

California Cast

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The Newsletter for Trout Unlimited of California

Fall/Winter 2003

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Photo by J. Hunter

Volunteers install a notched log for an aeration pool in the Sequoia National Forest.

New Progress Protecting California Golden Trout

By David Katz

Exciting new progress is occurring in the work to protect the golden trout.

The California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) has completed a major reconstruction of a key protective barrier for golden trout and TU is embarking on a new restoration effort in partnership with DFG and our colleagues at Cal Trout that is being funded by Orvis.

First, some background. Over the past several years, TU has been very actively involved (see sidebar about TU's petition to list) in working to conserve and protect California's state fish, the California golden trout—a brilliant gold and red fish

that evolved from sea-run rainbow trout that migrated deep into the southern Sierra Nevada Mountains some 20,000 years ago. Their specific origin has been traced to the high elevation streams of the Kern River drainage, specifically the South Fork Kern River and Golden Trout Creek.

The future of this beautiful and historically significant species is being threatened on several fronts. Non-native fish have been introduced into the golden trout's home waters, resulting in hybridization, predation, and competition for resources. Hybridization is compromising the golden

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TU Heads Back to Court for Golden

Trout Unlimited has served notice to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) that we will return to court once again to force the agency to protect California's state fish, the golden trout.

This legal struggle began three years ago when TU first filed a petition to list the California golden trout as endangered. In the fall of 2000, TU petitioned USFWS to list the fish under the Endangered Species Act. By law, the USFWS is required to make a finding—within 90 days after receiving such a petition—as to whether the petition presented substantial scientific information indicating that a listing might be warranted. USFWS failed to make the 90-day finding, claiming budgetary constraints. In February, 2001 TU notified the USFWS that if it did not act on the petition, we planned to pursue legal action. In spite of the threat of legal action, the USFWS still refused to act, forcing TU to go to court.

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Next California Council Meeting

The next meeting of the California Council will be held at the Dance Palace in Point Reyes Station, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

February 7, 2004.

If you would like to attend or need more information, please contact us at 707.543.5877 or e-mail dkatz@tu.org

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New Progress in protecting Goldens

trout's genetic integrity and predation and competition are pushing pure strain goldens to the brink of extinction. The consequences of non-native introductions are exacerbated by cattle grazing that has resulted in the degradation of golden trout habitat throughout its historical range.

In 1999, the Inyo National Forest (U.S. Forest Service), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) signed a Conservation Strategy for the Volcano Creek golden trout. Since then, the Conservation Strategy has undergone several revisions and the current strategy and implementation plan is almost complete. TU has had an active role in working with DFG to help shape the Strategy and implementation goals. Due to budget and other resource constraints, only scant portions of the Strategy have been implemented thus far. One notable exception has been the recent rebuilding of the Schaeffer Barrier by the DFG, a \$1.3 million project that has just been completed on the South Fork Kern River in the Golden Trout Wilderness. This barrier will prevent non-native fish and

hybridized populations of golden trout from migrating into waters that harbor pure populations of golden trout, thus preventing further hybridization.

We are now embarking on joint project with California Trout in concert with the California Department of Fish and Game. The Orvis Company has agreed to fund \$30,000 of the initial expenses of the project and they will be asking their customers to join in to provide additional funding for the project over the coming year. Conservation strategies include genetic monitoring, habitat protection and restoration projects through improved grazing management, and developing education and outreach programs to inform the public about the golden trout's historic and biological significance.

These developments represent a great opportunity for everyone who cares about golden trout. It is a partnership where we are all working together for a common goal, and where there will be an opportunity for our members, both from TU and California Trout, to work side by side in restoration and outreach projects. 🐟

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TU Heads Back to Court

"Historically, Trout Unlimited is very reluctant to go to court. We would much rather spend our time and energy working with appropriate state and federal agencies to save fish, like the golden trout, from extinction," said Chuck Bonham, Trout Unlimited's California counsel. "Unfortunately, the federal government's inaction has forced us to return to court once again."

On June 21, 2002, a federal district court judge ruled in TU's favor, requiring that Gale Norton, Secretary of the Interior, make a preliminary determination within 90 days as to whether the TU petition to list the California golden trout as endangered presented substantial information that a listing was warranted. Since then the USFWS has not acted on the petition, even though they were required to do so within a year. So now we have served notice to the USFWS that we will return to court once again to force the agency to protect California's state fish, the golden trout.

"We have been told that one of the reasons behind the U.S. Fish and wildlife Service's failure to once again act to save this magnificent fish is because of a lack of funding. They simply will not consider our petition until we sue them. Ironically, every time we take them to court it costs the federal government money—money that could be better spent saving California's state fish from extinction, the same fate the state's animal—the grizzly bear—met," said Bonham. 🐟

Recovery Plan Underway for California Coho Salmon

By Stan Griffin

In July 2000, the Salmon and Steelhead Recovery Coalition, of which TU is a member, petitioned the Fish and Game Commission to list coho salmon north of San Francisco as an endangered species. The Commission referred the listing petition to the Department of Fish and Game (DFG) for evaluation and they subsequently recommended that the Commission accept the petition. In August of 2003, the Commission found that north coast coho warranted listing under the California Endangered Species Act. Coho are now considered "endangered" from San Francisco Bay to Punta Gorda in Humboldt County, and as "threatened" from there north to the Oregon border.

As a result of the listing petition, the Commission directed the DFG to prepare a coho recovery strategy over the next 12 months. This is a very exciting event for conservationists. This will be the first extensive recovery plan developed to address the needs of coho in California. Fish and Game Director Bob Hight established a 21-member statewide "Coho Recovery Team" to oversee development of the plan. The statewide team includes representatives from a variety of interest groups, including Indian tribes, large and small landowners, state and federal agencies, environmental groups, commercial fishermen and recreational anglers. Tom Weseloh, the North Cast Manager of Cal Trout, was a driving force behind the initial listing petition. He has a seat on this blue-ribbon panel and TU's Stan Griffin often attends the meetings as his alternate.

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North Bay Chapter Wins TU's Highest Award

By Jamie Hunter

The North Bay Chapter has won the Golden Trout Award for 2003. In a ceremony on September 5 at the National Meeting in Denver, Charles Gauvin, President and CEO of Trout Unlimited, presented chapter representative John Milanovich with the award at the annual awards banquet. The North Bay Chapter meets in Corta Madera and includes members from San Francisco, Marin and Sonoma Counties.



North Bay Chapter members proudly show off their well-deserved Golden Trout Award.

The highest award given to TU chapters is the Golden Trout Award, which recognizes that chapter which has made the most significant contribution to Trout Unlimited's mission during the previous year, while remaining dedicated to the development of its volunteers and membership.

California's North Bay Chapter was this year's recipient, recognizing their activities and organizational strength in a state where TU's presence at the grassroots level is vital to our conservation success. Aply led in recent years by National Leadership Council Representative John Milanovich and an executive committee that has doubled in size over the past year, the North Bay Chapter and its volunteers serve a membership that numbers around 3,000.

In addition to its success in cultivating effective leadership, the following successes made the North Bay Chapter the 2003 Golden Trout recipient:

- Secured a \$65,000 California Fish and Game grant for its work on coastal coho restoration at Devil's Gulch.
- Actively supported TU's petitioning to provide Endangered Species Act protection for the California golden trout.

- Held a *Fall Hatch 2002* benefit, which generated \$32,000 from over 170 attendees in support of chapter projects.

- Received a TU Embrace-a-Stream grant to preserve coastal coho.
- Established a chapter *First Cast* youth education program.
- Completely redesigned its newsletter and website.

Over one hundred people attended the award ceremony. The award, a beautifully carved rainbow trout sculpture, was proudly displayed at the chapter's Fall Hatch banquet. With over 450 Trout Unlimited chapters in the nation, this is a fantastic honor for North Bay TU.

Congratulations North Bay Chapter! 🐟

Jamie Hunter is editor of California Cast. E-mail hjhunter1@cox.net

TU Volunteers Return to Silver King Creek

By David Katz

On August 22, 23 and 24, I joined 30 other TU volunteers bound for the Sierra Nevada and the next chapter of restoration work on Silver King Creek. A fierce thunderstorm hit as we approached Lake Tahoe, complete with heavy hail, dramatic lightning strikes, and deafening thunderclaps. We wondered how the TU advance team was doing. Linda Perrone and Mike Cronin were camped at the trailhead, preparing the supplies for our departure the next morning.

We were going to Silver King Creek, a Carson River tributary situated on the eastern side of the Sierra, south of Carson City. Silver King Creek, in the Carson-Iceberg Wilderness, is home to the Paiute cutthroat trout, a native trout listed as "threatened" under Endangered Species Act. Since the mid-1980's, TU has worked in partnership with the Department of Fish and Game and the U.S. Forest Service to implement a recovery plan for this unique fish.

Over the years, TU volunteers have built exclusionary fencing to keep cattle out of the creek, installed bank erosion control structures, and planted willows to stabilize banks. This time around, our plan was to

spend several days capturing and moving hybridized fish from a six-mile stretch of Silver King Creek above Llewellyn Falls to other areas, where they could provide fishing opportunities for anglers. The stream would then be treated by the DFG, to remove any remaining hybrids and exotic fish. Pure-strain Paiute cutthroat native to the area would then be reintroduced into a protected upper section of the creek.



Photo by Mike Cronin

TU Volunteers working with CDFG staff in Silver King Creek.

"We have the opportunity to restore the fish to its native range," said Bill Sommer, a senior fisheries biologist with the DFG, who has been the main liaison with TU. "It is one of the rarest of trout. The Paiute trout is part of our heritage and it's a unique life form."

We arrived at the trailhead as Linda and Mike were drying out from their stormy night at the base camp and just in time to watch the packers load the mule train that would carry our gear to Silver King, eight miles up the trail.

Our days were spent working with the DFG and Forest Service

staff shocking up fish, measuring them to record various population data, and loading them on mule-back for transport to several water bodies outside of the basin. We were able to spend several hours each afternoon fishing or relaxing, with evenings spent around the campfire, telling fish stories. It was a great opportunity to discuss fisheries and resource issues with member of the various government agencies. The

TU volunteers who pulled this project together deserve a nod for the many hours they spent writing the grant proposal and organizing the logistics. John Regan, Linda Perrone, and Mike Cronin were the mainstays. We are also grateful to Patagonia, which helped us cover the expenses of the project, and to all of the North Bay chapter members who made the Paiute T-shirt fundraiser

happen. A huge thanks is due to Roy Murrin, who was our chef for the three days. The Leo Cronin tradition of feeding the volunteer crew well was carried on in fine style!

We have good reason to believe TU's efforts over the years have improved the survival chances of native Paiute cutts. Perhaps one day you will have the pleasure to fish for them or see them in their native habitat along Silver King Creek. Let's hope so! 🐟

David Katz is Director of Trout Unlimited of California. You can reach him at 707 543.5877 or by e-mail, dkatz@tucalifornia.org.

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Introducing Rob Dickerson: New TU Staff Member

By Jamie Hunter

Several months ago, Rob Dickerson joined TU's efforts in California. Rob is managing the North Coast Coho Project and is helping to coordinate restoration projects for native golden and Paiute cutthroat trout. He also maintains the TU website and works with our grassroots volunteers to enhance TU conservation efforts.

He graduated from UC Davis in 1982 with a Bachelor of Science degree in geology and is a long-time volunteer for a variety of causes. Rob's 22 years of experience in the geothermal energy business includes working for twelve years in environmental, health and safety compliance at The Geysers in northeastern Sonoma County. The Geysers is the world's largest geothermal field and the facility there uses geothermal energy



Rob Dickerson

to generate enough clean electricity for a city the size of San Francisco. Dickerson's professional experience is enhanced by his work in environmental education, watershed ecology and restoration projects. He is a board member of the Stewards of the Coast and Redwoods and has been active with the California State Parks on the Willow Creek Project, a watershed restoration project in western Sonoma County.

Rob is a northern California native whose family goes back over 100 years in Sonoma County. He lives in Windsor with his wife, Diana and daughter, Kathryn. When not working to protect our watersheds, Rob enjoys hiking, cooking and being outside. He is actively seeking new ideas for restoration projects and can be reached at rdickerson@tu.org.

North Bay Chapter Tackles Devil's Gulch

By Mike Cronin and Linda Perone

The trail along Devil's Gulch, a tributary of Lagunitas Creek, encroaches on the creek in many places, causing not only erosion and hiker safety issues, but also disturbance to spawning salmon. To alleviate the problem, the TU Devil's Gulch restoration project (funded by an Embrace-A-Stream Grant) will relocate as much of the existing trail away from the creek banks and repair or replace the existing footbridges over seasonal tributaries.

The first trail work took place on the weekend of October 18 and 19. TU volunteers, along with State Park

ranger and trail expert, Chris Platis, successfully completed two of the four low lying footbridges targeted for replacement. Almost 30 volunteers split into crews, cut and carried wood beams and planks, prepped the sites to support the beams, and moved rocks into place around the base of the new bridgework to anchor the soil and prevent erosion. Others cleared hiking trails along the creek from overgrowth and fallen trees.

Mike Cronin is vice president of North Bay Chapter and Linda Perone is Public Relations. Visit North Bay website at www.northbay-tu.org



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■ **Bridge Creek**

Bridge Creek, tributary to South Branch North Fork Navarro River, is located in northern Mendocino County, California. A culvert that blocked fish passage to critical habitat



was removed and replaced by a bridge. The work made an estimated 1.5 miles of spawning and rearing habitat available for steelhead trout upstream of the bridge. In 2002, coho salmon were observed in the North Fork Navarro River. TU worked with the Mendocino Redwood Company, the California Department of Fish and Game and NOAA Fisheries to design, permit and complete this project in about seven months.

—David Katz

■ **Pit River Relicensing**

TU and a group of diverse interests, including conservation organizations, a utility, and state and federal agencies, have worked for three years to reach agreement for the FERC relicensing of PG&E's three hydroelectric dams on the Pit River in northeastern California. At the end of October, we reached an agreement that will ultimately lead to better conditions for wild trout and other aquatic species in the Pit River. TU and CalTrout have joined with PG&E, the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. National Park Service, California Department of Fish and Game,

California Department of Parks, South Fork Irrigation District, Modoc County and other stakeholders in creating a consensus-based package of natural resources conditions for this new hydro license on the Pit River.

—Chuck Bonham

■ **Lower Austin Creek**

Trout Unlimited and our partners (Bohan and Canelis, NOAA Fisheries, California Department of Fish and Game, California Conservation Corps and the Sonoma County Water Agency) completed work this fall to improve 4,000 feet of juvenile and adult steelhead trout and coho salmon habitat. Complex structure and scour elements were added to pools and will provide summer habitat in a key Russian River tributary.

—David Katz

■ **Willow Creek**

The Willow Creek Restoration Project, under the leadership of Mike Swaney, will conduct additional restoration work on this watershed located in western Sonoma County. TU has been working in this watershed since the late 1990's and will continue with additional upgrades and maintenance at the project sites this winter.

—Rob Dickerson

■ **Hollow Tree Creek**

The first year of this multi-year, \$836,000 project to reduce sediment input to this important salmonid stream and tributary to the South Fork of the Eel River was completed. TU worked with Mendocino Redwood Company to upgrade roads and drainage systems, and decommission roads at 216 sites. We also worked with the California Conservation Corps to install in-stream structures for habitat improvement.

—Rob Dickerson

■ **PG&E Bankruptcy**

TU's California legal staff have found themselves advocating for coldwater fisheries protection in an unlikely place for the last several years—bankruptcy court. TU has been a key player along with other members of the California Hydropower Reform Coalition in helping to resolve the complex bankruptcy of California utility giant PG&E, which was a casualty of the state's energy crisis. TU and its partners got involved in response to a proposal from the utility to break up its hydropower system, 140,000 acres in 16 major watersheds and is the largest in the nation's smaller, non-state-regulated projects. The proposed settlement agreement will keep PG&E's hydro-system intact and create permanent protection through conservation easements or other means for the company's vast landholdings in California. These lands are in many sensitive watersheds throughout California, and their permanent protection will contribute to the health of trout and salmon streams. Final approval of the proposed settlement agreement is required by the CPUC and the federal bankruptcy court.

—Chuck Bonham

■ **San Mateo Creek**

The first phase of biological assessment work on San Mateo Creek, a southern steelhead stream which flows into the ocean near San Clemente, California, was completed this past August by contractors ECorp and Associates.

The next phase of work will involve testing removal techniques for non-native fish in the upper reaches of the creek in the Cleveland National forest. Volunteer participation may be needed and we will be soliciting help from local South Coast Chapter members. TU volunteers have logged over 500 hours of work on the creek over the past four years.

—George Sutherland

Restless Waters: Terrestrials

By Gary Watt

The trail was tucked up under the trees, way above the river. From that height, the feeling was all exhilaration, anticipation, butterflies. Beyond the near trunks lay a vast forest of fir and pine. The intense emerald canvas was spattered with vivid yellow blotches of big-leaf maple, like an artist's trick or tantrum. Above all that, a thin layer of cloud stretched



over the rim. I paused there, catching my breath, looking down. The limegreen liquid below looked like cellophane spread across a rock garden.

The wind rattled the deciduous trees, setting off a burst of color and light as leaves of ginger, rust, and crimson twisted this way and that on the currents, slowly working their way toward the water. I followed them down, picking my way amongst the lava rocks and parched grass pushing up from every crevice and crack. Hoppers sprung from my feet, some floating and falling into the void. The rock turned to ruddy soil, tiny withered wildflowers, blackberry vine and poison oak. Then I was on the forest floor, dappled by beams of early morning sunlight with an October chill fading.

A nearly dry tributary skittered over a wide, smooth, granite wall, collected in a small pool rimmed with ferns, and ran steadily toward the river. I picked my way along the alders and vines guarding the tiny trough and slipped quietly down to the water. The rivulet dropped over

a steep bank and there, just beyond where the bubbles from the falling water subsided, right where it ought to be, was a big trout, finning slowly in the current.

There was no place to cast, no place to stand, no way to get there without sending the fish deep. So I crawled back up the ravine, hauling myself over the jagged rock exposed by last spring's high water. Marking the spot, I headed upstream until I came to a small grassy patch where a large fir had crashed into the river, leaving a loamy patch of upturned soil. The root wad seemed alive, moving, writhing and I felt myself pulling up short, nerves fluttering. Then I saw the patterns, the rusty wings and tiny black dots. Lady bugs, thousands of them.

Perhaps hundreds of thousands.

Climbing out on the trunk of the big tree, I looked to the shady spot and saw a large dimple fade, a bubble sitting for a few seconds on the glassy surface. Way beyond my fish, way downstream near a huge pyramid of granite jutting out of the middle of the river, a large fish soared into the air and crashed hard, sending rollers to shore. Such distractions!

When I looked back at *my* fish, I saw another bubble rise, and then pop. My cast would need to be a one-time, one-time-only deal. The question, the ever-lasting fly fisher's query, what fly? Then a rusty red shimmer caught my eye again, all those lady bugs, and I looked down and saw a few sitting on the water beneath the tree. Had they fallen? Couldn't they fly away? Do trout eat them?

The fly didn't have a rusty red back, but from the water, it might resemble a lady bug. Maybe it looked like an overfed carpenter ant. I can't say. But against the white maw of the fall brown, against the vivid splendor of the fish's electric silver shimmer, buttery sheen, and red and black moons, it looked awfully good! 🐞

Story and photo by Gary A. Watt, Chairman of the California Council of Trout Unlimited. For more Restless Waters visit www.tucalifornia.org.

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Coho Recovery

The Department has identified freshwater habitat loss and degradation as the leading factor in the decline of anadromous salmonids. Timber harvest activities, especially road construction and diversion of water for agricultural and municipal purposes have resulted in less habitat for fish. Water quality in coho streams has deteriorated, and more streams are showing up on the list of California water bodies considered "impaired" by Clean Water Act standards.

The team has been meeting regularly since last December, and has developed a two-part recovery strategy. The first goal is to identify macro issues affecting coho throughout California. The second goal for the group is to identify issues impacting coho in each of the watersheds addressed in the listing.

DFG experts have presented in-depth studies and recommendations for each of the Northern and Central California watersheds, including information on all of the coastal streams north of Santa Cruz.

More information regarding the Coho Recovery Plan can be found at www.cohorecovery.org.

Stan Griffin is a former TU Regional Vice-President for California, Nevada and Hawaii. Contact him at 510.528.5390, tucalif@earthlink.net

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