

Willow Creek Fish Passage Project

Project Objective: Restore connectivity to the upper reaches of Willow Creek for pure populations of westslope cutthroat trout.

Stream & Project Details: Willow Creek is a second-order tributary to the upper Blackfoot River entering near river-mile 102.5 and supports populations of genetically pure westslope cutthroat trout, and brown and brook trout. The project is located on property protected under a perpetual conservation easement and was funded through Habitat Conservation Funds (HCP). This HCP-funded easement is intended to foster the conservation of native fish by preventing sub-division, development and other forms of habitat loss. This fish passage project was identified through the HCP assessment as a necessary habitat improvement to foster the recovery of native trout. This project addressed an existing culvert crossing near stream mile 5.2 that was undersized and perched, created a barrier to fish passage during high flow periods and caused channel impairments. This culvert was upgraded with an appropriately sized bridge following stream simulation guidelines and principles that will allow uninhibited aquatic organism passage and replicate the stream bed up and down stream of the crossing. Fill slopes and stream banks were reclaimed using transplants, sod and native grass seed.

Results: Connectivity for westslope cutthroat trout has been restored to the upper 3.5 miles of Willow Creek.

Project Partners: Jerry & Susan Biresch, USFWS Partners for Fish & Wildlife, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Five Valleys Land Trust, & Big Blackfoot Chapter of Trout Unlimited.



Photos 1-2: Undersized culvert replaced with a free-span bridge on Willow Creek near Lincoln, Montana.