Anglers Fund Conservation Update
Spring 2016

To help you get ready for the coming fishing season, we are pleased to share the latest edition of American Rivers’ Anglers Fund Conservation Update, highlighting our work across the country to protect and restore important fish habitat. Whether we are opening access to spawning grounds by removing outdated dams and barriers, protecting rivers with Wild and Scenic designations, restoring floodplains and meadows, or working with hydropower companies to better their operations, virtually all of this work helps to improve the health of our rivers and our fisheries.

As anglers, we understand that healthy fish need healthy rivers. Please enjoy the report and thank you for your interest in and support of our work. And good luck with your fishing!

Elwha River’s remarkable recovery: we start this report with an update on the salmon recovery taking place in Washington’s Elwha River where 2 huge dams were removed several years ago. According to the Seattle Times, “The middle Elwha and its tributaries went from no Coho at all before dam removal, to producing about 32,000 outgoing salmon fry in 2014. Chinook redd counts are up more than 350 percent and steelhead 300 percent from 2013 to 2015.” Biologists project that the river will support 400,000 steelhead and salmon now that the dams are out, which shows how quickly and completely rivers and fisheries can recover. Read more here.

Progress to remove 4 large dams on the Klamath River: In a move that holds similar great promise for Pacific salmon recovery, representatives of governors of California and Oregon, the U.S. Depts. of Interior and Commerce, and PacifiCorp announced an Agreement in Principle (AIP) to pursue removal of PacifiCorps four Klamath River dams. The AIP, which American Rivers actively supported, calls for transferring the dams to a new non-profit corporation for removal by 2020.

Large grants for restoring California floodplains: When juvenile salmon can mature in a floodplain as opposed to the main channel of a river, they grow dramatically bigger and have a better chance of returning to spawn (see photo). We have received 3 large grants to connect CA rivers with their floodplains which will allow this to happen. First, the CA Department of Fish & Wildlife awarded American Rivers a $576,000 grant for floodplain restoration work at the Great Valley Grasslands State Park, which will restore 220 acres of floodplain on land that will provide rearing habitat for Chinook salmon on the San Joaquin River. Read more. We additionally
received grants from the Wildlife Conservation Board for the Firebraugh Floodplain restoration project and for the Oroville Wildlife Area Floodplain Reconnection and Habitat Restoration project. These two projects will restore salmon habitat in the San Joaquin and Feather Rivers, respectively, and improve flood protection by allowing the floodplains to play their important role. Together, these grants represent a big step forward for river restoration, public safety, and the health of the salmon population.

**Restoring Yakima floodplains in Washington to reconnect salmon with spawning grounds:** Like we are doing in CA, as part of our work on the Yakima River, American Rivers has supported floodplain restoration efforts by Yakima County on the Yakima River to reconnect salmon with vital spawning habitat in the floodplain. [Read more.]

**Gaining “administrative protections” for rivers in western Montana:** Designating a river as “Wild & Scenic” is the highest form of protection a river can have, and these protections can start once a river is in the administrative process. Our Northern Rockies Office has actively been engaged in the forest plan revision for the Helena-Lewis & Clark National Forest as a way to gain new administrative protections for streams that qualify for protection under the Wild & Scenic Rivers Act. So far, the Forest is proposing 40 Wild & Scenic eligible streams for protection in its draft analysis, in part due to our advocacy. This is up from 14 streams in the previous plan, and includes Tenderfoot Creek (pictured). We are also engaged in plan revisions for the Flathead National Forest and Custer and Gallatin Nation Forest.

**Pressuring the state of Montana to deny Smith River copper mine:** We deployed several [Smith River action centers](#) across western Montana in February to raise awareness about the proposed copper mine that threatens the headwaters of Montana’s legendary Smith River. American Rivers listed the Smith River as America’s #4 Most Endangered River® of 2015.

Over the past month, more than 500 Montanans responded to our call to action by contacting Gov. Bullock.

**Pushing for the removal of Intake Dam on the Lower Yellowstone River:** Our Northern Rockies office recently partnered with Defenders of Wildlife and Natural Resources Defense Council to investigate the feasibility of [removing the existing Intake Diversion Dam](#) to aid in the recovery of endangered pallid sturgeon and a host of other native fish species that have been partially blocked by this barrier for more than a century.

**Success for Colorado Water Plan:** The Colorado Water Plan, recently signed by Governor Hickenlooper, included many of American Rivers’ recommendations to improve water management in the Colorado basin. It sets a municipal conservation goal of 400,000 acre/feet of water saved by 2050, recognizes the importance of healthy
rivers for Colorado’s economy and quality of life, and commits funding to Stream Management Plans which will benefit wild and native fish. It emphasizes flexible water management and water sharing, and makes the prospect of a new trans-mountain diversion from the Colorado River less likely. American Rivers has been involved in every phase of the process, and we were recognized for our efforts by the Colorado Water Conservation Board. Read more.

Protecting Colorado’s Deep Creek: After decades of work by AR and others, we are closer to having Garfield/Eagle Counties’ Deep Creek permanently protected as Wild and Scenic. American Rivers, with the full support of Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) staff, presented to the CWCB about full Wild & Scenic designation for Deep Creek. The CWCB board enthusiastically supported further investigation. This would be just Colorado’s second W&S River (the Cache la Poudre River is our one and only now).

Citico Creek Dam removal opens miles of TN wild trout habitat: American Rivers, in partnership with the US Forest Service Southern Region and the US Fish and Wildlife Service, removed the Citico Creek dam in the Cherokee National Forest in Tennessee. You can see a short clip of the wild trout trying to get past the dam before its removal by clicking here. With the dam removed, these trout can now move freely up and down the stream. Read more.

Bringing two stretches of NC’s and SC’s Catawba River back to life: Reversing the negative impacts of expiring dam licenses is a major focus of our hydropower relicensing team. After 13 years of engagement in NC and SC, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission issued a 40-year license to Duke Energy for the operation of the Catawba-Wateree hydroelectric project in North and South Carolina. The project consists of 11 dams and affects some 300 miles of river. American Rivers has been a leader in this project since 2003 and has won two legal challenges in state court: the first to protect higher water quality standards for trout in NC and the second to fend off Duke’s attempt to take away SC’s authority under the Clean Water Act. The numerous benefits of the new license include improved environmental flows for 140 river miles, fish passage for American shad, blueback herring and American eel, dissolved oxygen improvements so that all dam releases meet state water quality standards, and special flow release schedules for fishing and non-motorized boating, sturgeon spawning, and natural flooding patterns for the 91,000 acre Wateree River floodplain. This is a major victory for the river and the fish that live in it.

More NC dams scheduled for removal in 2016: American Rivers continues to expand its partnership with the US Fish and Wildlife Service’s National Fish Passage Program. Three dam removal projects (Granite Mill, Indian Valley, and Shuford) and two culvert replacement projects on Cherokee National Forest (Briar Creek and Sills Branch) are scheduled for removal during the Summer 2016 construction season.

Expanding dam removal work in GA and TN: American Rivers, in partnership with the Tennessee Chapter of TNC, has completed a dam removal capacity building plan for Tennessee, as a way to
expand the dam removal potential for this state and improve river health. This builds upon the successful removal of Citico Creek dam. Also, American Rivers, with our partners, presented a first-ever Dam Removal Training Workshop in Georgia. American Rivers and our partners see good momentum coming out of the meetings for dam removal and restoration projects to get underway in GA and TN.

Establishing the nation’s first Native Fish Conservation Area: With American Rivers serving in a leadership position, federal and state agencies, conservation groups, and native tribes designated the Little Tennessee River as the nation’s first Native Fish Conservation Area (NFCA). NFCAs are river basins designated for management with a focus on conservation and restoration of native fish and other aquatic life, paired with compatible recreational and commercial uses, with the end goal of ensuring the long-term survival of native aquatic species. Hopefully this will be the first of many. Read more.

Three examples of Connecticut dam removals: We kicked off 2016 with the first dam removal of the year (maybe in the country), on January 5, by removing the Timber Dam on Amethyst Brook in Pelham, MA. Estimates are that the dam dates from the mid-1700s. The dam was fully excavated so it could be documented for historical purposes and then removed. In December, we wrapped up the Ed Bills Pond Dam removal and river restoration. The dam removal on the Eightmile River in Connecticut will be followed this spring by restoring the channel with site revegetation. A third dam removed was the Pond Lily Dam on CT’s West River which flows into the Long Island Sound. This project opened approximately 2.6 miles of the West River and 76 acres of pond habitat to migratory fish. Restoring access to spawning grounds for forage fish like herring and alewife also helps the recovery of game fish like striped bass in Long Island Sound.

Blocking replacement dam on Utah’s Bear River: Keeping unneeded, proposed dams from being built is as important as removing them. American Rivers formally intervened in the licensing process for the proposed Bear River Hydroelectric dam on the Bear River in Utah. The proposed 109-foot-tall dam would be constructed a few miles upstream of a former dam site (Cove dam removed in 2006 as part of hydroelectric settlement) in the treasured Oneida Narrows. Among other things, the dam would result in a loss of 4.5 mile section of the Bear River with outstanding recreational values, reduce the size of cutthroat trout fishery, cause loss of 4.5 miles of fluvial Bonneville Cutthroat habitat on the Bear River and reduce the populations of up to 48 state-designated sensitive wildlife species. Fortunately, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission staff has issued a draft EIS recommending that the Commission not issue a license for the project. However, not all is settled until FERC denies the power company the license it is seeking to build the project.

Victory for TN’s Holston River: Listed in 2015 as one of America’s Most Endangered Rivers®️, we celebrated victory in October for Tennessee’s Holston River. The river is a favorite fly fishing destination with wonderful dry-fly fishing, and now
will have dramatically less pollution by 2020 thanks to a recently signed consent decree between Tennessee Clean Water Network (TCWN), the U.S. Department of Defense, and BAE Systems Ordnance Systems, Inc. Read more.

Restoring the Mississippi River Gorge in Minneapolis:
More decisions have been made that favor the eventual removal of the navigation dams in Minneapolis and restoration of the unique rapids ecosystem that existed between St Anthony Falls and Lake Pepin. The US Army Corps of Engineers has requested funding to conduct disposition studies on Upper St Anthony Falls Lock, Lower St Anthony Falls Lock and Dam and the Ford Lock and Dam due to the elimination of commercial navigation through this stretch of river. This is the first step in releasing the infrastructure for removal or other purposes. American Rivers is working with the University of Minnesota to study the environmental impacts of dam removal, like sediment transport and invasive species establishment.

Helping water quality in the Great Lakes Basin: American Rivers, together with more than 100 Great Lakes supporters, met in D.C. to urge members of Congress to support federal efforts to restore and protect the Great Lakes as part of an annual event hosted by the Healing Our Waters – Great Lakes Coalition. Our messages included restoring funding to the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative to protect clean drinking water, keep beaches open, stop toxic algal blooms, and support the outdoor recreation economy; supporting successful farm conservation programs that will help improve soil and water quality by maintaining funding for the Farm Bill’s Regional Conservation Partnership Program; and keeping Asian carp and other aquatic invasive species out of the Great Lakes. The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative has been widely credited over the last seven years with reinvigorating federal restoration efforts by supporting more than 2,900 projects that have restored more than 150,000 acres of fish and wildlife habitat as well as opened up fish access to more than 3,000 miles of rivers.

As a specific example of how you can keep harmful runoff out of our streams, in Toledo, Ohio, American Rivers has been working with the Toledo Mud Hens minor league baseball club (great name!) to install a tree bed filtration system to help manage urban runoff from a newly developed site called Hensville Park. This system will treat 8,700 gallons of polluted rain water coming off neighboring rooftops before being distributed back into the Maumee River each year.

Protecting rivers by working with Congress: Congress passed and the President signed the FFY 16 Omnibus Appropriations Bill. Highlights of the bill for American Rivers include:
• Securing the Green Project Reserve within the EPA’s Clean Water State Revolving Fund
• Substantial increases to NOAA’s Restoration Program and its Coastal Resiliency Grants
• Significant increases to DOI’s WaterSMART program
• Funding of the Yakima Basin’s request under current authorization levels
• Dropping all policy riders which AR opposed (including the Ski Bill and Waters of the US riders) from the final package

Overall, the omnibus bill represented a series of significant policy and funding wins for American Rivers and America’s rivers.

**National River Clean-up:** 2015 was another bumper year for our National River Clean-up program with 1.9M pounds of trash removed by over 100,000 volunteers. It’s a great way to connect communities with their rivers in a tangible, active way. Read [more](#).

**“Legacy”: Please enjoy this short video about Jack Dennis and the protection of Snake River headwaters:** We’ll leave you with a wonderful video that shares how fly-fishing legend Jack Dennis helped so many people get into fly fishing and then, working with American Rivers and our partners, helped make sure that they had a protected, natural place to catch native cutthroat trout by helping to designate 415 miles of the Snake River and its tributaries as “Wild & Scenic”. See the video [here](#).

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Thank you for your interest in and support of our work to protect and restore important fish habitat.

If you would like to make a difference for our rivers by helping us to continue doing this work, please consider joining the Anglers Fund for American Rivers at [www.AmericanRivers.org/AnglersFund](http://www.AmericanRivers.org/AnglersFund) or by contacting Steve White at either (919)720-2901 or swhite@americanrivers.org.