

## North Fork Spanish Creek Westslope Cutthroat Trout Restoration

**State(s):** Montana

**Managing Agency/Organization:** Turner Endangered Species Fund, LLC (TESF)

**Type of Organization:** Nonprofit

**Project Status:** Underway

**Project type:** WNTI Project

**Project action(s):** Barrier Removal or Construction, Riparian or Instream Habitat Restoration

**Trout species benefitted:** Westslope Cutthroat Trout

**Population:** Spanish Creek Watershed; North Fork Spanish Creek and tributaries

**Project summary:** Native Westslope Cutthroat Trout will be restored to 17 miles of upper North Fork Spanish Creek in the Gallatin River sub-basin of southwestern Montana and protected with a constructed fish movement barrier. Successful implementation of this project, located predominately on public lands, will more than double the 2% of historical habitat currently occupied by native westslope cutthroat trout in the Gallatin River sub-basin, providing a large, self-sustaining population as a source of individuals for restoration elsewhere.

**Problem the Project Addresses:** Westslope Cutthroat Trout are currently found in only 5% of their historically occupied habitat in the upper Missouri River. In the Gallatin River portion of their native range, wild aboriginal Westslope Cutthroat Trout remain in low densities in only 4 of 1048 (0.5%) suitable stream miles. Introductions of Westslope Cutthroat Trout into historically fishless or renovated streams have added another 12 miles of occupied habitat. This proposed North Fork Spanish Creek project will more than double the currently occupied habitat in the Gallatin River sub-basin and provide the only self-sustaining population large enough to provide consistent numbers of source individuals for other restoration projects.

Westslope Cutthroat Trout have declined primarily due to competition and hybridization with non-native salmonids and habitat degradation. We are proposing to use piscicide to remove non-native trout from the upper 17 miles of the North Fork Spanish Creek drainage. A constructed fish movement barrier will be critical to prevent reinvasion of the restored North Fork Spanish Creek westslope cutthroat trout population.

This is a collaborative effort among the Custer Gallatin National Forest, Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks, and Turner Enterprises, Inc./Turner Endangered Species Fund, and 75% of the project is on accessible public lands. The project represents the last of seven native cutthroat trout restoration projects sponsored or initiated by the Turner organizations Cutthroat Trout Initiative that will ultimately lead to recovery or conservation of native cutthroat trout in over 250 miles of stream habitat.

**Objectives:** This project would meet Goals # 1 and # 2 of the National Fish Habitat Partnership Action Plan (NFHAP 2nd Edition, 2012). The project will protect and maintain intact and healthy aquatic systems. The National Forest portion of the North Fork Spanish Creek drainage lies entirely within the boundaries of the Madison Inventoried Roadless Area and Lee Metcalf Wilderness Area and contains both healthy and intact aquatic systems minus native WCT. The project will also prevent further degradation of fish habitats that have been adversely affected by preventing the future expansion of non-native trout into the headwaters. If fully funded by all parties, national and local support will be mobilized and focused on achieving fish habitat conservation goals.

This proposed project meets Goals #1, #2, #3, and #4 of the Western Native Trout Initiative, A Plan for Strategic Action (2008). It is the intention of all partners to share and report our work including data, lessons learned, results and accomplishments, including presenting at professional meetings.

The overall project has been broken in to five distinct phases. This proposal addresses only Phase II (Barrier Construction). The proposed barrier site is located on private land owned by Turner Enterprises, Inc. (TEI). Turner Enterprises, Inc. has funded the engineering design and will contract and oversee logistics of barrier construction. A U.S. Forest Service engineering/hydrologist provided oversight throughout the design process and will assist with engineering oversight during construction. Upon the completion of Phase II, the TEI, Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks, and the Custer Gallatin National Forest will collaborate on implementation of Phases III, IV and V (removal of non-natives and restocking of Westslope Cutthroat Trout).

**Partners:**

- Turner Enterprises, Inc./Turner Endangered Species Fund LLC
- Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks
- Custer Gallatin National Forest
- Montana Future Fisheries
- National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
- Montana Trout Unlimited

**Project Monitoring:**

The final engineering design will be stamped by a professional engineer.

State of Montana (SPA 310, Stream Alteration) and Army Corps of Engineers (404 wetlands) permits will be obtained prior to barrier construction.

Turner Enterprises, Inc. and Custer Gallatin National Forest will provide construction oversight and inspections.

Turner Enterprises, Inc. and Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks will develop a long-term contract for barrier Maintenance.

**Funding Source(s):** National Fish Habitat Action Plan

**Project cost:** \$15,000.00

**Start Date:** 08/01/2017 **Completion Date:** 9/30/2018

**Project Contacts:** Carter G. Kruse, Director of Conservation and Research, Turner Enterprises, Inc. and Turner Endangered Species Fund LLC, 406.556.8508.