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EDMISTON SPRING PROJECT TO IMPROVE CUTTHROAT TROUT HABITAT ON FISH CREEK TRIBUTARY

The Wyoming Game & Fish Department, Jackson Hole Trout Unlimited, Friends of Fish Creek, Teton Conservation District, and community stakeholders announced today that a new collaborative project on Edmiston Spring, a small spring-fed tributary of Fish Creek that flows through Wilson, WY, will enhance habitat for native cutthroat trout and improve stream function.

Edmiston Spring originates in the town of Wilson, WY, just south of West Main Street, and flows for approximately a half mile before joining Fish Creek. Nine landowners are located within the 75-acre watershed, representing a mix of adjacent land uses including residential, public park and wetland walkway, riding arena, office buildings, general store, gas station and plant nursery. It is a small stream, averaging about 2 to 4 cfs annually.

The Edmiston Spring Enhancement Project was initiated in fall 2014 by the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) to improve water quality, stream function, and native trout habitat on Edmiston Spring Creek. Jackson Hole Trout Unlimited (JHTU) and Friends of Fish Creek joined the project as early partners, contributing funding for its design. In addition to surveying instream habitat, fisheries, and other existing conditions, WGFD ensured that stakeholder and landowner feedback were evaluated and incorporated into the project design plan developed by contractor Intermountain Aquatics. "We saw the project as a unique opportunity to work with partners and stakeholders to address a range of water-related issues on Edmiston Spring, with an eye toward future collaborations in the Fish Creek watershed," said Anna Senecal, Aquatic Habitat Biologist for WGFD in Jackson.

The instream habitat and fisheries surveys identified that Edmiston Spring is a valuable nursery for juvenile Snake River cutthroat trout. The project design therefore primarily focuses on techniques that will optimize juvenile fish habitat, especially in late winter flow conditions, although some spawning enhancements are also planned. In addition, because the wetland and riparian habitat found in several existing ponds along Edmiston Spring were found to provide habitat for a diversity of wildlife species, the project design seeks to promote and maintain these habitats in balance with the proposed enhancements for cutthroat trout.

The Edmiston Spring Enhancement Project received grant support from the Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resources Trust and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department's Habitat Trust Fund for the implementation phase of the project. This October and November, hand-placed habitat treatments using willows and small woody debris and light excavation work will be completed by Intermountain Aquatics, with assistance from a community volunteer day organized by JHTU and the Snake River Fund. A second phase of treatments using wetland sod will be completed in July 2016.

Stakeholder feedback indicated that partners and landowners were interested in further exploring water quality and sedimentation issues on the stream, in addition to the fish habitat enhancement component of the project. In response, the project's final design plan was adapted into an Edmiston Spring Watershed Plan document that outlines partner roles and provides recommendations for ongoing and future efforts, including water quality testing and best management practices that will be led by Friends of Fish Creek and the Teton Conservation District. Recommended best management practices include setbacks for snow storage and lawn fertilization, improved storm water drainage systems, discouragement of new pools or dredged areas for adult trout, septic system improvements and linkages, and additional willow plantings.

"We are grateful to the partners, landowners, and funders that have responded so favorably to this project. We look forward to seeing the results of the fish habitat enhancements as well as the potential water quality work that would further improve this neighborhood stream," said Leslie Steen, JHTU Vice President.

About the Wyoming Game & Fish Department

The Wyoming Game & Fish Department is charged with providing an adequate and flexible system for the control, management, protection, and regulation of all Wyoming wildlife. The Department is the only entity of state government directly charged with managing Wyoming's wildlife resources and conserving them for future generations.

About Jackson Hole Trout Unlimited

Jackson Hole Trout Unlimited was formed in 1983 in Jackson, Wyoming, to conserve, protect, and restore Jackson Hole's coldwater fisheries and their watersheds. JHTU is one of 15 Trout Unlimited chapters throughout the state that make up the Wyoming Council of Trout Unlimited.

About Friends of Fish Creek

The Friends of Fish Creek work to protect the Upper Snake River watershed by improving and restoring water quality in Fish Creek and the West Bank aquifer through science-based research, engagement of community stakeholders, and collaborative problem solving.

About the Teton Conservation District

The mission of Teton Conservation District is to promote conservation and management of natural resources through research, education, conservation practices, cooperative projects, and on the ground actions.