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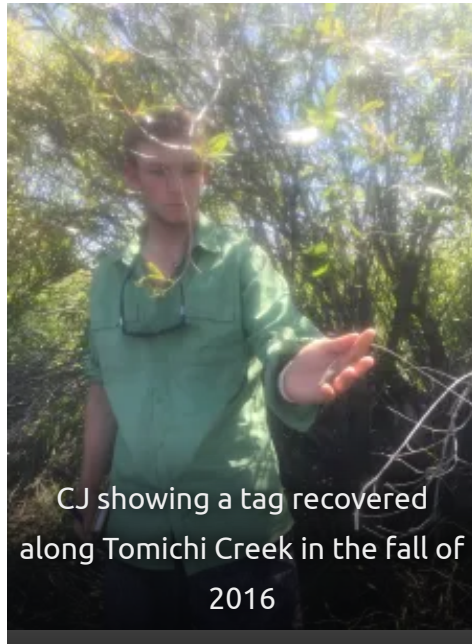
Month: *January 2017*

Adopt-A-Trout Internship – Always Say Yes!

Always Say Yes

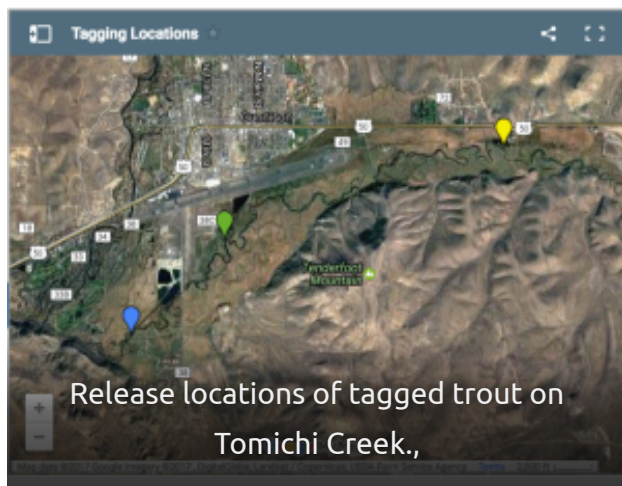
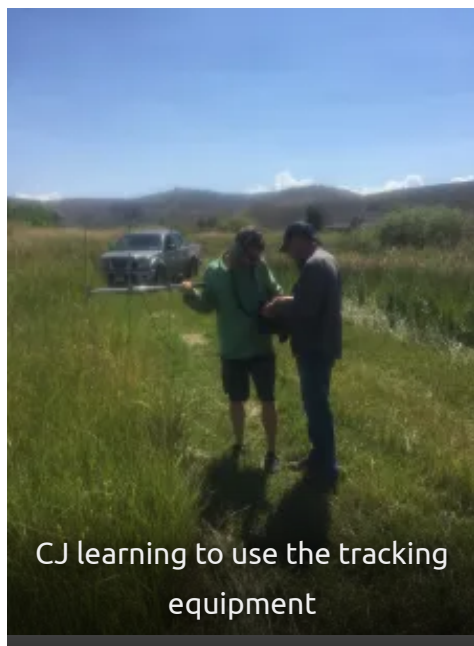
By Christopher (CJ) Gooderham

If there is one thing that I have learned since college, it is to always say yes.



While at a monthly Trout Unlimited meeting, Briant Wiles, the Director of Land Management at Coldharbour Institute, was discussing the Adopt-a-Trout Program and that he was looking for help. He asked me if I would be interested in participating in an internship for the program and I quickly answered with a “yes.” Though I knew little about what I was getting into, I am so glad I said yes, because it has been one of the greatest decisions I’ve made since I came to college.

In the following weeks, Colorado Parks and Wildlife would electroshock Tomichi Creek and select 15 trout for the project. Each fish had to weigh at least 500 grams because the tag could not be weigh than 5% of the fish’s body weight, resulting in some fish up to 22 inches! Tags were surgically implanted into both Rainbow and Brown Trout and fish were released at discrete locations along Tomichi Creek.



After receiving a quick orientation of the telemetry equipment and a field notebook in September, it was up to me to find the remaining fish and document their locations. Over the next few months, I would hike many miles, drive down Highway 50 numerous times, and learn a lot about Trout and their relationship with the ecosystem.

While I did receive a lot of help from Briant Wiles and Jesse Kruthaupt, Trout Unlimited Upper Gunnison Project Specialist, this internship was entirely self-driven. At first, this internship seemed quite daunting because there were so many different rivers and creeks other than Tomichi Creek that the fish could be in. While many of the fish stayed in Tomichi Creek, tags were found at the Neversink area of the Gunnison River and even in Quartz Creek. One fish (Tag-164) had even traveled from Tomichi Creek up to Quartz Creek and then back down to its release location, totaling a 40+ mile journey!

I had found a few tags early on and then in the middle of semester I hit a dry spell. For many days in a row I couldn't find any fish, and became very discouraged. I hit a point where it almost wasn't about finding the fish but more about fulfilling the 45 hour requirement for the internship.

One sunny October afternoon, I mustered up the motivation to go out to the State Wildlife Area and get on W Mountain Ranch. My plan was to hike for an hour up this incredibly steep hill for an hour, not detect anything, and then hike all the way down just like the past few weeks. Not expecting much, I finally got to a good high point on the hillside, caught my breath and put the headphones on. Starting at the last known fish, I flipped through the frequencies. Tag-094... nothing, Tag-112... nothing, Tag-142... nothing, Tag-164... BING... BING...BING! Finally after all these weeks I finally got a signal! After a small mountainside celebration, I turned to the next frequency... BING! Another one! By this time I was happier than a toddler catching their first fish ever! Then flipped to another frequency...BING! Three fish, I couldn't believe it! Finding Tag-164, Tag-184 and Tag-284 all in the same day gave me the confidence and strength I needed to find the few remaining fish. On the last day of tracking, a few weeks before school ended, I found the remaining fish and had one last mountainside celebration.

The Adopt-a-Trout program and the findings of this internship offer much insight into Trout migrations, human impacts, and possible species interactions. The findings show that every fish moved, with a few traveling very great distances through other waterways. A few fish had died from possible human impacts like Tag-203 was found in an irrigation ditch after runoff.

Trout with tag number 149.203 found
deceased in an irrigation ditch in the
middle of a field

Others may have died possibly from induced stress due to the unusually warm fall this year. Unfortunately, this could become a common occurrence due to our warming climate and the alarming consequences of climate change. A few tags were found under birds nests like Tag-003 which was found a few hundred yards away from Tomichi Creek in a cow pasture under some tall cottonwoods. Tag-142 had a similar fate and was found near the trail at Neversink with some skin and blood still attached to the tag. Predatory birds most likely picked these fish up and ate them, but whether they were dead or alive when they were picked up is unknown.

Maps on the AAT website display the results
of the tracking.

Water Conservation is becoming increasingly important in our world today and the findings of this program may offer insight into the importance of keeping all rivers healthy, not just a few. Fish can travel great distances, by evidence of fish like Tag-164. Human impacts of any kind to a river not only affect organisms in that immediate river but in surrounding rivers as well. As anglers and conservationist alike, we must be aware of this and made educated decisions on and off the water.

Please visit the Gunnison Basin Adopt-A-Trout website to learn more about each Trout and how far they have traveled! It is a great website that has all of the updated information on every fish involved in the project. I would like to thank Briant Wiles for giving me the opportunity to do this internship and Colorado Parks and Wildlife as well as Jesse Krauthaupt for their assistance. It was a pleasure learning about the Trout living within in the Gunnison Watershed and made me realize how blessed Western Students are to live in such an amazing place.

– While CJ was officially an intern for the Coldharbour Institute he has worked closely with the GAS chapter of Trout Unlimited where much of the funds for the project came from. CJ is now a regular attendee at chapter meetings and is taking on a leadership role with the Gunnison Sockeyes (the Western State Colorado University chapter of Trout Unlimited). It was a pleasure to work with CJ for the AAT program and I look forward to many more collaborations in the future. A big thank you to the support provided for the Gunnison Basin Adopt – A-Trout program from New Belgium Brewing, Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Trout Unlimited, GAS, and the Coldharbour Institute. See the AAT website for the results of CJ’s tracking and the latest updates on where the trout are: <http://gunnyaat.wixsite.com/adopt-a-trout>

Briant Wiles, President of the Gunnison Angling Society



Briant Wiles



January 30, 2017



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