



Industry and Conservation Partners Unite to Enhance Smith River Watershed Through Collaborative Restoration Project

For Immediate Release: Montana Trout Unlimited, Black Butte Copper, and the Meagher County Stewardship Council join forces to improve riparian habitat, water quality, and working lands along the Smith River.

WHITE SULPHUR SPRINGS, Montana June 8, 2026- A collaborative restoration project along the Smith River is bringing together industry, conservation, and community partners to improve riparian health, enhance wildlife habitat, and support the long-term stewardship of working lands in Meagher County.

The project will focus on protecting and restoring a section of the Smith River located on state land through wildlife fencing of recently planted willows and installation of an off-stream livestock watering system. The project aims to reduce pressure on sensitive riparian areas while promoting healthier streambanks, improved water quality, and enhanced fish and wildlife habitat.

The Smith River project demonstrates how locally driven partnerships can address shared resource goals while balancing the needs of all interested parties. The effort is supported through funding from Sandfire Resource's Black Butte Copper Project and Montana Trout Unlimited, with project coordination being completed by the Meagher County Stewardship Council. Matching fund support is provided by the Montana Department of Environmental Quality's Ranching for Rivers Program and additional support dollars are added by the Smith River Corridor Enhancement Account funding administered through Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks.

The Ranching for Rivers Program is designed to help landowners and grazing managers improve riparian health through practical ranch management solutions. The program provides cost-share assistance for projects such as off-stream water developments, fencing, and grazing management planning that benefit both agricultural operations and watershed health.

"This project reflects collaboration that creates lasting value for communities and the landscapes we all care about," said Nancy Schlepp, Vice President of Communications and Government Relations for Sandfire Resources America. "By bringing together industry, conservation organizations, and local partners, we are demonstrating that responsible resource development and environmental stewardship can work hand in hand. We are proud to support projects that strengthen watershed health, enhance wildlife habitat, and contribute to the long-term well-being of Meagher County."

Healthy riparian areas play a critical role in maintaining water quality, reducing erosion, supporting fisheries, and providing important habitat for wildlife throughout the Smith River watershed.

“Some of the most effective conservation work happens when diverse partners come together around a shared goal,” stated David Brooks, Executive Director of Montana Trout Unlimited. “By improving riparian habitat and reducing pressure on the stream corridor, this project will benefit the health and resilience of the Smith River while supporting sustainable land management practices. We appreciate the commitment of everyone involved to achieving meaningful conservation outcomes on the ground.”

The project also reflects the long-standing commitment of local organizations to pursue collaborative, voluntary approaches to natural resource stewardship.

“The Meagher County Stewardship Council was created to help bring people together around solutions that benefit Meagher County's natural resources, culture, and economy,” shared Cassie Coburn, Executive Director of the Meagher County Stewardship Council. “This project is a wonderful example of what can be accomplished when organizations with different perspectives focus on common values and shared goals. We are grateful to help facilitate partnerships that leave a positive legacy for future generations.”

Project partners hope the restoration effort serves as a model for future conservation initiatives by demonstrating the value of partnerships built on trust, shared responsibility, and a commitment to the land.

While each entity brings a unique perspective to the table, all share a common goal: ensuring that Montana's working landscapes, healthy watersheds, and vibrant communities remain strong for generations to come.

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