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What has wings, scales, and loves water in the Intermountain West? Why, a new partnership between the Western Native Trout Initiative (WNTI) and the Intermountain West Joint Venture (IWJV), of course!

Native trout and migratory birds have more in common than one might think. In the West, riparian and wetland habitats on public and private lands provide critical habitat for both winged wildlife and scaled stream-dwellers. These areas also provide groundwater recharge opportunities that can improve water quality and quantity for fish, wildlife, and people.

The new WNTI-IWJV partnership is designed to accelerate conservation efforts for both migratory birds and native trout fisheries across the Intermountain West. The initial focus will be strengthening and supporting agricultural conservation for multi-species benefits through communications. Telling the story of the value of working lands and the farmers and ranchers who manage them helps ensure well-informed decision making related to conservation policies and land and water use planning. Future conservation work will benefit from a better understanding of the mosaic of private and public lands habitat, as well as how different land and water management practices and infrastructure improvements can benefit multiple species on those lands.

Julie Meka Carter, the Statewide Native Aquatics Program Manager for Arizona Game and Fish Department and Chair of WNTI's 18-member steering committee, said that this partnership suits WNTI's mission to support strategic, local efforts that stabilize, recover, and improve populations of western native trout.

"Successfully addressing native trout recovery is a landscape-scale challenge that requires collaboration from all interested parties," she said. "We are thrilled about this new collaboration between WNTI and the IWJV."

Water is a common thread connecting fish and wildlife habitat, agriculture, and people in the Intermountain West. The IWJV launched the Water 4 Initiative in 2019 to take a holistic view of the habitat needs of migratory birds and the role of working agricultural lands in providing that habitat. Water 4 strives to better understand and elevate the relationship between publicly and privately managed wetlands, areas of multi-species habitat overlap, and the unique needs of every landscape.

"Wetland conservation requires three things: collaboration, resources, and water. Combined, these key elements open countless doors for a future of landscape-scale conservation benefiting waterfowl, fish, and people," said Jeff McCreary, Director of Conservation Programs for the Western Region of Ducks Unlimited. "In true Joint Venture fashion, this is another example of how partnership efforts are more effective than individual ones."

The WNTI-IWJV partnership establishes a new paradigm for practitioners to view potential conservation projects, partners, funding sources, strategic approaches, and other fundamentals of habitat conservation, restoration, and enhancement. The partnership will enhance opportunities to diversify and leverage funding for conservation on both private and public lands, as well as use a combination of fisheries, wetlands, and other science to develop strategic approaches to conservation. Early efforts of this collaboration will focus on the Bear River watershed (ID, UT, WY) and the Rio Grande corridor (CO, NM).

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