

COLLABORATIVE BLACK RIVER LANDSCAPE RESTORATION PLANNING FOR APACHE TROUT CLIMATE RESILIENCE GRANT

Building Watershed Resilience through the WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program

In 2022, Trout Unlimited was awarded a Cooperative Watershed Management Grant to convene a diverse group of stakeholders to engage in a collaborative planning process for a watershed restoration project on the West Fork Black River, Arizona. Warming temperatures, changing patterns of precipitation, and a legacy of fire suppression throughout the West have contributed to overstocked forests at risk of burning catastrophically, damaging aquatic habitat, water quality, and reducing the capacity of downstream water storage facilities.

The proposed project location is on the West Fork Black River, 25 miles to the west of Alpine, Arizona. The West Fork Black River is an important headwater stream in the Salt River watershed which is a key source of water for over 2 million people and ten municipalities - including the City of Phoenix - and supports five Bureau of Reclamation facilities that produce hydropower and manage water. Additionally, the watershed contains one of the few remaining genetically pure Apache trout populations within its historic range.



PHOTO: WEST FORK BLACK RIVER | STEPHEN FLORA, SRP

PROJECT DETAILS

Project name: Collaborative Black River Landscape Restoration Planning for Apache Trout Climate Resilience Grant

Potential Project Partners: Trout Unlimited, Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest, Arizona Game and Fish Department, Arizona Wildlife Federation, Arizona Elk Society, Freeport McMoRan, Salt River Project, and the Wild Turkey Federation

Federal Funding Award: \$191,220

Total Project Cost: \$293,280

Federal Funding Program: Bureau of Reclamation's WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program

Creating climate and drought resilience ecosystems will require combining aquatic restoration with upland forest treatments to address multiple drivers and scales of this threat. The goal of this partner-led, cross-boundary effort will be to generate designs and permit applications that will meet the readiness requirements for subsequent funding opportunities on a project area located on the West Fork Black River, Arizona.

This work will build on existing Trout Unlimited partnerships with the Arizona Game and Fish Department around the monitoring and management of Apache trout, contribute to the larger forest health and climate resilience missions outlined in the Four Forest Restoration Initiative (4FRI), and develop plans to carry out aquatic restoration and fuels treatment needs identified in the Black River Landscape Restoration Environmental Assessment. Project partners anticipate this process will accelerate the pace and scale of restoration and improve collaboration to increase overall engagement.

Community Support

This project brings together a diverse set of partners, including Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest, Arizona Game and Fish Department, Arizona Wildlife Federation, Arizona Elk Society, Freeport McMoRan, Salt River Project, and the Wild Turkey Federation, which are also members of the existing 4FRI watershed collaborative initiative. Additionally, the Fort Apache Indian Reservation lands align with the western border of the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest in the Black River watershed. While Tribal lands are not within the proposed project area, TU and project partners are undertaking additional outreach to the San Carlos Apache Tribe and the White Mountain Apache Tribe to ensure their perspectives are incorporated.

The development of the proposed restoration project would fulfill a key 4FRI priority to implement aquatic restoration projects by leveraging cross-boundary partnerships to expand the capacity of federal and state agency staff and other 4FRI stakeholders. This cross-boundary partnership is a key milestone in the success of the 4FRI's vision to increase its headwater watersheds' resilience to climate change.

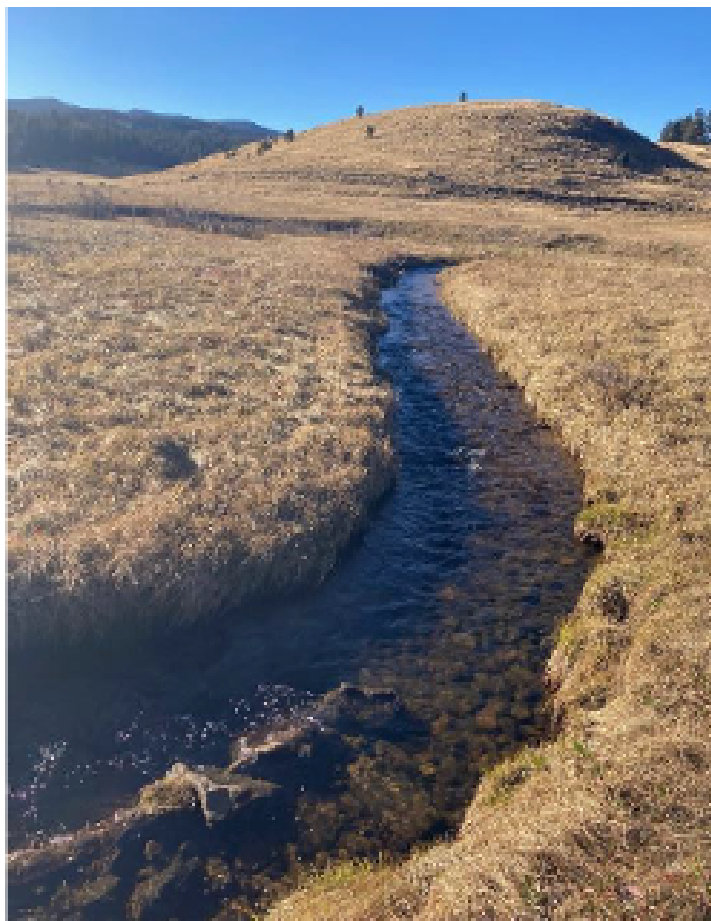


PHOTO: WEST FORK BLACK RIVER | STEPHEN FLORA, SRP

The Importance of Federal Funding

Trout Unlimited was awarded \$191,220 through the Bureau of Reclamation's Cooperative Watershed Management Program to support these efforts on the West Fork Black River. The full project cost is \$293,280.

This program provides funding to watershed groups to encourage diverse stakeholders to form local solutions to address their water management needs. Funding is provided on a competitive basis for Watershed Group Development and Watershed Restoration Planning. In 2012, Reclamation began providing funding for watershed group development, watershed restoration planning, and watershed management project design. The grant program is critical to address capacity issues - a key barrier to accessing federal funds in rural areas.

This is one of the only grant program that supports crucial activities for project development, including:

- Supports watershed group formation or expansion
- Supports watershed restoration planning and project design
- No cost-share
- Funds can be used to hire staff
- Can receive multiple successive grants—e.g., can use first grant to start watershed group, second to build out a watershed plan/“library” of projects”