

# WORLD WATER DAY 2023

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**As I write this, the spring equinox is upon us, signaling a return to longer, warmer days, rising streams and rivers, and, for Montana Freshwater Partners staff, a very busy field season.**

**We are preparing to implement several wetland restoration projects across the state in 2023, monitor our existing projects, and evaluate new project opportunities.**

**Additionally, we have a renewed and increased focus on our own backyard. Montana Freshwater Partners has been working to safeguard the Yellowstone River since our inception in 2011. Our efforts on the Yellowstone have continued to expand, particularly after the record breaking floods last year, with the Upper Yellowstone Project Prioritization Plan and the Give Back to the Yellowstone Campaign. These projects share a common goal: to enhance ecosystem and community resilience and promote watershed health in the face of mounting climate change and increasing development and recreation pressures.**

**We hope that you will join us in giving back to the rivers and wetlands that sustain us all.**

**For the love of water,**



# FOR THE LOVE OF WATER

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The Yellowstone River is one of the world's most iconic and longest free flowing rivers. However, in the last few years, the river has experienced unprecedented pressure and changes in land use that are impacting its health and vitality. The Give Back to the Yellowstone campaign was developed as a way to engage the community, out-of-state visitors, and businesses to give back to projects that support the overall health and vitality of the Yellowstone River, from its source in Yellowstone National Park to its confluence with the Missouri River in North Dakota. The Yellowstone River directly supports our quality of life, drives tourism, and is key to the regional economy. The campaign is a voluntary, grass-roots effort created to engage the community to provide funding to support badly needed projects that support the resiliency of the Yellowstone River.

All proceeds from the campaign will be invested in conservation and restoration projects that will improve water quality, fish habitat, late season flows and floodplain connectivity, and address recreational pressures. These funds will go towards priority on-the-ground projects implemented collaboratively with local nonprofit organizations (Montana Freshwater Partners, the Upper Yellowstone Watershed Group, Park County Environmental Council, Trout Unlimited, Greater Yellowstone Coalition and others) working in partnership with natural resource agencies.

One of our most exciting partnerships is with Simms Fishing Products! The fishing gear and apparel manufacturer and retailer has contributed \$50,000 to the Give Back to the Yellowstone Campaign through the sale of their Watershed Stockingfoot Wader, in addition to a \$10,000 donation on Giving Tuesday. To join Simms in supporting the healthy and vitality of the Yellowstone River, please consider by [CLICKING HERE!](#)

# IN THE NEWS!

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**In concert with our partners at the Beartooth Group and thanks to Montana FWP for purchasing the land, 107 acres have been protected which comprise two islands, of the mighty Yellowstone River.**

**Our goals with the project were to naturally replace oil contaminated large woody debris removed from the 2011 Exxon oil disaster, protect critical wildlife habitat, and provide greater public access opportunities. Montana Freshwater Partners was a key partner connecting this opportunity with Beartooth Group and the state of Montana.**

**"This is a positive step towards enabling and protecting the Yellowstone's ability to move freely across its floodplain while offering another public access opportunity in Montana..." said our Executive Director Wendy Weaver.**

**To read our recent press about this project, check out our Mountain Journal and Billings Gazette articles!**

**(Floodplain photo by Chris Boyer via the Billings Gazette)**



# OUR POST FLOOD WORK

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On June 13, 2022 the Yellowstone River experienced a record-breaking flood that resulted in significant damage and loss to private and public lands and infrastructure in Park County. When the flood hit our community, Montana Freshwater Partners immediately stepped in to support local agencies, other NGOs, and landowners in the flood recovery effort.

Our role in the flood-recovery effort to date has included helping landowners evaluate their properties for flood recovery/restoration projects, participating in an interagency flood response committee aimed at providing technical support and funding updates to the community, and contracting with a local pilot to collect post-flood low-altitude aerial imagery of the river and adjacent floodplain for future planning, permitting and funding purposes.

We have also been working with our local governments to incorporate new tools into their decision-making processes and to consider floodplain protection and restoration projects that will make our community more resilient against the next major flood. As part of this effort, we recently assisted Park County with a DNRC Reclamation and Development Grant application that if awarded, will allow the channel migration zone mapping to be updated for the Park County portion of the Yellowstone.



# LEAVE IT TO THE BEAVERS

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**With the support of partners including the National Wildlife Federation, Defenders of Wildlife, Sacajawea Audubon Society, and Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks, Montana Freshwater Partners has launched a new Beaver Conflict Resolution Program for southwest Montana!**

**Beavers and the dams they create provide many services to people and the environment including increased natural water storage, flood attenuation, and high-quality wetland habitat for fish and wildlife.**

**While the benefits of beavers are numerous, they are often considered a nuisance, due to their tendency to dam culverts and irrigation systems, or cut trees. These problems are often resolved through lethal means (trapping or shooting), and/or dam removal. These management approaches limit the ability to realize the environmental benefits of having beavers on the landscape. They are also costly and often don't permanently solve the problem as beavers are quick to recolonize good habitat.**

**We are developing a cost-share and technical assistance program for landowners and land managers to demonstrate non-lethal conflict resolution tools such as tree fencing, pond-levelers, and culvert exclusion fencing. Our goals include building greater tolerance for beavers on the landscape, reducing human/beaver conflicts, and providing education and outreach around beavers and restoration. This program is being modeled after the very successful pilot program that was launched in the Missoula area in 2019.**

**We have recently hired Nick Hagan, to lead the program in 2023. If you or someone you know would like assistance with a beaver conflict, feel free to reach out to Nick at [beavers@freshwaterpartners.org](mailto:beavers@freshwaterpartners.org).**

# UPPER YELLOWSTONE PROJECT PRIORITIZATION EFFORT

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**MFP is leading the charge on a project planning effort focused on identifying and prioritizing watershed health, flood, and drought resiliency in the Upper Yellowstone and Shields River Watersheds. This is a collaborative effort with members of the Upper Yellowstone and Shields Watershed Groups that will ultimately increase the pace and scale of watershed restoration in our area. Over the past year, MFP has been busy kicking off this effort. Last spring, we held over 20 meetings with partner organizations to discuss potential project ideas and to vet and refine our process for developing the project list. We held 3 public meetings in April to solicit input from landowners and connect with those that had potential projects on their properties.**

**Over the summer, fall and winter, MFP conducted more than 15 site visits with private landowners in the Shields and Upper Yellowstone and identified over 35 projects aimed at boosting watershed health and flood and drought resiliency. We are now currently in the process of vetting and prioritizing the projects through several meetings with a ranking committee made up of local partners including the MT FWP, MT DNRC, NRCS, Park County CD, USFS, Trout Unlimited, Park County Environmental Council, Greater Yellowstone Coalition, and interested landowners.**

**Ultimately, the project inventory will be a living document that gets continually updated as the new projects are identified and others are completed.**



# YELLOWSTONE SAFE PASSAGES

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**Yellowstone Safe Passages (YSP) is a recently formed collaborative group focused on reducing vehicle/ wildlife conflict on Highway 89 between Livingston and Gardiner.**

**The group is currently working on a fine-scale Wildlife and Transportation Assessment to identify the areas with the greatest need to address wildlife-vehicle conflict and develop recommendations for short and long-term actions to make Highway 89 safer for people and wildlife.**

**YSP has contracted with Montana Freshwater Partners to help author the aquatics portion of the report, focused on identifying barriers to fish and other aquatic organism passage, as well as recommendations for roads and bridges within the Yellowstone River floodplain and channel migration zone to improve river/riparian health and infrastructure resilience.**



YELLOWSTONE  
SAFE PASSAGES