friends of the tetonriver

25 years

water lines

NEWSLETTER 2025

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF CONSERVATION

Working together to conserve a healthy Teton River Watershed

STAFF

Amy Verbeten, Executive Director
Anna Lindstedt, Grants Director
Patrick Leary, Philanthropy Director
Will Stubblefield, Programs Director
Mike Lien, Stream Restoration Director
Brian Van Winkle, Fisheries Program Director
Daniel Wilcox, Farms & Fish Program Manager
McKenzie Heras, Development Coordinator
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Front cover: FTR's fisheries program director, Brian VanWinkle collects surface water quality samples on the Teton River near Bates Bridge. *Photo: Camrin Dengel*

Inside cover: Clear water flows over macrophytes and clean gravels on the Teton River. *Photo: Will Stubblefield*

LETTER FROM THE STAFF

Celebrating 25 Years

Dear Friends,

As we begin the busy summer field season, we're commemorating something truly special: 25 years of working with you—our partners, neighbors, and fellow river stewards—to protect and restore the waterways that nourish this place we call home.

This milestone is both a celebration and a call to action. We've come a long way down the river together—running rapids and flat water, building strong partnerships, restoring vital habitats, and growing a team that works tirelessly to care for the Teton River watershed. We're deeply proud of the progress we've made, as reflected in the pages of this newsletter. We hope to convey not just "the numbers" and successes, but how grateful we are to have journeyed twenty-five years together with you.

Thanks to your support, Friends of the Teton River has strong financial footing, but we are navigating a shifting current. The critical conservation funding which we've been successful in securing for projects and community partnerships is being rolled back at the federal level, with ripple effects impacting other funding sources as well. This means we'll be relying more than ever on the support of our donors to help us stay the course. It's an inflection point—a time when we must dig our paddles in and work together to keep momentum moving downstream.

This summer, and in the coming year, we're celebrating all we've accomplished with you; the science that guides our path, projects that have meaningful and long-term benefit for farmers and fish, our cities and our citizens, the health of our water and our soils, and the community that keeps this work grounded and resilient. But there's still so much ahead.

As we enter our next quarter-century, we invite you to recommit and roll up your sleeves. It's all hands on deck! Let's meet this moment together to ensure that the river—and everything and everyone it supports—keeps flowing strong for generations to come.

With gratitude,

The Friends of the Teton River Staff

FTR Staff. Back row: Mike Lien, Patrick Leary, Will Stubblefield, Brian Van Winkle
Front row: Anna Lindstedt, Amy Verbeten, McKenzie Heras, Andrea Flores

Why We Serve

Friends of the Teton River was founded in 2000 by a grass-roots group of citizens—farmers, fishing guides, scientists, and conservationists–who shared concerns about the health of the Teton River Watershed. Today, we continue to have representation from a cross-section of our community on our Board of Directors. The organization continues to be guided by stakeholders from different backgrounds and perspectives, with a common mission.

FTR envisions a future in which all members of the community consistently and voluntarily work together to protect and conserve a healthy watershed. FTR's work is science-based, collaborative, action oriented, innovative and adaptive. FTR Staff and Board members alike, demonstrate passion, excellence and integrity in all endeavors.

Above: *FTR's Staff brings over 90 years of combined service to clean water, healthy streams and a thriving wild fishery in the Teton River Watershed.*

Right: *FTR's Board Members weigh in on what keeps them passionate and involved.*

"As an FTR Board Member, I have learned to listen, then listened to learn. I've also learned not to be afraid to get out of my comfort zone and meet someone new."

—LYNN BAGLEY
Fourth-Generation Farmer

"What attracted me to serve on the FTR Board was a strong commitment to the mission, the culture, and the quality of the people who are involved. I am drawn to what the organization represents, and all the different constituents that FTR is listening to and talking with to get conservation work done."

—CHRIS LITTAUER
WorldCast Anglers Vice-President

"FTR has proven that their science-based approach can deliver the critical data needed to make informed decisions to meet the needs of multiple stakeholders in the Teton River Watershed. FTR has set the standard for community-based water resource conservation."

—JEN PIERCE
Geophysical Science Professor (Boise State)

Photo: Camrin Dengel

Calendar of Events

We look forward to seeing you out in the field this summer!

JUN 19

FISHERIES PROGRAM TOUR

Join us to explore spawning Cutthroat redds, stream restoration, and managed grazing at Six Springs Creek with FTR and the Teton Regional Land Trust. Don't miss this opportunity to see the coordination of fisheries research and land management practices on this beautiful spring creek ecosystem.

JUL 23

TROUT ASSESSMENT TOUR

Every 5 years, FTR conducts the Teton Tributary Trout Population Assessment. To collect data on native and non-native trout distribution and abundance, critical data for guiding our work in the Teton River watershed. Meet the team and learn more about field research methods!

AUG 12

TETON CREEK RESTORATION TOUR

Teton Creek is the largest tributary of the Teton River and a critical tributary for fish, wildlife, and people. Join the tour to learn how healthy and functioning floodplains reduce flood risks for the community of Driggs.

FARMER'S MARKET

Visit us at your local Farmers Market! Meet FTR staff, learn more about FTR programs and projects in the watershed, get info on upcoming events, and buy some FTR merchandise!

JUN 20 - DRIGGS

JUL 8 - VICTOR

SEP 5 - DRIGGS

TIN CUP CHALLENGE DAY

Register to run in the Competitive 10K/5K, Fun Run, or walk. Afterward, visit with our staff and board members at the FTR booth, one of the 64 nonprofit booths with information and family-friendly activities. **Donations through the Tin Cup Challenge can be made in-person or online between 9:00 AM on June 13 and 5:00 PM July 25, 2025.**

JUL 19

Donate at **cftetonvalley.org**

WELL WATER TESTING DAY

Want to know more about your well water? FTR coordinates an annual testing event, with well water test kits available for purchase. Order your kit and receive instructions about water collection dates, drop-off locations, and specific tests available (e.g. nitrates & bacteria) by contacting **info@tetonwater.org**.

SEP 5

Scan for a full list of events and detailed information or visit tetonwater.org

A Warm Welcome

We are thrilled to welcome Patrick Leary as our new Philanthropy Director. Patrick brings a deep love for wild places and a strong background in conservation fundraising, having most recently worked at Grand Teton National Park Foundation. His passion for rivers, community, and the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem makes him a wonderful fit for our mission and team.

Outside of work hours, Patrick spends his time gardening, raising chickens and pigs, making pottery, fly-fishing, foraging, hunting, skiing, and backpacking alongside his spouse and their two young daughters.

Be sure to give Patrick a warm welcome when you see him at an FTR event or out and about this summer.

Teton River Float Guide

Over 65,000 visitors recreate on the Teton River in the summer!

With this many river users, everyone's actions add up to having a big impact. Do your part to model exceptional river user etiquette.

For more river recreation tips visit tetonwater.org/get-out/recreation-map

FTR staff hauls ingredients at Melvin Brewing.

Cheers to 25 Years!

FTR is raising a glass to 25 years of conservation, and we're doing it with a hoppy twist. Melvin Brewing is generously crafting an anniversary beer for FTR that's as refreshing as a dip in the river. Cutthroat Legacy Lager is a limited-edition micro-brew that honors the Teton Watershed's native trout and is made with Trout-Safe* ingredients.

**Trout-Safe certification recognizes farms for going "above & beyond" in protecting water quality and wildlife habitat. FTR is proud to be a founding partner of this program. Learn more at www.troutsafe.org.*

Sip & Support

Join us for a series of pint nights at local watering holes this summer. Cutthroat Legacy Lager will be on tap and proceeds from sales will benefit FTR. Enjoy a drink, meet fellow river-lovers, and learn about your backyard watershed — all while supporting river conservation in the Tetons. Can't make it? Don't worry! We'll also be pouring pints of our one-of-a-kind brew at our 25th anniversary party on July 11.

Maison – Driggs, ID – Thursday, June 26 - 4-7PM

Refuge Taphouse – Victor, ID – Tuesday, July 1 - 4-7PM

25 Years...How did *that* happen?

By various measures of success (number of fish, linear feet, acre-feet, etc.) FTR has accomplished more than we thought possible in twenty-five years. What's even more remarkable than *what* we've achieved is *how* we've done it. FTR was started by farmers, anglers, scientists and citizens who shared a common concern for our watershed. FTR was built on a foundation of sound science and collaboration, which have been propelled by the generous support of our community, donors, and project partners.

FISHERIES

In the first five years (2001-2005), FTR conducted baseline research to monitor native and non-native trout, water quality and quantity, and aquatic habitat on the Teton River. Since then, FTR has pursued best in class watershed science through:

- Electrofishing assessments, redd surveys, and eDNA analysis
- Monitoring water quality (11 sites) and stream temperature (36 sites) throughout the watershed
- Tagging more than 6,000 fish to monitor YCT migration

FISH PASSAGE

FTR's first project to improve fish passage was completed in 2006. Since then, partnerships with irrigators have resulted in:

- Construction of 3 fish screens and 8 fish ladders that enhance habitat connectivity, support fish migration and reduce fish loss to water delivery infrastructure.

AGRICULTURAL PARTNERSHIPS

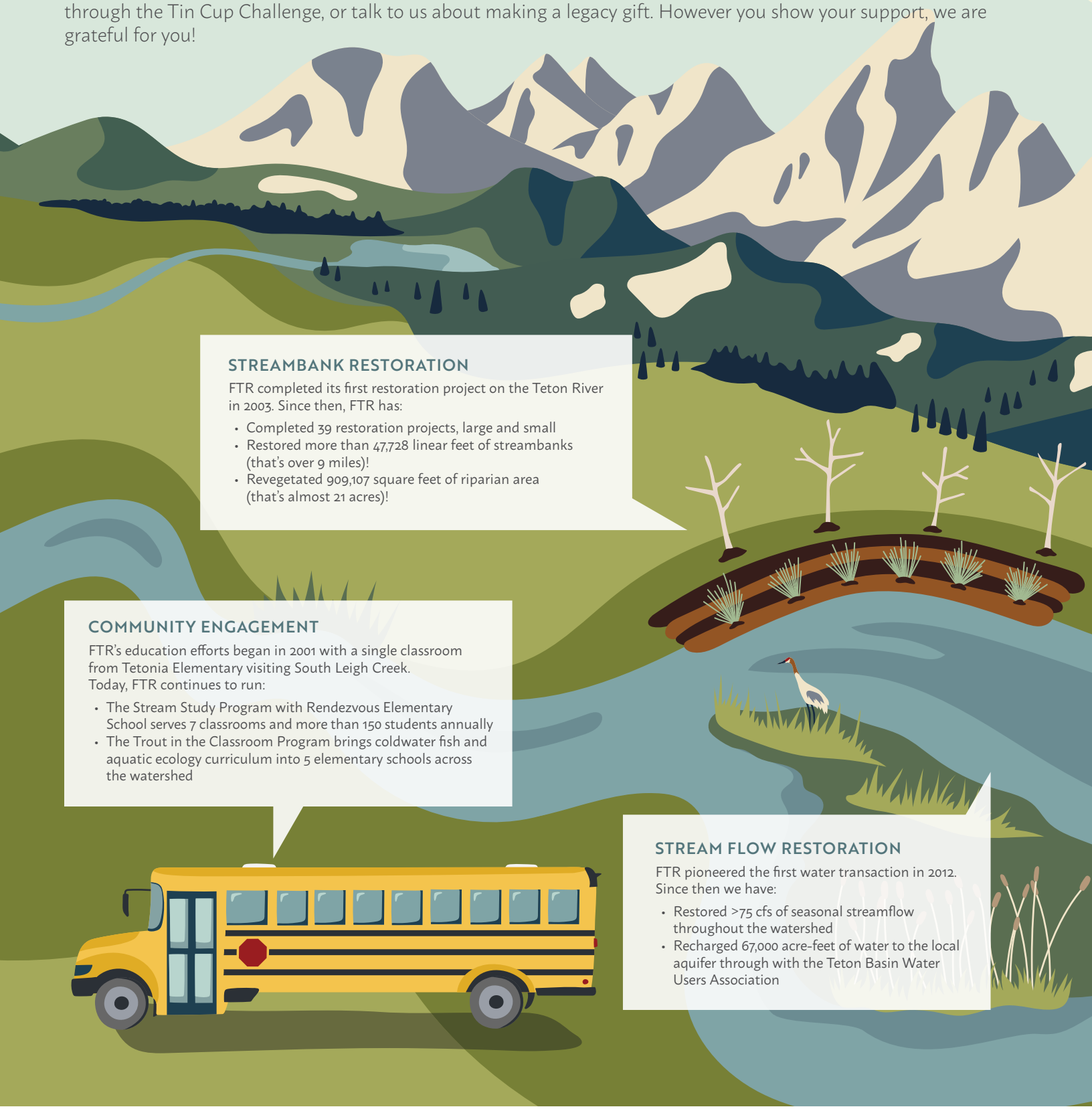
In 2016, FTR helped fund the purchase of a no-till drill for local producers to support the adoption of no-till practices- improving soil health, reducing erosion, and protecting water quality across the watershed. Since then:

- FTR has partnered with 33 producers
- Conservation practices have been implemented on 8995 acres of agricultural land

Illustration: Kia Tolan

With Community Support!

Your support has restored habitats, increased native trout populations, improved irrigation efficiencies and water quality, and has forged unlikely partnerships. Thank you for being part of this continuing success story. This summer, we encourage you to deepen your connection to FTR—join a field tour, attend our 25th anniversary party, donate through the Tin Cup Challenge, or talk to us about making a legacy gift. However you show your support, we are grateful for you!



STREAMBANK RESTORATION

FTR completed its first restoration project on the Teton River in 2003. Since then, FTR has:

- Completed 39 restoration projects, large and small
- Restored more than 47,728 linear feet of streambanks (that's over 9 miles)!
- Revegetated 909,107 square feet of riparian area (that's almost 21 acres)!

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

FTR's education efforts began in 2001 with a single classroom from Tetonia Elementary visiting South Leigh Creek. Today, FTR continues to run:

- The Stream Study Program with Rendezvous Elementary School serves 7 classrooms and more than 150 students annually
- The Trout in the Classroom Program brings coldwater fish and aquatic ecology curriculum into 5 elementary schools across the watershed

STREAM FLOW RESTORATION

FTR pioneered the first water transaction in 2012. Since then we have:

- Restored >75 cfs of seasonal streamflow throughout the watershed
- Recharged 67,000 acre-feet of water to the local aquifer through with the Teton Basin Water Users Association

Teton Creek flows from headwaters in the Teton Mountains ~14 miles through the City of Driggs to the confluence with the upper Teton River. It is the largest water contributor to the Teton River, provides irrigation water for agricultural production, and is the most significant corridor for fish and wildlife in the upper Teton Watershed. *Photo: Chris Boyer*

Decades in the Making

The Teton Creek Story Continues

Stream restoration success stories aren't written overnight, and such is the tale of Teton Creek. As the largest tributary and riparian corridor in the upper Teton River, Teton Creek is home to native Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout, provides a vital corridor for wildlife migration, and is the main artery that runs adjacent and through the City of Driggs. Starting forty years ago, the creek was heavily altered by a developer to build a subdivision. Illegal dredging and removal of vegetation caused stream channel instability and bank erosion, effectively disabling the floodplain function and creating severe risk to people along the creek corridor.

Our chapter begins circa 2006, when a Teton Creek landowner walked through our office door to ask for help. The destabilized creek was posing a bigger problem than one person (or neighborhood) could fix. Little did we know FTR would be embarking on what has become a model for long-term, community-driven watershed restoration. But even in those early years, the vision was clear: stabilize the most at-risk sections of the channel, reconnect the creek to its floodplain, protect the existing homes and infrastructure, restore habitat, and collaborate with the stakeholders who depend upon our collective success.

Over nearly two decades, FTR has invested ~$4.5 million dollars, along with agencies and partners to stabilize two-and-a-half miles of stream channel, helped residents with the formation of a Flood Control District, protected critical infrastructure, restored fish and wildlife habitat and the riparian corridor. In the 2025 chapter and beyond, FTR and our community continue to lead multiple planning and restoration efforts on the creek.

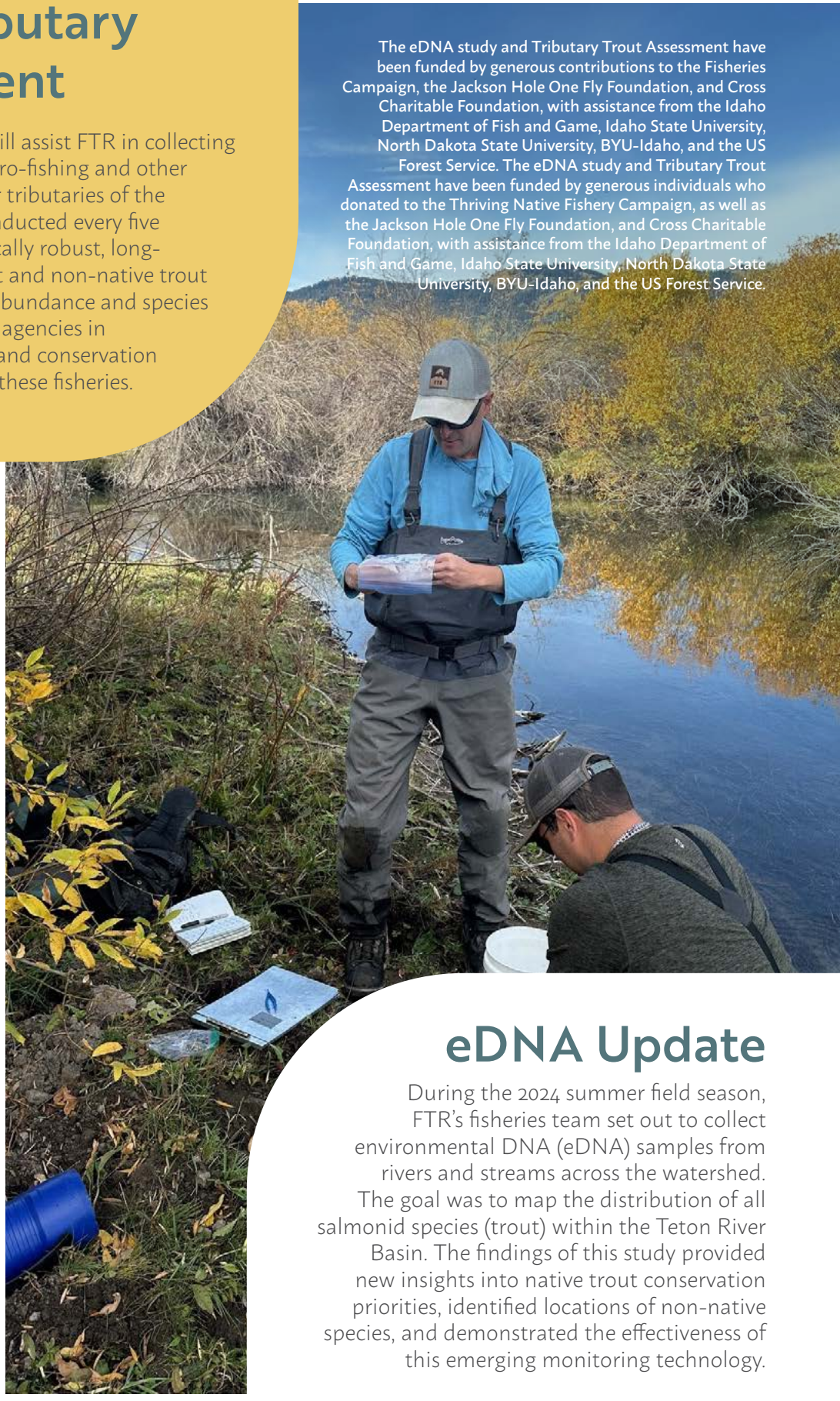
CURRENT WORK:

- Through a partnership with the City of Driggs, funding from the FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, and input from agencies and local stakeholders, FTR is coordinating completion of a stream restoration design plan for the reach extending from Fifth Street, through Creekside subdivision to the Highway 33 bridge. The focus of this work is to stabilize streambanks to mitigate future flood events adjacent to and through residential areas. Funding has been awarded for engineered plans, but construction in the next 24 months will be contingent upon receiving the $2M dollars in federal funding that was awarded under the previous administration. If this section were to catastrophically flood, damages could reach $20M or more.
- An in-depth planning effort is underway (2025-2026) to closely examine water conservation and efficiency projects on Teton Creek, through $400,000 in funding awarded to FTR under the Bureau of Reclamation's WaterSMART Planning Grant. In partnership with the City of Driggs, this project will weave together further study of in-stream habitat and hydrology, water delivery improvements, city water supply solutions, and potential infrastructure or strategies to meet water use and user needs, including ecosystem health. This planning effort has been made possible through $275,0000 in generous matching contributions through private foundations and individual giving directed to Teton Creek projects.

20 Years of Tributary Trout Assessment

This summer, two 3-person teams will assist FTR in collecting valuable fisheries data through electro-fishing and other sampling techniques across 12 major tributaries of the Teton River. This study has been conducted every five years since 2005, providing a statistically robust, long-term comparison of native cutthroat and non-native trout populations. The resulting data on abundance and species composition guide FTR and partner agencies in prioritizing management strategies and conservation projects in response to the status of these fisheries.

The eDNA study and Tributary Trout Assessment have been funded by generous contributions to the Fisheries Campaign, the Jackson Hole One Fly Foundation, and Cross Charitable Foundation, with assistance from the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Idaho State University, North Dakota State University, BYU-Idaho, and the US Forest Service. The eDNA study and Tributary Trout Assessment have been funded by generous individuals who donated to the Thriving Native Fishery Campaign, as well as the Jackson Hole One Fly Foundation, and Cross Charitable Foundation, with assistance from the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Idaho State University, North Dakota State University, BYU-Idaho, and the US Forest Service.



112

SITES SAMPLED (every 5 years) during the Tributary Trout Assessment.

225+

MILES HIKED by the field crews to reach the e-fishing sites

494

eDNA SAMPLES collected during the 2024 field season.

Scan the QR code for the latest fisheries data and reports or visit tetonwater.org

eDNA Update

During the 2024 summer field season, FTR's fisheries team set out to collect environmental DNA (eDNA) samples from rivers and streams across the watershed. The goal was to map the distribution of all salmonid species (trout) within the Teton River Basin. The findings of this study provided new insights into native trout conservation priorities, identified locations of non-native species, and demonstrated the effectiveness of this emerging monitoring technology.

Rivers & Ranches

Over the past 25 years, FTR has worked to protect healthy streams and water quality by building strong, collaborative partnerships with the farming and ranching community. These relationships have sparked innovative, win-win solutions including irrigator–led water management to recharge the aquifer, improved soil health practices that boost agricultural productivity while improving water quality, and coordinated efforts to restore stream banks and implement managed grazing along the river corridor.

Launching in 2025, our Rivers and Ranches program builds on this legacy, advancing grazing management and riparian restoration to support healthy working lands and community waters. Read on to learn how restoration and ranching practices have evolved over the years.

Reflections on Stream Restoration

By Mike Lien

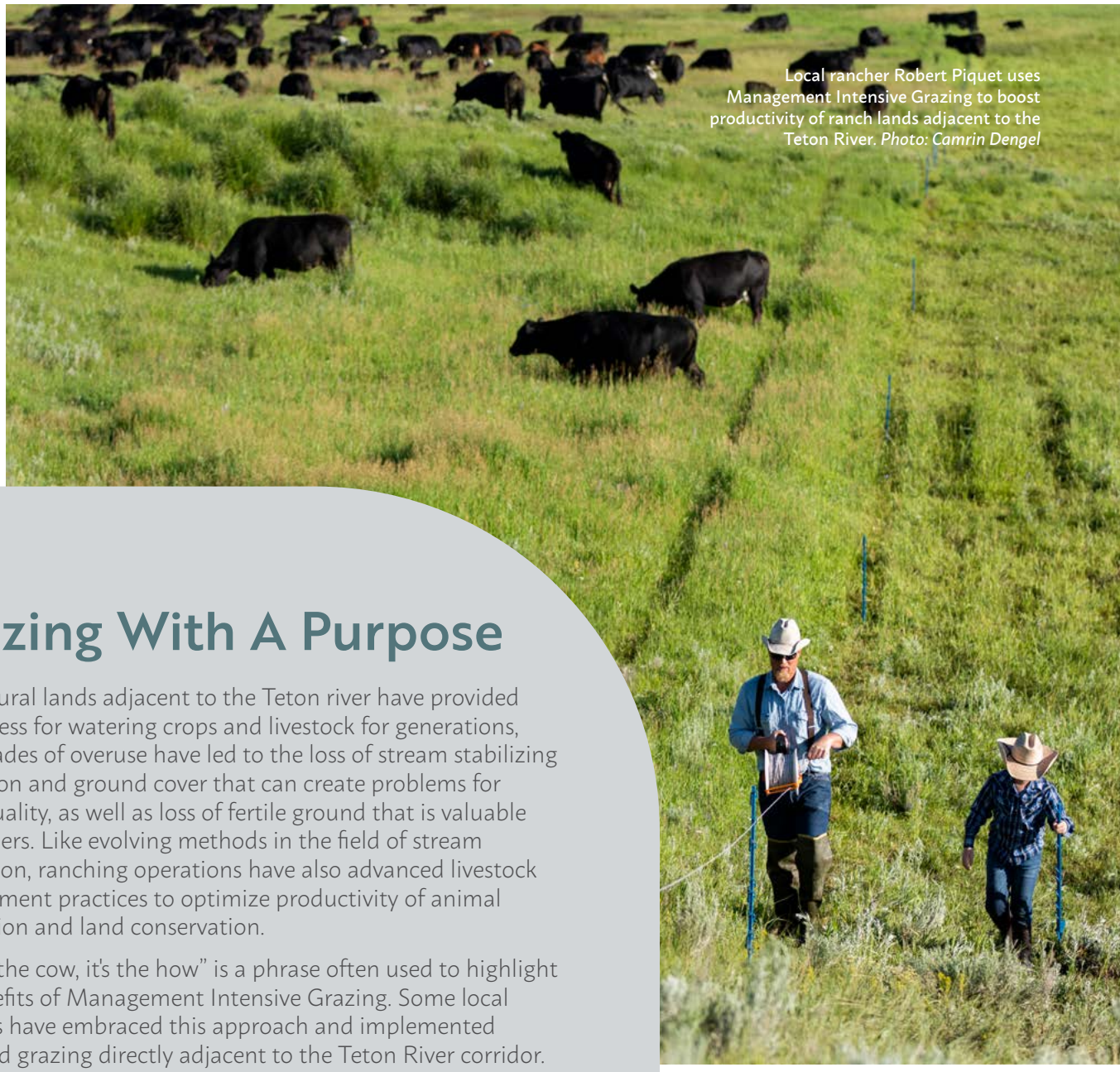
When I first entered the world of stream restoration in the early 1990's, the field was just starting to evolve away from the idea of "cleaning" stream channels, which meant removing "pesky log jams" so streams could flow freely and have abundant spawning gravels. The issue, biologists learned, was that this strategy left out the other key habitat features that fish need, namely pools and backwaters; and that logs and vegetation provide essential benefits such as shading, erosion prevention, and can reduce flooding risk.

The tune changed to "wood is good," so stream restoration specialists began adding wood back into project designs and successfully improved the complex habitats fish need. It was the beginning of using bioengineering techniques in the stream, which means using native materials—such as willow plants, logs, and root wads— to rebuild a stream to a natural condition; a condition that is changing, but resilient over time.

Here at FTR, early restoration work focused on restoring eroding stream banks as stand-alone projects. This was due to being a new organization with little funding, working where we had the opportunity. As we gained expertise and technical tools, such as effective hydrologic or sediment-transport models (as well as funding), we have been able to implement a more holistic vision of restoring an entire stream reach.

Starting around 2010, FTR took our restoration process to the next level. Each restoration project, no matter the size, now starts by extensively studying a stream reach and developing a plan that will restore one section as a part of the whole, while also addressing the specific needs of the landowner and the land use.

We have coined this approach "bestoration," which acknowledges that humans are a part of the landscape and that a successful restoration strategy brings together the best possible solutions that meet the needs of people, as well as fish and wildlife, water, and soil health. Just like the living streams we restore, we'll continue learning about new methods and processes and adapting our approach over time. That's restoration science at its best!



Local rancher Robert Piquet uses Management Intensive Grazing to boost productivity of ranch lands adjacent to the Teton River. *Photo: Camrin Dengel*

Grazing With A Purpose

Agricultural lands adjacent to the Teton river have provided easy access for watering crops and livestock for generations, but decades of overuse have led to the loss of stream stabilizing vegetation and ground cover that can create problems for water quality, as well as loss of fertile ground that is valuable to ranchers. Like evolving methods in the field of stream restoration, ranching operations have also advanced livestock management practices to optimize productivity of animal production and land conservation.

"It's not the cow, it's the how" is a phrase often used to highlight the benefits of Management Intensive Grazing. Some local ranchers have embraced this approach and implemented managed grazing directly adjacent to the Teton River corridor. Key principles include confining cattle to a specific area and rotating them frequently, grazing intensively for just a few days before moving them to fresh pasture. This gives previously grazed areas time to rest and regenerate, and ranchers are seeing real benefits: improved soil structure, increased organic matter, better water infiltration and more productive forage.

FTR and local ranchers successfully collaborate on managed grazing by recognizing the shared importance of water for both ranching and river health. Riparian restoration efforts have included features like hardened river access points, which protect streambanks while providing safe drinking areas for livestock. On lands with spawning Cutthroat Trout streams, cattle movements are carefully timed to avoid disturbing sensitive spawning redds. Over time, the soil health and productivity benefits of managed grazing not only enhance ranch operations but also lead to improved water quality and riparian health.

Interested Producers

Learn more about FTR's producer incentives and resources for regenerative Agriculture practices including Grazing Management!

CONTACT US

Friends of the Teton River
P.O. Box 768
Driggs, ID 83422

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tetonwater.org

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Celebrate 25 Years

JULY 11, 2025

5 - 8 PM at Driggs City Center Plaza

Join Friends of the Teton River for an evening of socializing and celebrating 25 years of watershed protection, restoration, and education. Enjoy live music from The Riffles, delicious food for purchase, a limited edition anniversary beer brewed by Melvin Brewing, root beer from Grand Teton Brewing, and Highpoint Cider available for purchase. You'll also have the chance to win some fantastic prizes in our raffle!

To RSVP scan the QR code or visit tetonwater.org