Trout Unlimited, which has worked for years on the abandoned mine problem, quickly moved to provide leadership in the crisis. TU launched a “We Are the Animas” campaign to engage local citizens with cleanup efforts. And TU is working with Mountain Studies Institute on a two-year study of macroinvertebrates in the river to monitor aquatic bug life and shed light on long-term mine impacts to river health.

The spill also shone a spotlight on TU’s campaign for Good Samaritan legislation, which would give TU and other qualified Good Sam groups the
Our Gunnison Angling Society (GAS) Chapter teamed up with Western State Colorado University in Gunnison to hire two Communications Interns to help with marketing, branding, youth outreach, and promoting the chapter’s annual Superfly event. Student interns Philip Conrad and Sara George helped the chapter increase the visibility of its work in the community and build a stronger connection to the college’s student Trout Unlimited Club, the Sockeyes.

John Bocchino who manages the GAS website and chapter communications, is a long time fly fishing guide in the Gunnison valley who currently works for Eleven and Irwin Guides as their Colorado Fishing Manager. John supervised the two interns during their employment.

“It was exciting for our chapter to bring on two interns to help us reach the younger generation,” John said. “We realize that we must have a connection to the next generation of TUers if we are to be successful as a chapter in the long term. Phil and Sara were instrumental in making that connection happen and providing our chapter with an opportunity to follow through on our outreach efforts.”

legal protection needed to pursue the costly and complex process of treating mine pollution. After months of behind the scenes discussions with TU and other stakeholders, Sens. Bennet and Gardner introduced bipartisan Good Sam legislation in Congress.

What’s more, in early 2016, the town of Silverton announced that it would support the EPA in designating the area a Superfund site. Ty Churchwell, TU’s San Juan Mountains Coordinator, called the Superfund plan “comprehensive in scope and impact.” If done right, with sufficient 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.
A Decade of Inspiring Youth

River Conservation and Fly Fishing Youth Camp Celebrates 10th Anniversary

In 2015, Colorado TU — with support from the Purgatoire River Anglers Chapter and Phil Long Toyota — hosted its tenth annual River Conservation and Fly Fishing Youth Camp in the Purgatoire River watershed above Trinidad. Each June, roughly 20 campers between the ages of 14 and 18 spend a week gaining experience in watershed science, entomology, restoration efforts, and angling. The camp focuses on hands-on experiences — conducting water quality and flow testing, learning fish identification, collecting and classifying insects, participating in on-the-ground conservation project, and of course, fly-fishing.

The best way to understand the impact of this intensive camp experience is to see the stories of some of the camp’s alumni.

According to Elyssa Ridinger, attending youth camp opened doors she never could have imagined. When Elyssa arrived at camp she had some experience fishing with her uncle, but “didn’t know much about bugs or conservation.” After camp she returned home to Boulder and armed with new knowledge and hands-on experience, she headed up a project to monitor water quality on Boulder Creek. The “Ecology Stream Team” gathered data that was turned over to the City of Boulder for use in mitigating Eurasian watermilfoil, an aggressive aquatic invasive species.

When she went on to college at Oregon State University, she landed a job in their Aquatic Insect Lab. “I got the job because of my camp experience,” she said. Elyssa moved on to work in perhaps a more important type of lab — a cancer lab at MD Anderson Cancer Hospital.

Nick was interested in fly-fishing from the age of 10, but the 2006 camp provided his first formal casting lesson and introduced him to fly-tying. He returned to camp for two years to help as an assistant counselor.

Sharing fly-fishing techniques and watching others successfully land a fish turned out to be something Nick enjoyed, and he went on to guide for six years on the Gunnison River. Guiding helped pay for college at Western State University where Nick majored in Ecology. A recent summer found him working on a native fish study in Wyoming. His goal: a career in fisheries biology with a position in the Rocky Mountains.

Former CTU camper Grant Burke is now completing his fifth year at the University of Wyoming, studying Rangeland Ecology and Watershed Management. Following graduation he hopes to pursue a job in the meat industry or range management, with the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, or a private ranch. He fly fishes every chance he gets on southern Wyoming and northern Colorado waters. “Since attending the TU camp I have become more and more involved in conservation efforts, as well as explaining and educating others on what conservation is,” Grant explained. “I've been a proud supporter of many conservation groups such as Trout Unlimited, Ducks Unlimited, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, and the Mule Deer Foundation.”

Collin Papuga picked up his father's old fly rod when he was ten years old, and has been hooked on fly fishing every since. Taking part in the CTU Camp was a no-brainer and allowed Collin to deepen his connection with fly fishing and conservation. Today, Collin has relocated to The Last Frontier of Alaska and is living his dream of owning and operating his own guide service, Tightlines Alaska, on the Kenai River. In addition to sharing his love of fly fishing with his clients, Collin has regularly given back through donated trips to benefit TU conservation efforts in his former home waters of Grand County. “Having the opportunity to be a part of the CTU Youth Conservation & Fly Fishing Camp was an opportunity of a lifetime,” Collin said. “The knowledge and experience I obtained from the camp helped me follow my dreams.”
Colorado Welcomes Youth Anglers from Around the World

Colorado played host to the 2015 World Youth Fly Fishing Championships, based out of Vail. International competitors came to Colorado for a week of competition, camaraderie, and conservation – including a special family angling day co-hosted by Colorado TU at Camp Hale in the Eagle watershed where families and youth from in state had the chance to meet and fish alongside some of the best young anglers from around the world. John Knight from TU’s Eagle Valley Chapter has been the lead organizer for the Championships, and in 2016 will be spearheading the adult World Fly Fishing Championships – also being held in Colorado.
Greenbacks Return Home

When new genetics studies revealed that only one small population of native greenback cutthroat trout remained in Colorado – in a small stream near Colorado Springs, outside of their native range of the South Platte basin – TU volunteers sprung into action to support Colorado Parks and Wildlife and federal agency efforts for restoring the native trout. The greenbacks’ future looks bright as these partners have returned Colorado’s state fish to Zimmerman Lake in the Poudre watershed, and have prepared several other reintroduction projects for 2016 and 2017.

Browns Canyon
A Monumental Victory

In February 2015, President Obama designated 22,000 acres of Browns Canyon as a new national monument—the culmination of years of effort by TU and other groups to protect a Colorado backcountry treasure beloved by generations of anglers, hunters, rafters, and hikers.

For almost two decades, TU and local residents had been pushing for monument status for Browns Canyon. In the year prior to designation, TU and other sportsmen’s groups worked hard to organize local anglers and hunters to voice their support for Browns. TU staff and members attended numerous local meetings and public forums, where they extolled the canyon’s Gold Medal trout waters and wildlife habitat, as well as its role as an economic driver for Colorado’s $1.2 billion fishing economy and $500 million hunting economy.

As supporters predicted, the National Monument status has raised the visibility of Browns Canyon. In the year since designation, tourism visits to the Browns Canyon area have increased by about 10 percent, according to the Chaffee County Visitors Bureau.

Thank you to the TU members, supporters, and partners who helped to preserve this special landscape for future generations of anglers, hikers, hunters, rafters, campers, and families. It’s a monumental achievement.
Colorado Water Plan
Collaboration, Conservation, and Healthy Rivers

On December 14, 2015, Colorado adopted its first-ever Water Plan. The final plan emphasized collaboration in meeting future water needs, included strong emphasis on water conservation, and recognized the crucial role healthy rivers play in Colorado’s economy and quality of life. It was the product of over two years of work, hundreds of public meetings across all of the state’s major basins, and thousands of public comments.

Trout Unlimited was there, every step of the way. Our volunteers, staff and chapters across Colorado worked together to provide over 100 pages of detailed comments, took part in Basin Roundtables and other public meetings; and organized public outreach including the Our Colorado River program, to ensure that trout and healthy rivers have a strong place in Colorado’s water future.

Highlights from the Colorado Water Plan include:

- Support for collaboration on multi-purpose solutions that meet needs from cities to farms to the environment.
- A strong statewide goal for water conservation.
- Committed funding to develop “stream management plans” to better understand and address environmental and recreational water needs.
- Promoting modernization of irrigation infrastructure, like the innovative irrigation projects that TU has worked on with ranchers and farmers to improve water delivery while protecting river flows and habitat.
- A conceptual framework to ensure that new transbasin diversion projects only proceed if western slope and environmental concerns are responsibly addressed.

Trout Unlimited will continue to speak out as ideas from the Colorado Water Plan are converted to action, through new projects, policies, legislation, and other water management decisions.

Dolores River Anglers go to CAMP

Faced with a warming climate that may make some southwest Colorado rivers less capable of supporting healthy trout fisheries, the Dolores River Anglers Chapter decided it needed to bring a systematic and scientific approach to its future conservation efforts. The result has been a partnership with Colorado Parks and Wildlife, the US Forest Service, and other local agencies and stakeholders on the Coldwater-fisheries Adaptive Management Plan (CAMP).

The intent of CAMP is to facilitate a systematic search for trout “stronghold” streams and reaches, particularly those that are most resilient in the face of projected changes to trout habitat due to climate change. Strongholds are those waters where habitat conditions can be expected to continue supporting trout in spite of overall changes to the ecological conditions through the mountain southwest.

CAMP incorporates an ecological “limiting factor” approach that identifies factors and their critical threshold values beyond which habitat would no longer support viable trout populations. Understanding those limiting factors has allowed for a systematic assessment of various climate change scenarios. Taken as a whole, this allows for adaptive guidance for “best management practices” and in-stream and riparian projects within an evolving environment. Dolores River Anglers hopes that its science-based approach also can be used by other interested TU chapters facing similar challenges.
Investing in Colorado’s Great Outdoors
Congress Extends the Land and Water Conservation Fund

In 1964, Congress created the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) to protect natural areas, water resources, and to provide recreation opportunities to all Americans, using funds generated from royalties paid on offshore oil and gas leasing. In its 50 year history, the LWCF has protected land in every state and helped support over 41,000 state and local parks. However, after 50 years of success, the LWCF was going to sunset unless Congress took action to reauthorize it.

Last summer, Colorado TU issued a report, “Colorado’s Great Outdoors,” to help focus attention on the program and highlight LWCF’s successes in Colorado. Over its history the LWCF has invested more than $2.2 billion to protect state treasures like the Great Sand Dunes, Mesa Verde National Park, and the Colorado River above Glenwood, as well as supporting local community recreation resources and parks, cultural heritage sites, and working landscapes.

In December, Congress extended the LWCF for an additional three years and approved $550 million in funding for 2016 – a $100 million increase from

Keeping Public Lands Public

In 2015, legislation was proposed to promote the transfer of 22 million acres of federal public lands to the State of Colorado; yet the State lacks the needed resources to manage those lands and would have little choice but to commercialize access to the lands or sell them into private ownership. Hunters and anglers, including Corinne Doctor (pictured) co-owner of Rep Your Water, descended on the Capitol to speak out for keeping public lands in public hands.

A Voice for Trout

Colorado TU maintains a lobbyist, Jen Boulton, to represent the interests of trout and anglers at the Colorado General Assembly each year. Whether promoting new river-friendly legislation, or helping to defeat harmful bills that could undo much of our on-the-ground conservation work, TU provides a much-needed voice on behalf of trout and river conservation at the legislature, as well as working with other state and federal agencies to advocate on behalf of trout and anglers.

In 2015, Colorado TU addressed key legislation from opposing efforts to transfer federal public lands to state jurisdiction – to helping extend the Healthy Rivers Fund and voluntary tax check-off program benefiting rivers – to supporting new state grant funding for the removal of invasive plants including tamarisk.
In fiscal year 2015, Trout Unlimited in Colorado invested more than $3.6 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 National Trout Unlimited programs and staff working on initiatives including 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. TU funds in Colorado were complemented by an additional $1.23 million in “sweat equity” – the value of more than 47,000 volunteer hours contributed through our grassroots volunteers. In addition, we leveraged more than $750,000 in off-budget contributions from grants on TU projects received via our agency partners – further stretching the impact of our donors’ generous support.

The vast majority of TU funds go directly into programs for conservation, education, and grassroots engagement. For fiscal year 2015, 91% of TU in Colorado funds were directed toward program services, 5% for general administration, and 4% for fundraising.

**Protect Our Rivers Partners**

River-minded businesses can help Colorado’s rivers through their generous contributions under Colorado TU’s “Protect Our Rivers” program. We would like to recognize our current sponsors:

**Rep Your Water** offers creatively-designed gear that allows you to show your love for your home waters. They not only celebrate those waters, they give back to them – 1% of sales of Colorado merchandise is contributed to Colorado TU. [www.repyourwater.com](http://www.repyourwater.com)

**Suncor** is a globally competitive integrated energy company with a balanced portfolio of assets including oil and gas as well as renewable energy. Suncor is a generous supporter of the South Platte River Explorers program connecting Denver-area students with watershed science and fishing. [www.suncor.com](http://www.suncor.com)

**Trouts Fly Fishing** in Denver is a premier fly fishing outfitter and retailer with a 3,000+ square foot store boasting two floors of retail goods, as well as a fly fishing education center and outfitting office. Trouts has hosted multiple events supporting TU and the Defend the Colorado campaign, bringing resources and awareness to the plight of our state’s namesake river. [Troutsflyfishing.com](http://Troutsflyfishing.com)

**Upslope Brewing Company**, an award-winning Colorado brewery, knows that healthy rivers brew the best beer. Upslope contributes 1% of the sales of its craft lager to Colorado TU through the Protect Our Rivers program. [www.upslopebrewing.com](http://www.upslopebrewing.com)
Your Support Makes the Difference!

Thank You!

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

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Your generous financial support will keep the great conservation success stories that you see in this report coming, and make fishing in Colorado better. Through grants, sweat equity, and partnerships, we will stretch the impact of every dollar received.

Donors can support the work of Trout Unlimited in Colorado through contributions for unrestricted support or for specific programs, projects, or basins.

Century Club donors contribute $100 or more each year, while through a contribution of $1000 or more per year you can join the River Stewardship Council (CO) and Griffith Circle (National), and take part in special tours where you can interact with other dedicated conservationists, enjoy outstanding fishing, and see first-hand the difference your support is making on the ground.

Please go to www.coloradotu.org or www.TU.org right now, to make a donation to help write the next TU success story.

Thank you!
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