THOMPSON-BURRO MEADOW RESTORATION FACT SHEET

By the Numbers:

$1.8
Million Investment in Rural Arizona

128
Acres of Wet Meadow Regeneration

8
Project Partners and Funders

3.5
Miles of Stream Restoration

Powering the restoration economy and rural jobs: TU's federal partnerships for America's working lands and waters

Trout Unlimited's restoration efforts don't just support America's working lands and waters, they are a driving force behind rural economic growth. Across the country and in Arizona, TU's projects are generating high-quality jobs for contractors, engineers, and laborers, most of whom live and work in the very communities benefiting from these projects.

These partnerships are proof that habitat restoration isn't just about conservation—it's about creating lasting benefits for rural Americans. By creating new jobs and clean coldwater resources, TU is strengthening communities that rely on healthy watersheds. From working alongside foresters to reconnecting streams with ranchers, this work not only supports fish populations but also bolsters the agriculture and outdoor industries.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Located northeast of Phoenix and 25 miles west of Alpine, the West Fork Black River runs through Thompson-Burro Meadow and is a major tributary of the Black River. The Black River watershed is part of the largest contiguous ponderosa pine forest in the United States. It serves as a crucial headwater source of water to the Salt River, a significant source of water for the Phoenix Valley.

The Thompson-Burro Meadow Restoration Project is the highest-priority restoration project for Trout Unlimited (TU) in Arizona over the coming years. The project area lies within the Colorado River Basin and the Salt River Basin and has an abundance of ephemeral, intermittent, and perennial streams – which are all particularly vulnerable in the arid Southwest.

Degradation occurred in the meadow system from historic land management or private actions, first identified in the late 1980s. Then, the 2011 Wallow Fire significantly impacted the project area. Many streams in the burn area experienced runoff from fire-impacted slopes that overwhelmed the systems, causing channel incision and erosion, which led to the loss of instream habitat and floodplain connectivity critical to groundwater storage and functioning riparian and wetland wildlife habitats.

Based on an assessment by the U.S. Forest Service, this project aims to restore the hydrological function of Thompson-Burro Meadow and the West Fork Black River.

TU and our partners will focus on approximately 3.5 miles of stream restoration and 128 acres of wet meadow regeneration. We will utilize process-based restoration structures in three creeks (West Fork Black River, Burro Creek, and Thompson Creek) to benefit the associated high-elevation wet meadows.

These process-based restoration techniques will increase water table elevations, restore stream function and natural flow regimes, enhance water storage in a historic wet meadow, mitigate erosion processes, stabilize channel banks, decrease stream temperatures, and restore habitat for native Apache trout in the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest.

PROJECT BENEFITS

This project will directly benefit Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest, native Apache trout, New Mexico meadow jumping mouse, and downstream users in the Phoenix Valley, and will contribute to improving the health of the Colorado River Basin and the communities and economies that rely on this river system.

Specifically, this project will utilize nature-based solutions to restore natural hydrology, creating a snowball effect of benefits for multiple species and human communities. By raising the groundwater in Thompson-Burro Meadow to historical levels, we are increasing water storage capacity and reinvigorating natural hydrologic attenuation in the meadow, thereby mitigating the impacts of drought and wildfire. Restoring floodplain connectivity will moderate high-intensity floods that can degrade water quality and damage water distribution infrastructure by reducing the erosive energy of floods and capturing sediment that would otherwise reduce reservoir storage capacity for the water system downstream that services users in the Phoenix Valley.

FUNDING PARTNERS & PROGRAMS

- U.S. Forest Service - TU Keystone/Regional Agreements
- Bureau of Reclamation - WaterSMART CWMP Phase I
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Bonneville Environmental Foundation
- CK Blueshift and BlueCommons ReBeaver Restoration Fund
- Microsoft
- Caterpillar Foundation

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- U.S. Forest Service
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- Microsoft
- Bonneville Environmental Foundation
- World Resources Institute
- Caterpillar Foundation
- Salt River Project
- Arizona Game and Fish
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- BlueCommons ReBeaver Restoration Fund