

Comanche Creek Restoration Project

Visit Comanche Creek, New Mexico to see how a highly collaborative restoration project improved habitat for the Rio Grande cut throat trout and lent to the delisting of the creek as an impaired waterway.

NRRSS Project #: 16391

NRRSS Categories: Instream habitat improvement, water quality management (primary goal)

What was done and why?

In 2000, Dick Neuman, then the president of New Mexico Trout, a fishing conservation organization, called The Quivira Coalition to solicit additional support for an attempt to restore Comanche Creek, located in the western half of the Valle Vidal unit of the Carson National Forest, north of Questa, to a condition where it could support a healthy population of native Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout. New Mexico Trout had invested many volunteer hours in creek rehabilitation but Dick felt progress wasn't going fast enough for the fish. The creek is still trying to recover from a triple whammy of overgrazing, logging, mining, and associated road building to support these activities. As a result, the creek was listed as an impaired waterway due to its elevated temperatures and sediment loads relative to optimal Rio Grande cut throat trout habitat. With the help of New Mexico Trout and The Quivira Coalition plus the New Mexico Environment Department, New Mexico Game and Fish Department, Bill Zeedyk and Steve Carson (consultants), U.S. Forest Service, Valle Vidal Grazing Association, and Taos-based Rocky Mountain Youth Corps, the roads in the area have been surveyed and improved, elk exclosures have been installed around riparian vegetation, rock and wooden vanes (all local materials) have been installed instream to induce natural meanders and provide fish habitat, and 13 monitoring sites have been established. The result of all of these efforts has been the delisting of the creek as an impaired waterway.

Who was involved?

In 2001, The Quivira Coalition was awarded a three-year restoration and education grant from the EPA, through the New Mexico Environment Department, under its section 319 program. Bill Zeedyk and Steve Carson surveyed the roads system and identified spots where too much sedimentation was flowing into the creek. The U.S. Forest Service made road improvements. Volunteers from The Quivira Coalition, New Mexico Trout, and Rocky Mountain Youth Corps installed numerous elk exclosures. The New Mexico Environment Department has monitored water quality while the New Mexico Game and Fish Department has monitored fish populations.

Where can I see the restoration projects?

The project can be seen by visiting the Valle Vidal unit of the Carson National Forest, north of Questa, NM.

Why is this a model project?

The project demonstrated how restoration projects can be approached using collaboration vs. litigation to conserve native species and their habitats. An extensive process of dialogue between the numerous participating entities ensured project buy-in and long-term commitment. Restoration activities were low impact. Materials used in restoration construction were local to the area surrounding the creek. Monitoring efforts ensured that the project was not only a success from the perspectives of aesthetics and community-building, but also from an ecological perspective. Finally, water quality has already improved to the point that the creek could be taken off the list of impaired waterways. Whether populations of Rio Grande cut throat trout are growing will be determined through on-going long-term monitoring.

Who can be contacted about this project ?

Dr. Cliff Dahm, Department of Biology, University of New Mexico
(505) 277-2850
cdahm@sevilleta.unm.edu

Jennifer Follstad Shah, Department of Biology, University of New Mexico
(505) 277-9164
follstad@unm.edu

Courtney White, Executive Director, Quivira Coalition
(505) 820-2544 ext. 1#
executive@quiviracoalition.org

Tamara Gadzia, Programs and Finance Manager, Quivira Coalition
(505) 820-2544 ext. 3#
projects@quiviracoalition.org.



September 14, 2002 Workday with New Mexico Trout. Photo courtesy of Tamara Gadzia.