



Reclaiming East Spring Creek - Greater Trout Populations

The East Spring Creek Project was initiated in 1987 by the Flathead County Conservation District with support from several state and federal agencies.

Project goals were to:

- improve water quality by reducing accumulated in-stream sediments;
- improve the riparian habitat;
- restore the trout fishery; and
- remove debris and debris dams.

East Spring Creek flows through a suburban area near Kalispell, Montana, that is bounded by 194 individual tracts. Thus, the stakeholders, as well as the management activities needed to achieve these goals, were many, and the changes required might have been resisted. However, an exceptional public relations campaign convinced all but two landowners along the stream corridor to participate in the project.

As a result, management changes were far easier to recommend than anyone thought possible, and a number of best management practices (BMPs) were implemented, including fencing, stockwater development, flow control structures, channel reconstruction, erosion control, fish habitat improvement, and riparian vegetation planting.

Biological monitoring on East Spring Creek measures water quality and the project's effectiveness. Based on the data collected from macroinvertebrate communities sampled, and the fish population surveys conducted, conditions improved in two out of three sites. One of the sites improved from moderately to slightly impaired, while the other improved from moderately impaired to unimpaired.

Project success was also clearly indicated by improved trout populations. Trout densities quickly responded to improved habitat from channel reconstruction. Estimates of trout density have increased almost threefold since the channel was reconstructed in 1989.