

CALIFORNIA TROUT



FISH · WATER · PEOPLE

BACK TO LIFE

ANNUAL REPORT 2024

RESTORING RIVER FUNCTION

California's economy – the world's fifth largest – is fueled by water. At CalTrout, we understand our state's economic health relies on healthy rivers. Rivers are the arteries of our state, providing water for drinking, agriculture, and commerce all while holding unquantifiable value to the natural environment. When our rivers are healthy, our communities and environments are healthy.

How do we know if our rivers are ecologically functional? At CalTrout we go straight to the source: we ask California's salmon, steelhead, and trout. These fish have swum through our rivers for millennia and serve as an ideal proxy for the health of our rivers. If our wild fish are thriving, that tells us the ecological function of their rivers remains relatively high.

If California's native fish aren't doing well, then we know there's something amiss with the river. If something is out of balance in our rivers, chances are the health of the greater landscape has been compromised. In this way, we use the health of our fish populations to better understand the ecological integrity of our entire state. From ridgetop to river mouth, California's fish tell us about the ecological health of the mountain meadows, foothill forests, valley grasslands, and brackish estuaries through which rivers flow.

Today, the story that California's fish are telling is clear: these precious species and the habitat on which they rely are compromised. To achieve recovery, we cannot focus on one single river or one single lifecycle stage. We must focus on every link in the chain. Adult fish need access to diverse upstream habitat to lay their eggs. Eggs need clean, cold, well-oxygenated water with suitable gravel beds to survive. Young fish need access to food to fuel their journey towards the ocean. Before entering the ocean, young fish need more food and a place to transition from freshwater to saltwater—estuaries. Each piece of a watershed must be functioning to support a fish's graduation from one life stage to the next to successfully complete the entire lifecycle.

It's a beautiful journey, and our team is working across the state and across every link in the chain to recover California's native fish populations. We are removing barriers to upstream migration for adult fish; we are ensuring high

quality headwaters habitat for fish to lay eggs and begin their lives; we are reactivating floodplains and reconnecting food webs in order to fuel young fish; we are restoring estuaries for young fish to transition to salt water before entering the ocean; and we are advocating for common sense conservation policy to ensure that our restoration actions result in permanent protections for the future of these species.

We don't do any of this work alone. We are proud to partner with agencies, Tribes, communities, landowners, and other NGOs across the state to make this work happen. And we're not going into any of this blind: we are employing the best science to determine the highest priority areas to focus. We are on the ground getting dirty to restore river function from Southern California to the Klamath. We are walking the halls of DC and Sacramento advocating for our fish. And through our regional approach — staff living state-wide in the watersheds in which they work — we are implementing a robust outreach and engagement program to engage the public because all of us depend on California's rivers.

Thank you for being a part of this journey and the impact we are collectively creating to revitalize rivers—the lifeblood of our state.

With gratitude,



Kelly Barlow,
Board Chair



Curtis Knight,
Executive Director

WE WORK IN 32
RIVERS/STREAMS

60 ACTIVE PROJECTS

10 COMPLETED PROJECTS

9 OFFICES

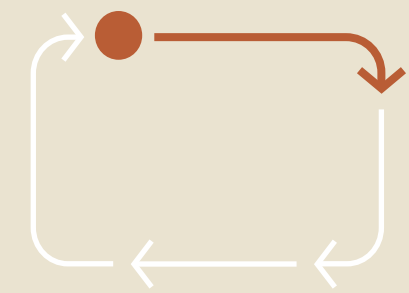
Cover photo: Sierra Nevada Headwaters
by Matthew Green

Sources: Esri, USGS, Esri, USGS



RIVER CHANNEL

**NEARLY
400 MILES**
UNLOCKED THROUGH
KLAMATH DAM
REMOVAL



Adult salmon and steelhead swim upstream from the ocean to find a place to lay their eggs.

As adult fish swim from the ocean into rivers, they begin an upstream migration to find suitable habitat to spawn and lay their eggs. They are looking for a place where ample, cold water flows through clean gravels to incubate their eggs and where water will still flow as those eggs hatch. Having access to just one such area is not enough. They need access to many diverse headwater habitats in order to build population resilience in case of a disturbance that may impact them in one stream – an insurance policy. However, their ability to find diverse headwater habitats is often disrupted by dams, bridges, and other barriers.

LIFE STAGE: ADULT UPSTREAM MIGRATION

HABITAT: RIVER CHANNEL

ECOLOGICAL FUNCTION FOR FISH: ACCESS TO DIVERSE HEADWATERS

IMPACT METRICS: DAMS OUT – 17 DAMS, SIX WATERSHEDS, OVER 750 MILES OF HABITAT; TOTAL MILES OF HABITAT TO UNLOCK: 816; NEARLY 400 MILES UNLOCKED THROUGH KLAMATH DAM REMOVAL

RIVER CHANNEL

We are working to break down barriers so that fish can access a diverse array of upstream habitats where they can lay their eggs.

Klamath River Dam Removal

This year, we witnessed the Klamath River dams topple. For the first time in over a century, the river flows free. Dam removal unlocks access to hundreds of miles of historic habitat for native salmon and steelhead, improves water quality for humans and wildlife, and marks a step toward restoring a place critical to the cultural life-ways of Indigenous peoples who have lived along the river since time immemorial. As fish begin to return, CalTrout and our partners are monitoring fish migration and assessing the efficacy of this monumental restoration effort.

Dams Out

We're building on this dam removal momentum to unlock fish habitat across the state on the Eel River, Battle Creek, San Francisquito Creek, Malibu Creek, and Matilija Creek.

Eel River Dams

Two dams on the Eel River block 288 miles of salmon and steelhead spawning and rearing habitat. Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E), the owner of the dams, plans to remove their outdated hydropower facilities and will submit their

decommissioning plans to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission in 2025. Over the next few years, we will work to ensure that dam removal happens quickly and safely and we will support dam removal with restoration work.

Battle Creek Dams

The Battle Creek Hydroelectric Project, owned and operated by PG&E, includes 16 dams, two reservoirs, and three forebays located throughout the watershed blocking fish passage and altering the creek's natural flow pattern. PG&E's license for this project will expire in 2026. In 2024, CalTrout assembled a coalition of resource agencies, NGOs, Tribes, and community members that are working together to accelerate dam removal. We are contributing technical reports to inform the decommissioning process.

Searsville Dam, San Francisquito Creek

Searsville Dam is an impassable barrier to federally threatened steelhead, and CalTrout is committed to finding a solution that includes full dam removal. The environmental review process for the future of Searsville Dam continues to be delayed. We are working with consultants to



conduct studies to help us and resource agencies better understand the benefits of full dam removal as compared to the owner Stanford University's plan to drill a hole in the dam and leave it in place.

Rindge Dam, Malibu Creek

Based on the current schedule, Rindge Dam is expected to be removed by 2035. Its removal will achieve a critical species recovery action for endangered Southern steelhead and revitalize healthy beaches, supporting both fish and people. CalTrout is partnering with California State Parks to lead communication and public outreach for the project.

Matilija Dam, Matilija Creek, tributary to Ventura River

Matilija Dam is a complete barrier to the migration of endangered Southern steelhead. As of October 2024, Ventura County is preparing the higher-level plan sets for detailing the removal of the dam along with an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the project. Dam removal is expected to begin as early as 2030.

MALIBU CREEK COMMUNITY SCIENCE PHOTO POINT PROGRAM

On Malibu Creek, the community can help document dam removal as it plays out. All you need is a smart phone or camera and a visit to the watershed! The Community Science Photo Point Program allows Malibu Creek visitors to snap a picture at one of the photo monitoring sites and upload it to help us collaboratively build a bigger picture of the watershed. Two of the sites are currently installed, and five more will be ready in 2025.

BEYOND DAMS

It's more than just dams that create barriers. Bridges, highways, train lines, and even gas pipelines can also block migration. On Alameda Creek, in the Bay Area, we received \$4.3M from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to address the last major fish passage barrier in the watershed, created by a gas pipeline, and open nearly 22 miles of habitat for native fish.

On the Santa Margarita River in San Diego County, we are replacing a flood-prone river crossing that blocks migration for Southern steelhead with a new bridge to restore access to 29 miles of prime habitat. In December 2024, construction of the new bridge is expected to break ground!

On Trabuco Creek in Orange County, we are working to address two fish passage barriers created by the Interstate 5 Bridge Array and Metrolink Railroad Bridge crossing. This year, we received \$23.9M from NOAA and California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) to support construction of this project which will restore Southern steelhead access to 15 miles of historic habitat in the Santa Ana mountains.

On Santa Paula Creek in Ventura County, we are working to address a fish passage barrier created by Harvey Diversion. This year, we were awarded almost \$20M from Bureau of Reclamation and CDFW to support final design and construction of this project which will restore Southern steelhead access to high quality habitat in the Santa Clara River watershed.

Previous spread: Malibu Creek by Kelli Frye.
This spread: Left: Undammed Klamath River by Michael Wier.
Top right: Former Klamath River Iron Gate Dam by Swiftwater Films.
Bottom right: Former reservoir footprint restoration by Yurok Tribal Construction Corp on Klamath River by Michael Wier.



In the headwaters of rivers, adult salmon and steelhead lay their eggs, and these eggs develop and then hatch as young fry.

Rivers are more than just thin blue lines. Headwaters – or the places that rivers begin – are only as healthy as the landscapes that surround, interact with, and feed them. Massive fires, degraded meadows, timber harvesting, or disconnected springs can severely impact the health of the watershed.

LIFE STAGE: SPAWNING

HABITAT: HEADWATERS

ECOLOGICAL FUNCTION FOR FISH: SPAWNING HABITAT, EGG HEALTH, AND REARING HABITAT

IMPACT METRICS: 463 ACRES RESTORED; 125 ACRES MORE IN THE WORKS TO RESTORE; 106,000 ACRES PROTECTED

106,000
ACRES PROTECTED

HEADWATERS

HEADWATERS

We are working to study and restore forests, meadows, and springs to build healthier headwater habitats that can better support fish eggs and the young fish that hatch from them.

Fish and Fire

Over the past three years, CalTrout and Inyo National Forest have been working together to restore and remove infested and dead whitebark pine trees on June Mountain near Mammoth Lakes. Forest health and fish health are intimately connected, especially when wildfires occur. In 2024, we completed the third and final phase of this project treating over 300 acres.

Just an hour north of June Mountain, in Mono County near the small town of Bridgeport, CalTrout recently completed another forest health project at By-Day Creek Ecological Reserve, which supports native, federally threatened Lahontan cutthroat trout. The By-Day Creek Forest Health Project is a collaborative project between CalTrout and CDFW to implement thinning of overly-dense forest understory. By thinning the forest around the creek, this project helps protect native fish from catastrophic fire events. In fall of 2024, we completed implementation, successfully thinning 163 acres.

Mountain Meadows

CalTrout is developing a new approach to meadow and forest health in the Sierra Nevada so that we can transform meadow and forest restoration efforts into quantifiable carbon, water, and energy benefits on a landscape scale. We recently received funding from the Sierra Meadows Partnership to start a pilot program of this bold initiative in the Glass Mountains.

Our goal of this pilot is to restore 125 acres of degraded meadows at the headwaters of Dexter Creek, adjacent to 300 acres of dense forests. Through a multi-pronged approach, we will quantify water and carbon benefits through avoided wildfire emissions, aquifer recharge, below-ground carbon sequestration, and biomass conversion for renewable energy. By better understanding the capacity of a meadow or forest to hold water or carbon, we can create data-driven conservation strategies to bolster climate mitigation.



Source Waters

The springs that emerge from the volcanic rocks of northern California's Cascade Range in the Upper Sacramento Basin are among the largest known springs in the region if not the world and they feed California's largest river, the Sacramento. These springs provide water security for both fish and people, yet little is known about them. In 2023, CalTrout and our partners embarked on a study to provide a scientific toolset to better understand, manage, and advance the protection of these cold, clean springs. This year, we entered year two of the study. Alongside our partners CDFW, CSU East Bay, UC Davis, and Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, we worked to quantify spring outflows, better define recharge areas, evaluate spring vulnerability, and examine the life histories of wild native trout in these unique habitats. This study will help inform future policy and management to further protect these vital springs in an increasingly variable climate.



SOURCE WATER PROTECTION SUCCESS IN THE SAN GABRIEL MOUNTAINS

This year, the San Gabriel Mountains National Monument was expanded to include an additional 106,000 acres – protected in perpetuity. CalTrout supported and advocated for this expansion which protects precious wildlands surrounding the dense Los Angeles basin for recreation, drinking water use, and cultural significance. The expansion also protects higher reaches of the greater San Gabriel River watershed, which hold dormant Southern steelhead genetics.

Previous spread: Rock Creek and Miter Basin, CalTrout Photo Contest 2023 by Frank Eldredge.
This spread: Left: Lahontan cutthroat trout on By-Day Creek by Michael Wier. Top: June Mountain Forest Health Project by Michael Mier. Bottom left: Source Waters Study Science Team on the Upper Sac by Damon Goodman. Bottom right: San Gabriel Mountains Stream by Bernard Yin

SCIENCE & MONITORING

With 60+ active projects across the state, how do we decide to focus our efforts on these specific projects? To understand where and how fish need our help most urgently, we monitor fish movement, behavior, survival, and other life history patterns. This data helps us figure out what restoration efforts to engage in and where they should take place. Simultaneously, we collect data to measure the success of completed restoration projects, ensuring that we learn from what we've done, and that future restoration is data-driven and impactful.

Answering the Question: How will Klamath River fish respond to dam removal?

In July 2024, CalTrout and our partners launched the Klamath River Monitoring Program to build our understanding of dam removal including how fish repopulate newly opened habitat and how they recover from landscape level restoration. The project team consists of a diverse group of interests including Tribes, government agencies, and non-profits. We use a combination of methods including sonar imaging, netting, radio telemetry, and spawner surveys to follow the fish. What we learn will help us uncover how fish respond to dam removal and will inform how to focus future restoration efforts. In October 2024, we detected the first Chinook salmon to migrate above the former Iron Gate dam site, confirmation that fish are using the newly reconnected habitat as the dam removal effort intended!

Different Monitoring Methods in Different Places

In the Bay Area, CalTrout and our partners use passive integrated transponder (PIT) tags to track individual fish in Walker Creek (Marin County), Pescadero and Butano creeks (San Mateo County), and, as of this year, Branciforte Creek (Santa Cruz County). Our PIT tag antenna networks enhance our ability to understand when and why fish move through and between streams and how connected different fish populations are.

In the South Fork Eel River, we use acoustic telemetry tags to track fish movements with sound. These tags send out a ping when they pass by an acoustic receiver, a type of

listening device installed down the mainstem river corridor. We surgically implant these tags in juvenile salmon and steelhead, and as we track them, we use this information to understand where they are most threatened by non-native pikeminnow predation so we can focus our recovery and suppression efforts. This year, we tagged over 400 fish and removed over 1192 non-native pikeminnow predators. We also operate a sonar camera station on the river to count adult salmon and steelhead, and bolster our understanding of how non-native fish move through the system.

In Southern California, in the Sierra Nevada mountains, and in the Elk River on the North Coast, we use environmental DNA (eDNA) which involves analyzing small traces of DNA that fish may shed into their environment as they move through it. This allows detection of a broad assemblage of fish species over long stretches of river at a fraction of the cost of traditional visual surveys and helps us better understand where native and non-native species are present.

In the Sacramento Valley, our Fish Food Program collects data to understand aquatic food web production dynamics and develop management practices that reconnect floodplain food web resources to fish confined to food-starved, leveed river channels. We measure the volume and quality of water running through participating farm fields and managed marshes, we sample the number and type of invertebrates growing in these "surrogate marshes", and we measure how much faster salmon grow, both on the floodplain and in the river, when they get access to this floodplain bug buffet. The answer: they grow a lot faster!



2500+
TAGGED FISH WITH
OUR PARTNERS

IN ORANGE COUNTY, VOLUNTEERS HELP MONITOR AN IMPORTANT SOUTHERN STEELHEAD CREEK

On Upper Trabuco Creek, Southern California residents Kris, Ella, and Shane became scientists for the day and joined us in the field to monitor and measure creek conditions including flow rate, sediment levels, riparian vegetation, and other habitat markers. This data, in conjunction with stringent engineering data collection and analysis required for fishway design, helps us inform future restoration – like CalTrout's upcoming Trabuco Creek fish passage project.

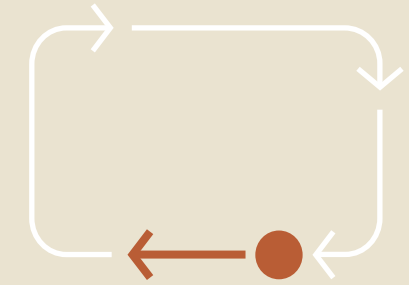
"I think the best part of the volunteer day was spending time outdoors with a small group of folks with such diverse backgrounds and points of view all coming together to help our local environment...Diversity matters not just in our wild spaces but in our community as well. I've found CalTrout to be a great place to share my point of view and help a great local environmental cause."

- Kris Hublitz, CalTrout Volunteer



Top: Pescadero estuary fish tagging by Michael Wier. Middle: Volunteers survey Trabuco Creek by Alix Martin. Bottom: Fish food (bugs) held by CalTrout scientists by R Michael Associates

FLOODPLAIN



As young salmon and steelhead swim downstream towards the ocean, they need access to food so they can grow big and strong enough to avoid predators and so they can survive at sea and ultimately return to their home rivers as large spawning adults.

Before California drained its wetlands and leveed its rivers, the state's fish and wildlife populations were supported by abundant food webs produced on millions of acres of seasonally inundated floodplain wetlands. Over the last century and a half, development—primarily for agriculture and flood control—has cut off California's rivers from this wetland food supply, effectively starving river ecosystems of the energy necessary to make healthy and abundant salmon populations.

LIFE STAGE: JUVENILE DOWNSTREAM MIGRATION

HABITAT: FLOODPLAIN

ECOLOGICAL FUNCTION FOR FISH: ACCESS TO FOOD AND REFUGE FROM PREDATION

IMPACT METRICS: \$10M INVESTED; 1,192 NON-NATIVE FISH REMOVED; 168,000 NATIVE PLANTS WILL BE PLANTED

\$10M INVESTED IN
FLOODPLAIN RESTORATION

FLOODPLAIN

We are working to reconnect rivers to food-rich floodplains while simultaneously reducing threats from non-native fish, so that young salmon and steelhead can more safely access the food they need to fuel their journeys to the ocean and survive there once they arrive.

Reconnecting Floodplains

This year, we were awarded a \$10M grant from NOAA to identify and restore floodplain rearing habitat in the Sacramento River for winter-run Chinook salmon along their entire 300-mile migratory route. Today, less than 5% of historical floodplain habitats remain accessible to Sacramento River salmon. The now-funded String of Pearls program will increase the pace and scale of landscape-scale floodplain restoration in the Sacramento Valley to make meaningful progress towards population-level recovery.

In February 2024, CalTrout and our Floodplain Forward Coalition partners co-hosted a tour of the Sacramento Valley floodplains for federal agency staff with California Secretary of Natural Resources Wade Crowfoot. This tour resulted in a Memorandum of Understanding, signed by federal and state agencies in October 2024, that calls for landscape-scale investment in green infrastructure accelerating momentum for floodplain projects.

On Prairie Creek, at the gateway to Redwood National and State Parks (RNSP), CalTrout, the Yurok Tribe, and our partners are restoring a former timber mill site to reconnect floodplain and off-channel habitat and improve conditions for salmon and steelhead. The project will also provide a Trails Gateway for the public to access the RNSP trail network. This year, we completed the fourth year of this project. Over 150,000 native plants are being carefully planted through this winter and through 2025. By the end of 2025, the new channel will be completed connecting 2,233 feet of stream and backwater to Prairie Creek and reconnecting the creek to 15.7 acres of floodplain habitat.

On Bull Creek, in the South Fork Eel River watershed, we completed construction for a floodplain restoration project. Timber harvest and other historic land uses had resulted in wide-scale watershed erosion and degraded habitat in Bull Creek. This project helped fix that by re-constructing floodplain and side channel habitat, installing four large



wood in-stream structures, and planting over 18,000 native plants. We're already seeing the results of this project: young steelhead were observed in the newly constructed floodplain areas throughout winter and spring, when this slower moving, off-channel habitat is critical, while larger resident rainbow trout have been using the large wood structures year-round.

Protecting Native Fish from Non-Native Predators

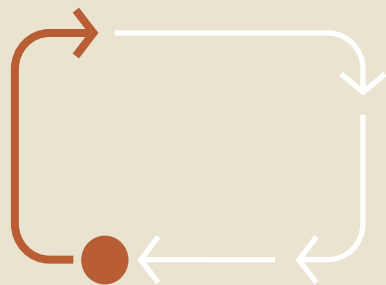
In the South Fork Eel River, non-native pikeminnow compete with, prey on, and alter behavior of young salmon – all of which impacts salmon recovery. The Wiyot Tribe has been leading pikeminnow monitoring and suppression efforts in the Eel River for years, and CalTrout and our partners UC Berkeley, CDFW, and Stillwater Sciences work with the Tribe to understand how pikeminnow suppression affects salmon recovery. This year, for the second year, we installed and monitored a pikeminnow weir to prevent upstream pikeminnow migration and protect rearing habitat for young salmon. We also worked with our partners to actively suppress pikeminnow using nets, snorkels, and spears to remove them from the watershed. This year, the community got a chance to help too by participating in a pikeminnow derby through which additional pikeminnow were removed. In total, our team removed 1192 pikeminnow – a record for the last five years. Finally, we continue to work with our partners to research methods for long-term eradication of pikeminnow, including sex chromosome alteration.

GOVERNOR NEWSOM VISITS CALTROUT PROJECTS

In January 2024, CalTrout and our partners had the honor of showing California Governor Gavin Newsom and his cabinet secretaries around the sites of two of our collaborative restoration projects on the North Coast at Prairie Creek and the Elk River. The Governor's visit coincided with his administration's announcement of a new Salmon Strategy, an imperative step to address the urgent crisis our native fish are facing.

Previous spread: Sacramento Valley floodplains by Michael Wier. This spread: Left: Restored Bull Creek floodplain by Pusher Media. Right: Prairie Creek floodplain restoration by Michael Wier. Below: Governor Gavin Newsom tours CalTrout projects, Courtesy of Governor Newsom's Office





Young salmon and steelhead continue their journey to the ocean, pausing in estuaries for more food and to smolt or transition before life at sea begins.

Estuaries, where freshwater rivers meet the ocean, create an environment that is vital to young fish and many other animals as they prepare for life at sea. An estuary offers fish a buffet of nutrient-rich organisms to feed on, and the mix of salt and fresh water helps them prepare their bodies to smolt, or transition from river to ocean. An uninhabitable or disconnected estuary may force a fish to swim into the ocean before it is prepared to do so.

LIFE STAGE: JUVENILE REARING AND SMOLTING

HABITAT: ESTUARY

ECOLOGICAL FUNCTION FOR FISH: FOOD AND
TRANSITIONING FROM FRESH TO SALTWATER

IMPACT METRICS: 1700+ ACRES WILL BE RESTORED;
THREE INTERPRETIVE SIGNS INSTALLED

1700+
ACRES WILL
BE RESTORED



ESTUARY

ESTUARY

We are working to restore estuaries so that young fish have access to food-rich places where they can prepare for the transition from river to ocean.

Restoring Estuaries

For the Redwood Creek estuary, we are launching a feasibility study and engineering design process. This estuary has potential to provide critical habitat to young salmon and steelhead as they grow and acclimate to life in the ocean. However, the entire estuary is cutoff by levees constructed by the US Army Corp in 1968, blocking fish access into critical floodplains, tidal wetlands, and freshwater tributaries. CalTrout and our partners have identified key restoration concepts for this project that would reestablish Redwood Creek with its historic estuarine habitat and reconnect the creek to sloughs, backwater channels, and wetland areas.

Adjacent to the mouth of the Eel River, CalTrout and our partners and landowners at CDFW have developed a shovel-ready project to restore the 795-acre tidal marsh estuary within Cannibal Island. The project will remove

earthen levees and obsolete water control infrastructure to restore natural tidal patterns, and will recreate a mosaic of tidal slough channels, brackish ponds, and native marsh vegetation. The project area will also benefit from receiving the sediment-rich waters of the Eel River to begin rebuilding tidal marsh elevations to keep pace with sea level rise.

On the Elk River, CalTrout secured \$11.5M in funding for engineering design and the first phase of construction to restore the river and its estuary. Timber harvest and agricultural land uses have degraded the Elk River's estuarine habitat. Restoration will enhance wetlands, riparian corridors, and floodplain habitats within the estuary area, benefitting salmon and steelhead, tidewater goby, longfin smelt, and other native species. Our team worked closely with six river-adjacent landowners and an agency advisory committee to develop restoration plans.

ALONG THE BADUWA'T, COMMUNITY GATHERS

In 2022, CalTrout and our partners completed an estuary restoration and public access project on the Baduwa't, also called the Mad River, in McKinleyville. This year, we collaborated with local artists to design and install interpretive signage at the site which is now known as Lhiwetgut. The new installation includes three interpretive signs with artwork by Alme Allen and Jullia Finkelstein and narrative cultivated by the Wiyot Tribe, CalTrout, and Redwood Coast Action Agency. In the summer, we hosted four stewardship workdays at the site to get the community outside and tending the landscape together. Alongside 35 community members, we removed non-native plants to make more space for native plants, learned about the restoration project, and left feeling inspired and optimistic about future community initiatives.



Previous spread: Malibu Lagoon by Bernard Yin.
This spread: Left: Elk River estuary by Michael Wier. Right: Baduwa't stewardship day by Ashley Shannon. Bottom: Redwood Creek Estuary by Michael Wier



POLICY

We understand that restoration is not possible without policy that supports it, and we are working every day to elevate freshwater conservation priorities to state and national decisionmakers.

Our policy and advocacy efforts help preserve and protect our freshwater species, while ensuring that there are ample state and federal funding opportunities for CalTrout’s on the ground restoration projects. Our Sacramento office enables us to foster direct connections with legislators and promote CalTrout’s goals and initiatives at the Capitol.

CalTrout Sponsored Bill AB 460 Signed into Law

In September 2024, Governor Newsom signed into law AB 460, introduced by Assemblymember Bauer-Kahan and co-sponsored by CalTrout. AB 460 dramatically increases fines that the State Water Resources Control Board can levy on illegal water divertors during critically dry years in sensitive watersheds. Previously, fines were so low that they could easily be ignored. This bill closes that loophole and makes the existing law stronger helping to keep water in our rivers for healthier and more functional watersheds for all Californians.

Victory for Southern Steelhead: Protected Under California’s Endangered Species Act

In 2021, CalTrout submitted a petition to the California Fish and Game Commission Commission to list Southern steelhead as endangered under California’s Endangered Species Act (CESA). We defended the petition in California Superior Court in 2023, and in April 2024, the California Fish & Game Commission voted unanimously to list Southern steelhead, expanding important protections for these fish. Listing will bolster federal protections for these fish, promote actions to protect them including removing obsolete dams, and benefit human communities.

Leadership on 30x30

CalTrout Associate Director of Policy, Analise Rivero, continues to serve as a committee member on the California Natural Resource Agency’s 30x30 Partnership Coordinating Committee. 30x30 is a global initiative to protect 30% of the world’s land and oceans by 2030.

Rivero is part of a small group of champions that provide critical input on California’s 30x30 initiative. Her role enables CalTrout to have a voice at the table as the state considers where and how to focus conservation efforts.

Leveraging Outstanding National Resource Waters Designations to Protect Waters

After years of studies, campaign building, and advocacy, the North Coast Regional Water Quality Board approved CalTrout’s request to designate Elder Creek and Cedar Creek as Outstanding National Resource Waters, the first step in the official designation process. The Outstanding Waters designation is a potent yet underutilized tool offering robust protection for waters of exceptional cultural, recreational, or ecological value.

Supporting Legal Precedent to Protect Native Fish in the Kern River and Beyond

In September 2024, CalTrout submitted an amicus brief otherwise known as a ‘friend of the court’ brief, on active litigation involving the Kern River. This case centers around an important California regulation in CalTrout’s advocacy history: Fish and Game Code 5937. In 1915, the California legislature passed the Flow Act, which, in part, requires dam owners and operators to “keep fish in good condition” below these barriers. We filed this amicus brief to support protections for California’s native fish, to preserve legal precedent that if reversed would imperil fisheries throughout the state, and because we support the restoration of a free-flowing Kern for the community of Bakersfield.



FOLLOW THE RIVER OF IMPACT

1 BILL SIGNED

1 SPECIES LISTED UNDER CESA

2 CREEKS TO BE DESIGNATED AS OUTSTANDING WATERS

On the National Stage

CalTrout is proud to be an inaugural member of the America the Beautiful Freshwater Challenge – a White House initiative dedicated to safeguarding the nation’s freshwater resources. Alongside over 160 partners, we’ve committed to a bold goal: protecting, restoring, and reconnecting eight million acres of wetlands and 100,000 miles of rivers and streams by 2030.



Top: Five Rivers Challenge by Val Atkinson. Middle: CalTrout tour visits the Capitol Building by Mike Wier. Bottom: CalTrout testifies on behalf of a bill courtesy of Analise Rivero.

COMMUNITY

From collaborative forums to tabling at community events, CalTrout is listening, educating, and showing up, and through collaboration with local organizations and project partners, we're building trust in the communities where we work.

Community participation is at the heart of an integrated approach to restoration. Restoration action and advocacy impact the everyday lives of the communities we work in, from mitigating flood risk for home and landowners, to enhancing recreational access to lands and waters. Across the state, we are engaging both the restoration community and the public toward shared understanding and shared action to benefit and protect the precious waters that form the basis of our lives and the many non-human lives of our local ecologies.

Pikeminnow Derby The pilot run of our South Fork Eel River Pikeminnow Derby pikeminnow suppression event was a hit, with 34 participants catching an impressive 510 pikeminnow! After a 20-year break, we're excited to bring back this hands-on opportunity for the angling community to actively contribute to non-native species management. CalTrout and our partners gave away \$2,000 in prizes - making this both fun and impactful.

The Lhiwetgut Baduwa't volunteer series was designed to connect the community with local restoration efforts by placing impacted sites into community care. Growing from five participants in the first session to 20 in the last, the series provided hands-on learning opportunities, ranging from botany to youth-focused activities, while empowering participants to engage with the land. The site is now envisioned as a hub for local knowledge and long-term stewardship.

The Alameda Creek Clean-Up was a huge success, with a multigenerational group coming together to care for their local watershed. Highlights from the event included seeing youth and community excited about stewarding their watershed, especially after beginning the event with an educational nature talk that highlighted the importance of protecting local ecosystems. Participants expressed

gratitude for the opportunity to connect with nature right in their own urban backyard, proving you don't have to go far to make a big impact.

Statewide tabling is a powerful way for us to connect with our community, providing a physical presence that allows for meaningful face-to-face interactions. At events like youth career fairs, we engage with students eager to explore career paths in the environmental field, offering mentorship and insight into diverse opportunities. At events like local farmer's markets, we invite individuals to join our mission and answer their questions about fish in their local watershed.

The Elk River Stewardship Program focuses on building trust and addressing diverse community needs through one-on-one relationship building over time. By balancing immediate flood risk mitigation and long-term sediment remediation, the program hopes to enhance habitat for listed species and community climate resilience. CalTrout works as a conduit between the stewardship program and organizations like the USGS and Humboldt OES, to connect residents with resources including flood prediction gauges and emergency notifications, as well as seeking long-term solutions for clean drinking water.



Left: Alameda Creek clean-up by Michael Wier. Right: CalTrout event tabling by Molly Ancel. Bottom: CalTrout Bay Area team with local youth in the estuary by Michael Wier.



The Eel River Forum brings together specialized and scientific groups to address the region's needs. The Eel River covers a vast watershed that spans five counties, and the forum addresses the diverse challenges faced by communities like Willits, Covelo, Ferndale, and Garberville. The forum recently hosted a workshop on pikeminnow suppression and is partnering with Rotary to explore the economic benefits of river restoration.

The Southern Steelhead Coalition brings together agencies, government representatives, nonprofits, tribal members, and concerned community members to collaborate on improving survival for Southern steelhead. It provides a much-needed forum for practitioners to share their knowledge, problem-solve, and learn from each other's experiences in restoration work. By expanding scientific knowledge and building community engagement, the coalition serves as a driving force for sharing expertise and advocating for Southern steelhead protection.

The Malibu Creek Ecosystem Restoration Project (MCERP) public outreach program has been instrumental in introducing the community to large-scale restoration efforts within the Los Angeles region. By providing public education on rivers and unique environmental spaces in this dense urban setting, the program builds community

knowledge and buy-in-for protecting the iconic Southern steelhead. This outreach program has reached tens of thousands through digital outreach and thousands through in-person engagement with over 50 in-person events.

The Trout in the Classroom Aquarium Education Program creates a powerful connection between students and nature, culminating in an unforgettable trout release day. Watching youth bond with their baby trout - complete with names and creative backstories - showed how deeply they felt connected to these tiny creatures. Being part of this program allows students to build a lifelong appreciation for nature through a personal, meaningful connection, and CalTrout is grateful to sponsor this experiential program that fosters a sense of stewardship and care for the environment.

The International Fly Fishing Film Festival is a joyous celebration that brings our community together to rekindle friendships and dive into shared passions. This year's events brought a vibrant, playful atmosphere with attendees uniting at theaters across the state to celebrate their interest in fish, water, and people. CalTrout is looking forward to launching the Fish Water People Film Festival in 2025 to provide a more tailored event experience for our community to celebrate and gather together.

FINANCE

Over the past five years, we have directed significant resources to on-the-ground restoration activities that help support our mission. That has translated to an approximate average annual growth rate of 25%. In 2024, we continued to strengthen our ability to lead large-scale watershed restoration projects across the state.

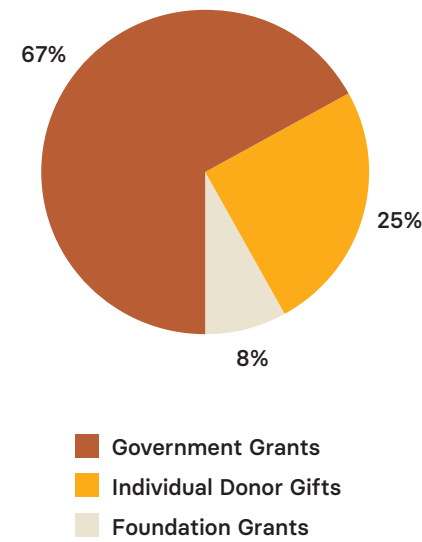
Our expansion is fueled by CalTrout's success in both individual giving and in securing public grants for river and fisheries restoration. Complex projects that involve barrier removal, source water rehabilitation, and river function restoration are made possible through that combination of private and public dollars. We've earned a strong reputation for delivering results, making us a trusted partner. This is demonstrated by the \$91 million CalTrout currently holds in government grant awards. Our financial health, high success rate, and proven ability to execute consistently make us a reliable collaborator across the state.

The generous donations we receive from individuals, foundations, and corporations are at the core of our achievements. These contributions not only enable transformative restoration projects, but they also enable us to invest in the communities we serve, supporting local economies and fostering community partnerships, engagement, and representation. Private donations are essential for building relationships, conducting research, collaborating with partners, and developing the projects that help us compete for public funding. They also enrich the cultural diversity and inclusivity of the communities where we work.

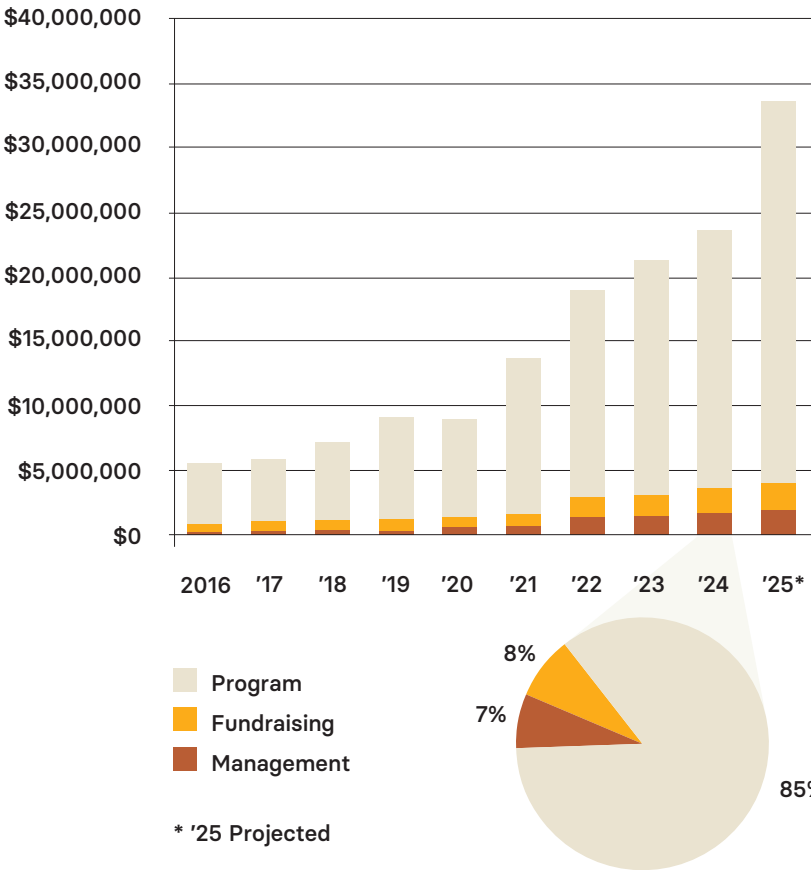


Our business model is designed to maintain financial stability, even when unexpected project delays cause budget fluctuations. With strong risk management policies, conservative fiscal practices, and expert legal teams, we are well-prepared to navigate challenges. Our reliability is further validated by external evaluations, with CalTrout receiving a perfect score of 100/100 from Charity Navigator, the world's largest nonprofit evaluator, continuing our Four-Star Rating.

REVENUE FISCAL YEAR 2024



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CALIFORNIA TROUT



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Including California Trout in your will or living trust is a powerful way to create lasting impact. Your legacy gift will safeguard healthy waters and resilient wild fish, ensuring they thrive for generations to come.

Contact Sierra Wildeor at swildeor@caltrout.org for more information or scan the QR code to become a member today.



Taylor Creek Kokanee Spawn by David Ruddle