

Bear Creek Fish Passage Improvement Project

Project Objective: The purpose of the project was to restore a migratory corridor for populations of trout utilizing Bear Creek and West Fork Bear by upgrading and removing undersized culverts, and reduce sediment inputs to Bear Creek by removing floodplain fill and abandoning and stabilizing riparian road segments.

Stream Description: Bear Creek is a second-order tributary to the lower Blackfoot River and flows six miles through a mixture of public and private lands before entering the river near mile 12.2. Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks monitoring data indicates it to be one of the colder tributaries entering this section of river and it supports populations of westslope cutthroat trout, juvenile bull trout, brown trout and brook trout. A section of Bear Creek was restored in 1999, and fisheries monitoring post project has identified Bear Creek to be an increasingly important spawning and rearing tributary to the lower Blackfoot River sport fishery.

Project Description: The development of the Bear Creek Fish Passage Improvement project began following the initiation of the Montana Legacy Project, which involves the purchase of 310,000 acres of Plum Creek Timber Company Lands in Western Montana by The Nature Conservancy and The Trust for Public Lands. Project area lands were transferred to DNRC ownership in 2010. Project specifics involved upgrading or removing three existing crossings on Bear Creek (main and West Fork) that caused channel impairments, road drainage issues and limited stream connectivity for fish. Specifically, an undersized and perched culvert near stream mile 2.2 creating a partial barrier to upstream migration was replaced with a free span bridge following *stream simulation* guidelines and principles. Two other culverts, one on Bear Creek (stream mile 3.4), one on West Fork Bear (stream mile 0.2) were also removed and 5,300 feet of adjoining road segments were abandoned and stabilized which will reduce sediment input to Bear Creek.

Accomplishments: Restored fish passage to over six miles of instream habitat, decommissioned close to one mile of riparian roads, reduced sediment inputs and improved channel conditions.

Project Partners: DNRC, USFWS, MTFWP, The Nature Conservancy, Montana Trout Unlimited & BBCTU.



Historic undersized culvert on Bear Creek near stream-mile 2.2 replaced with a free-span bridge in 2011.