COLORADO RIVER RESILIENCE

GREEN RIVER HUSTON TO SOMMERS RESTORATION

Credit: Wyoming Game and Fish Department

WHAT THIS PROJECT DOES

The Green River between the Huston and Sommers access areas is one of western Wyoming's most popular fisheries and a priority for restoration in the Pinedale region. The area supports cattle ranching and cherished wildlife, and, thanks to public access agreements with the landowners, provides public access to fish this world-class fishery. While much of the river corridor is intact, several areas suffer from degraded conditions, increasing vulnerability to large erosion events that send sediment downstream, degrade water quality, and decrease local hay production. In partnership with four landowners, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) and Trout Unlimited are restoring four miles of river corridor to significantly reduce riverbank erosion, expand riparian habitat, restore the river's natural channel dimensions, and boost vegetation along streambanks. Partners will stabilize more than 13,000 feet of the riverbank, plant willow trees, and create wetlands that will bolster stream function and benefit fish and wildlife. Partners will also improve trout habitat, and newly enhanced riparian health will boost insect populations for fish and strengthen overall ecosystem health. This project directly supports the WGFD's Statewide Habitat Plan, Statewide Wildlife Action Plan, and Green River Basin Management Plan while improving public access to the river and protecting the productivity of nearby working lands.

PROJECT DETAILS

Project Location: WY

Project Cost: $800,000

Funding Award: $175,000

Funding Programs: Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resources Trust, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Partners: Wyoming Game and Fish Department, private landowners, Trout Unlimited, Wyoming DEQ, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

PROJECT BENEFITS

This project delivers broad community, economic, and conservation benefits. The improved fish and wildlife habitat will support healthy game and sportfish populations, boosting recreational opportunities that drive local tourism and outdoor-based economies in Jackson and Pinedale. Restoration efforts will also enhance riparian health and increase forage for livestock, thereby reducing costs for nearby farms and ranches and providing a critical buffer against natural disasters and extreme weather. The project will also improve water quality and restore native vegetation, in addition to providing benefits for trout, waterfowl, sage-grouse, and big game species native to Wyoming and vital to the state's beloved hunting and fishing traditions.

PROTECTING THE COLORADO RIVER AND THE COMMUNITIES THAT DEPEND ON IT

The Colorado River is a resource for 40 million people. It provides drinking water, as well as critical food and energy production. It's an engine for local economies, an irreplaceable habitat for native birds, fish, and wildlife, and an essential part of the Western way of life. But it's on the brink of collapse.

The river is over—allocated, and its two largest reservoirs have fallen to roughly one-third capacity. Decades of drought and rising temperatures threaten the reliability of future water supplies in Colorado River Basin states, putting crucial infrastructure in jeopardy and increasing risks to communities from natural disasters like wildfires and floods.

INVESTING IN THE COLORADO RIVER BASIN'S FUTURE

In order to ensure that the Colorado River can continue to be a reliable source of clean water for communities and agriculture throughout the Basin, we need long-term, sustainable state and federal funding for strategies that make the river more resilient, conserve water, and protect communities from increasingly severe fires, floods, and drought.

HOW TO CREATE A MORE RESILIENT COLORADO RIVER BASIN

Improve forest health using management and restoration strategies designed to protect the forested areas in the Colorado River Basin, such as thinning overgrown areas, removing invasive plant species, and conducting prescribed burns.

Restore wetlands, high-elevation mountain meadows, and riverside habitat to help improve the health of rivers and streams across the Basin, reduce sediment in downstream reservoirs and water infrastructure, improve water security, and enhance forage. Strategies include implementing wood and rock structures to slow river flows, reestablishing native plants, and replenishing groundwater to help protect clean water supplies and restore degraded rivers and streams.

Increase agricultural efficiency and enable farmers to develop strategies that work for them, like supporting on-farm water conservation methods, alternative crops that use less water, and investing in infrastructure upgrades like lining canals.

Boost municipal water conservation by expanding what is already working, like water-efficient plumbing and appliances, leak detection systems, water reuse, replacing thirsty lawns with drought-tolerant landscaping, and incorporating water planning into urban development and growth decisions.

Contact: Sara Porterfield
sara.porterfield@tu.org

Scan the QR code to learn more about resilience projects in the Colorado River Basin