

## ***Rattlesnake Creek Community Stewardship Program***

Rattlesnake Creek Watershed Group • Report to the Western Native Trout Initiative • Nov 2012

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**ORGANIZATION PROFILE:** Founded in 2008, the Rattlesnake Creek Watershed Group (RCWG) works to promote the preservation of Rattlesnake Creek through education, science, and stewardship. We are a grassroots organization led by a seven-member board of directors, a part-time coordinator, and three young and growing volunteer committees. We strive to attract volunteers and members with diverse perspectives, and rely on a bottom-up, citizen-driven approach to watershed protection and community outreach. Although we have a relatively short history, we have made notable gains over the past several years that have improved watershed health and enhanced community stewardship in our region:

- Restoration of Bugbee Nature Preserve, a community park that is home to dozens of native plant species, big game animals, birds, and fish;
- Annual community tours and cleanups to connect citizens and local decision-makers with conservation efforts on the creek;
- Completion of stream monitoring projects to evaluate and assess water quality, water quantity, and biological data on the creek; and
- Completion of a watershed plan for Rattlesnake Creek that articulates our conservation vision, goals, and objectives for our region.

### **PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND GRANT PURPOSE:**

Rattlesnake Creek is a critical feeder tributary into the Clark Fork River, which is in turn one of the largest river systems in the Columbia River basin. The creek originates high in the Rattlesnake Wilderness Area, and gathers depth and breadth from dozens of even smaller streams as it meanders toward the city of Missoula, Montana. It boasts healthy populations of native westslope cutthroat trout, contains critical habitat for bull trout, and provides migratory habitat for deer, elk, black bears, and grizzly bears, as well as dozens of species of raptors, waterfowl, and songbirds. The creek also provides unique angling and recreational opportunities for residents, and is the back-up drinking water supply for the city of Missoula.

Yet despite the near-pristine state of its headwaters, Rattlesnake Creek has suffered in its lower reaches as a result of residential development, increased road densities, and water withdrawals. The urban region that straddles the lower portion of Rattlesnake Creek is a busy, populated area with two major road systems, a freeway overpass, hundreds of homes, a school, and restaurants. And, an ever-increasing population threatens to add more pollution, amplified nutrient runoff, and development that's too close to the creek.

Fortunately, residents of "The Rattlesnake" take immense pride in the creek, which serves as the namesake for their neighborhood. People routinely bike, hike, fish, and bird-watch throughout the watershed, taking full advantage of this exceptional recreational corridor situated just a step outside their back door. As a grassroots organization, the Rattlesnake Creek Watershed Group works to tap into this civic pride for the benefit of the neighborhood waterway, and connect hundreds of youth and adults to efforts to restore habitat, protect fish and wildlife, and learn more about the creek that is the lifeblood of the community.

The much-needed grant from the Western Native Trout Initiative helped us to implement the critical goals and objectives for community engagement and stream protection as contained in our watershed plan. Your investment in our organization helped us connect hundreds of community members to the irreplaceable ecosystem of Rattlesnake Creek, and enhanced our efforts to protect the native fish and wildlife who rely on a cool, clean, and connected creek to survive. We conducted three community workshops in 2012, and taught 100+ citizens about stream health, plant and wildlife identification, threats to the creek, and restoration opportunities over the course of one year.

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### **PROJECT DELIVERABLES:**

In 2012, we achieved the following specific objectives as relates to the WNTI grant:

- Hosted 3 workshops in partnership with the City of Missoula, Missoula Conservation District, Missoula Weed District, Defenders of Wildlife, Watershed Education Network, and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks.
- Engaged 100+ citizens on a variety of conservation topics related to stream health in Rattlesnake Creek, including: native trout identification and habitat; aquatic invasive species; riparian plant identification; water conservation; drought management; and restoration techniques.
- Surveyed 5+ miles of Rattlesnake Creek in Greenough Park, a City-owned Park, and Bugbee Park, a County-managed open space area, and monitored invasive species in both locations including common tansy, Norway maple, and spotted knapweed.
- Planted 100+ native riparian shrubs in Bugbee Park as part of a restoration workday in partnership with Sussex School, and engaged a total of 40 elementary-age students in restoration effort.

### **PHOTO DOCUMENTATION:**

Please see the following photos from our 2012 Community Stewardship Program:

