



- [Close Window](#)
- [Print This Page](#)
- [Expand All](#) | [Collapse All](#)

Shaw Dam Removal and Riparian Restoration Project

Applying Organization	Montana Trout Unlimited	Application Date	5/15/2026
Applying Contact	David Brooks	Status	Submitted
Record Type	Member Collective	Created By	David Brooks, 5/13/2026, 8:21 PM
		Create Account	<input type="checkbox"/>

Project Overview

Project Name	Shaw Dam Removal and Riparian Restoration Project	Requested Amount	\$42,000.00
Project/Campaign Name	Shaw Dam Removal and Riparian Restoration Project		
Type of Project	Restoration	Project Multiple Locations	
Project Location (State or Territory)	MT	Longitude	-111.942536
Latitude	45.88385		

Organization Details

Organization Name	Montana Trout Unlimited	Primary address for organization	312 N. Higgins Ave. ste. 200 Missoula, Montana 59802 United States
Contact Name	Dr. David Brooks	Contact Title	Executive Director
Contact Email Address	david@montanatu.org		
Annual Operating Budget	\$813,088.00	Tax Status/Organization Type	501c3 Organization
Staff Size	7	Main Phone	406.543.0054
Total Membership	5,000	Organization Website/Social Media Feed	https://montanatu.org/
BIPOC-led	No	C-Suite Staff	

Grant Details

Awarded Amount		Awarded Date	
Funding Program			
Primary Project Type		Secondary Project Type	
Term Start Date		Term End Date	

Proposal Questions

Mission/History Of Organization	Montana Trout Unlimited (MTU) conserves, protects and restores	Location Details	Across the Upper Missouri River Basin, low stream flows and higher water
--	--	-------------------------	--

coldwater fisheries and their watersheds in Montana. For more than 60 years MTU has mobilized a grassroots army engaged in on-the-ground conservation, advocacy at all levels of government, and education of the next generation of conservation leaders. We mitigate climate change by improving water quality and quantity in watersheds statewide, always using the best available science to drive the work. We also strive to protect access to public lands and waters knowing that people protect what they can actually access and enjoy. We partner with the outdoor recreation community to build awareness and coalitions for conservation gains across Montana.

temperatures, caused by land-use changes and persistent drought, have led to declining native and wild salmonid populations and ecological distress. Montana Trout Unlimited (MTU) agrees with TCA that “repair(ing) degraded landscapes allow for the recovery of biodiversity and enhance an area’s climate resiliency potential.” As a result, MTU is removing the Shaw Dam in the Boulder River near Butte, MT, which will yield significant ecological benefits for the Boulder and Jefferson Rivers by increasing in-stream water levels, restoring fish passage to 111 miles of stream (determined using the Aquatic Barrier Inventory and Prioritization Tool), eliminating entrainment, restoring streams and riparian zones, and enhancing over 2 acres of wetlands.

The Boulder River is the largest tributary to the Jefferson River downstream of the Beaverhead-Big Hole River confluence and is a valuable coldwater fishery that provides cold water for thermal refugia and offers critical spawning habitat near the midpoint of the Jefferson’s 83-mile length. The Jefferson Basin has experienced a well-documented and widely publicized decline in trout populations. This has resulted in a significant economic downturn in the region’s recreational economy and threatens Montana’s outdoor heritage. This landscape-scale dam removal ensures that fish have access to cold water for thermal refugia and spawning habitat and also builds climate resiliency in the greater Jefferson Watershed.

On the 2,840-acre Candlestick Ranch, owned by Golden Sunlight Mine (GSM), the channel-spanning Shaw Diversion Dam and the smaller Cardwell Diversion, located 2 miles upstream of the Boulder’s confluence with the Jefferson, deliver water to more than 180 acres of productive cropland. This project will address infrastructure concerns by removing diversions and replacing irrigation ditch withdrawals with in-stream pumps. Dam removal will restore passage to the entire upstream mainstem Boulder River Watershed for Westslope cutthroat, brown, and rainbow trout, mountain whitefish, sucker, sculpin, dace, shiner species, and crayfish. Most importantly, fish will benefit from access to the 40 cubic feet per second (cfs), 54°F Cold Springs, located 10 miles upstream.

GSM provides year-round public access to the ranch for hunting, fishing, and general recreation. Recent support from the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and National Wild Turkey Federation confirm that the recreation value of this area is significant.

Final Success Removing the Shaw Dam from Montana's Boulder River will restore fish passage to 111 miles of stream, increase the Jefferson's largest tributary base flow by 25%, and reduce the temperature of both the Bolder and Jefferson Rivers at a moment when hot dry summers are gravely impacting fish and recreationists alike.

Impact on Climate and Bioversity

The 2017 Montana Climate Assessment (MCA) showed that climate change is drastically altering Montana's hydrologic cycle, as already evident in the Upper Missouri River Basin in Southwest Montana (Whitlock et al. 2017).

"...overall snowpack values have been steadily declining across the State due to rising temperatures. Changes to the hydrologic regimes in mountainous areas have resulted in earlier snowmelt runoff and reductions in late-season stream flows. Climate predictions are forecasting that these patterns will continue, and the future impacts will only increase in overall magnitude. Climate change is anticipated to significantly increase average stream temperatures in the northern Rockies...climate change will exacerbate the severity of future drought episodes."

The combination of reductions in late-season stream flow and increases in summer stream temperatures has already adversely impacted Montana's cold-water fisheries (Cline et al. 2022).

The project will increase watershed resiliency by restoring aquatic organism passage to at least 10 miles of coldwater habitat and reconnecting fragmented habitat and supporting biodiversity. This project will also improve floodplain connectivity and function to enhance flood resiliency, heighten drought resiliency, and encourage alluvial water storage. Finally, the project will conserve and expand wetland features to enhance aquatic and terrestrial habitats and the species that depend on them, clean sediment, nutrients, and other pollutants from upstream water, and sequester carbon in riparian vegetation and soil organic matter.

Montana's rivers are the universal connector of lands, and if the Jefferson Basin continues to degrade, and (as was once the case in the 1980's) the Jefferson goes go dry at sections, then lands that have been connected by water for thousands of years will be severed from each other. Keeping the Jefferson cold and connected is essential to keeping and increasing connectivity on protected lands.

Expected Economic & Recreational Impact

Successful implementation of the dam removal project will help ensure the Block Management Area (BMA) remains intact. The dam is dilapidated, dangerous, and at risk of failure. The landowner's primary concern with the dam is liability, from injury to an angler or floater, or dam failure. The BMA is used daily by the local communities of Cardwell and Whitehall for activities such

Strategy & Timeline For Final Success

Our strategy for achieving final success is to remain steadfast and maintain fidelity to the relationships we've forged during the years invested in taking out this dam. Though not the "final," one key measure of success is MTU's unique partnership with an international gold mining company, Barrick/Golden Sunlight Mine, LLC (GSM). GSM is committed to and invested in the project,

as fishing, dog walking and training, hunting, birding, shed hunting, or just a quick stretch by travelers on Interstate 90. We anticipate improvements in the overall quality of the fishery, an increase in angler days on the Boulder River, and increased use of local businesses and the Lewis and Clark Caverns State Park.

having already invested \$95k on direct expenses for feasibility and planning, along with additional amounts to assess irrigation and land use changes it might make in conjunction with this project.

The final, written landowner agreement with a commitment to remove the dam and do the floodplain restoration work associated with dam removal is in the hands of Barrick Gold leadership and legal counsel right now (May 2026). The edits we expect are simply updates to the timeline in the agreement. While mining and fisheries interests are often in opposition, this partnership is a model for others and exemplifies the kind of conservation success possible when stakeholders find common ground.

Some of the largest potential challenges have been overcome. First, the most downstream irrigator on the Shaw ditch has been kept whole. This was a critical component to project success that required a time-consuming and expensive water rights change and irrigation infrastructure upgrade, completed in December 2025. Permitting was the next large hurdle. All project permitting was finalized in early May of 2026.

The challenge ahead is completing fundraising. MTU has raised \$400,000 in 2026 alone, and an additional \$550,000 is needed to meet the engineer's cost opinion. We are working with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks on a \$500,000 grant through the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation. MTU plans to go to bid in the fall of 2026. The current cost opinion is less than a year old, though recent rises in fuel prices could raise project costs. With the freezing of federal funding in 2025 (especially the Bureau of Reclamation's WaterSMART grant program over the last year), we have had to adjust the timeline for completion of this project. The updated timeline is:

- Spring 2026, Finalize permits
- August 2026, Construction bid tour
- October 2026, Award construction contract
- September-December 2027, Project implementation - dam removal and floodplain restoration
- April-May 2028, Spring riparian planting
- Monitoring through 2032

Business community engagement (in addition to the businesses already engaged) signals that this is a landscape scale, community-wide restoration project, which is made possible thanks to many diverse water users and stakeholders.

Key Decision Makers MTU worked to help pass legislation that is critical to this project. At the MT State Legislature in Helena in 2023, MTU lobbied for House Bill 114, to streamline and expedite the water rights change process. The Point of Diversion (POD) change for this project is the first to work its way through DNRC's new process and a prime example of how MTU

Working With Business Community

coordinates our policy and project work to develop common-sense outcomes. Without the legislation we worked for, this change would likely have taken years to accomplish.

We work with key decision makers. In 2025, MTU planned and conducted two days of project tours showcasing the multiple benefits of barrier removals for improving fish passage and overall aquatic health. The four sites featured diversion dam removals alongside irrigation improvements and included participation of state staff for three of MT's Congressional representatives, multiple state legislators, county commissioners, and Conservation District board members.

Elevate Voices

MTU has a long history of working with the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) in Montana. The Project area is an aboriginal area for the Salish, Pend 'd Oreille, and Shoshone tribes. The Upper Missouri region was a common hunting grounds for several tribes. While this Project does not directly impact local tribes, it does not limit access to or ceremonial use of ancestral sacred sites. Downstream, cleaner water will benefit several Federally Recognized Tribes, including, but not limited to, the Blackfeet and Gros Ventre tribes in Montana. The benefits of the Project's habitat improvements are recognized and supported by the CSKT.

While the Project area is not formally considered historically underserved, the Whitehouse Council on Environmental Quality identifies two adjacent areas, Butte and Townsend Montana. By vehicle, Butte is 33 miles and Townsend is 50 miles. Both Townsend and Butte qualify for low income/life expectancy, and Butte for poverty. Access to high-quality outdoor experiences can alleviate stress, improve mental health, and build resiliency in individuals. Butte is adjacent to the largest Superfund Complex in the United States. The Boulder and Jefferson River watersheds are some of the most accessible outdoor areas for Butte residents. While the Boulder watershed and Project area are not considered underserved, Butte is economically disadvantaged relative to the wealth of surrounding counties. Census data show that Montana has recently experienced a significant rise in high-income households, mostly in the state's urban centers, which has exacerbated the rural-urban income gap. This socio-economic trend in Montana, combined with record-high inflation and low economic development and employment opportunities in rural agricultural counties, renders places such as the Project area economically

Measurable On-Ground Outcomes

- Reduce conifer encroachment on the Candlestick Ranch while procuring woody debris for streambank restoration
- Increase the baseflow of the Boulder River
- Provide access to spawning areas and thermal refugia not currently accessible to wild and native trout



challenged. The impacted residents and communities of the Boulder River are rural agricultural communities. Having free places to recreate matter to these communities.

TCA Funding Plan

TCA's support will help keep the fundraising momentum MTU has experienced in 2026 going and it will signal to the landowner, project partners, and early funders (2021) that MTU can complete this project. TCA's financial support will specifically help us procure the woody material needed to build over 3,000' of new streambank. Acquiring the woody material will also begin to address the conifer encroachment in the adjacent uplands, which will improve wildlife habitat. One acre of dense conifer consumes about 500,000 gallons of water annually. Restoring ecosystem balance, aquatic and terrestrial, is a hallmark of this project. Support from TCA's elite consortium of businesses also reinforces one of the hallmarks of this project which is that recreation and conservation and farming and ranching and industry can ALL benefit from healthy watersheds, and we can only accomplish landscape-scale improvements and climate change mitigation when we work together.

Other Relevant Application Details

Thank you for your consideration.

Confidential Items

Not at this time. Thank you for this thoughtful accommodation if necessary.

