



Trout Unlimited mends creek

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POWELL - Fresh saplings now dot a stretch of Timber Creek east of Meeteetse, thanks to Trout Unlimited and an army of volunteers whose work will be featured in the pages of Field and Stream magazine in October.

East Yellowstone Chapter of Trout Unlimited Conservation Chairman Bob Capron was filmed, photographed and interviewed by Field and Stream for his tireless efforts to rescue trout from irrigation canals every fall. For his efforts, Capron was a finalist in the magazine's fifth annual 2010 Heroes of Conservation.

Capron, of Powell, has been working various projects to preserve cutthroat habitat for years. But on Sat., May 7, a new assembly of aspiring heroes helped Capron pursue conservation.

"When we wanted to champion some grass-roots conservation volunteer opportunities for a new program called "Hero For a Day," we knew we should reach out to Bob," said Kristyn Brady, editorial assistant for Field and Stream.

With a \$10,000 Trout Unlimited "Embrace a Stream" grant, electric fences were installed to keep cattle out of a portion of Timber Creek, and a variety of shrubs and cottonwood tree saplings were purchased for volunteers to plant, Capron said.

This is just one of several projects planned to restore native Yellowstone cutthroat habitat in the Greybull River drainage, Capron said.

Other projects include a fish ladder that will allow trout to travel from the upper to lower reaches of the Greybull River, which is separated by Sunshine Reservoir. On Timber Creek, upstream from Saturday's location, diversions to irrigation ditches will be modified to reroute trout so they don't die in drying irrigation ditches. In addition, a self-cleaning fish screen will be installed in Francs Fork to keep trout out of irrigation ditches. These projects will be completed this year and next, Capron said.

The Greybull River drainage is one of the last strongholds of native Yellowstone cutthroat trout. It is good cutthroat habitat, but it could stand improvement. The goal is to increase the cutthroat carrying capacity, Capron said.

That Saturday, Field and Stream was there to feature Capron as one of its Heroes of Conservation and write an article about the restoration project, he said.

It will be an article and a video, Capron said.

For their efforts, volunteers received caps, sunglasses and other gifts from Field and Stream, and the magazine paid for most of the lunch, Capron said.

Trout Unlimited, the U.S. Forest Service, Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Field and Stream, Meeteetse Conservation District, Meeteetse School and the Pitchfork Ranch all are partners in the Timber Creek project, Capron said.

And, action!

The Meeteetse district school bus pulls up to Pitchfork Ranch outbuildings that are the staging area for riparian repair on Timber Creek.

Packing cameras, video and recording equipment, Lyman Smith and Tim Willison, of Warren Miller Entertainment, on contract by Field and Stream, record the kids' bus debarkation.

Then they filmed a brief meeting and instructions on using a water jet stinger, which drills holes in soil, and how to dig holes in the rocky ground.

Jason Burckhardt, Game and Fish fisheries biologist out of Cody, explains the project to the assembled crowd, concluding, "Let's get our hands dirty!"

This stretch of Timber Creek carves lazy S-shaped loops through the plain before dumping into the Greybull about three-quarters of a mile below the sheds. To the south and west, mountains rise like massive tawny swells, their rounded pinnacles a dazzling white.

Within one-half hour, kids and volunteers are spread along both banks of the creek, planting willows and cottonwoods.

Anticipated precipitation remains at bay. Despite a gusty breeze, it's a beautiful day and the carnival-like atmosphere is reflected in the adults and kids manning shovels.

A black angus observes the human spectacle indulgently and a little further away, a herd of antelope take in the show for a few minutes before streaking over the next rise.

This is the heart of the purest cutthroat habitat, said Ray Zubik, Shoshone Forest fisheries biologist, noting the creek as it meanders down to cottonwoods delineating the Greybull River.

The day is winding down.

"I had a blast," Brady said. "These kids worked really hard."

Molly Potas, who teaches seventh to 12th grades at Meeteetse School, managed her 12 students, but the kids required little supervision - just an occasional directive.

The youngsters learned teamwork and habitat protection in a place they frequent on weekends, Potas said.

A water fight is brewing among the kids and at least one adult as Potas observes her charges. She smiles.

"I'm so proud of them today," Potas said. "They worked so hard. They're good kids."

The student volunteers saved Trout Unlimited volunteers two or three days' work, said Rick Hostetler, East Yellowstone chapter president.

"A good group of kids," Hostetler added.

Riparian restoration such as the Timber Creek project will ensure cutthroats persist. Kudos to Unlimited and the Pitchfork for allowing the volunteers access, Burckhardt said.

The undertaking was a great conservation effort and relationship-builder for the general public, governmental agencies and schools, Capron said.

The day was a win-win for trout, anglers and the land - "Projects that everybody can benefit from," Capron said.

A rundown of the "Hero For a Day" program appeared in Field and Stream's conservation column in the April 2011 issue, and an update to accompany the Heroes of Conservation feature will be published in the October 2011 issue, Brady said. The video will be posted on fieldandstream.com/heroforaday in late June, Brady said.