

conservation corner

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By Kyler Wolf, Clark Fork-Pend Oreille Conservancy

In our article last month I discussed the Clark Fork-Pend Oreille Conservancy (CFPOC), who we are and what we do. What I would like to discuss today is species and habitat protection.

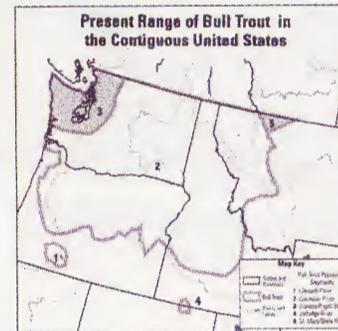
In 1963, President John F. Kennedy sent a bill to Congress to create the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Kennedy noted the need for a program that would buy land and protect it for future generations. Congress created the Land and Water

Conservation Fund in 1965 and began a legacy of conservation that has lasted nearly half a century. The fund is based on a simple concept: take revenues from the depletion of one resource (offshore oil and gas) and use them to acquire parks, playgrounds, wildlife refuges, forests, historic sites, and recreational lands. All this is done without spending a single tax dollar.

The CFPOC does not currently benefit directly from this funding, however we are working on a project that is similar to this concept. It is called the Tributary Streams Project and it involves using funding generated from the Clark Fork Settlement Agreement for protection of Bull Trout.

Bull Trout are members of the char subgroup of the salmon family (salmonids), which also includes the Dolly Varden, lake trout, and Arctic Char. Bull Trout that live in streams rarely exceed 4 pounds but

they can grow to more than 20 lbs. in lake environments. Listed as a threatened species in 1999 and in 2010, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service designated critical habitat for Bull Trout throughout their range.



So what is being done to protect Bull Trout? Stream and habitat protection and restoration, reduction of siltation from roads and other erosion sites, and modification of land management practices to improve water quality and temperature are all important. Several state agencies have enacted regulations reducing or prohibiting Bull Trout harvest. Some states have

also drafted or adopted conservation plans to help Bull Trout populations recover. Many of the conservation actions intended to protect other declining salmonids may also help Bull Trout.

What more can be done to help Bull Trout? Besides the measures outlined above, a strong commitment by private citizens, industry, state, federal, and tribal groups to change, reduce or eliminate activities that degrade streams and rivers is necessary to truly recover many species of native fish. Much of the Bull Trout habitat in rivers and streams is privately owned, making conservation activities on private lands a key element to restoring aquatic habitat and recovering native fish populations.

This is where the Tributary Streams Project that I mentioned earlier comes into play. The CFPOC is working with Montana Fish, Wildlife

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and Parks; Idaho Fish and Game and Avista Corporation to put conservation easements in place, or in some cases purchase privately owned lands along the tributary streams of the Clark Fork River and Lake Pend Oreille drainage system. This helps to protect vital Bull Trout habitat and focuses specifically on spawning areas.

Through this program, we work with willing land owners to negotiate conservation easements and land purchases that ensure that the Bull Trout habitat has permanent protection. This includes restricting development and other activities that are potentially damaging to the habitat. By protecting these areas and continuing restoration activities in our watershed, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks; Idaho Fish and Game; Avista Corporation and the CFPOC are working to protect the good habitat that is left and restore what has been degraded, so we can save and recover Bull Trout and other salmonid populations. We are helping this threatened, native species and leaving a legacy we all can be proud of to future generations.

What can you do to help? Well, we can always use volunteers. Also you can talk to your friends and neighbors, spread the word about Bull Trout and our Tributary Streams Project. Do you know someone who owns land along a river, lake or stream? Maybe they would be interested in placing a conservation easement on the property or selling it to help protect our native fish populations. If nothing else, keep your eye out for CFPOC events and come support us if you can. We are happy to do the heavy lifting, but we can't do it without support.

