



FISHING

Few anglers would disagree with the notion that fishing is fun. So it makes sense that Fishing is Fun is the name of a Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) program that has increased and improved fishing opportunities throughout the state for more than 30 years.

Funds for Fishing

Since 1987, Fishing is Fun has provided matching grant money for projects that enhance recreational fishing and improve fishing opportunities in Colorado. The premise of the program is that fishing can only be fun if anglers have places and opportunities to do it. So the program awards up to \$400,000 in matching grant money each year. The funds come from the Federal Sport Fish Restoration Program, dollars that are often known as Dingell-Johnson, or DJ, money. Authorized by the Sport Fish Restoration Act of 1950 — legislation that was spon-

sored by Senator Edwin Johnson of Colorado, as it happens, and Representative John Dingell, Sr. of Michigan — DJ funds come from the federal excise tax on fishing equipment and motorboat fuel. It's likely that everyone fishing Colorado waters has helped pay for the hundreds of fishing improvement projects made possible over the years through this program. "Each state gets a hunk of money through Dingell-Johnson funding," explains Jim Guthrie, who coordinates Fishing is Fun for CPW, "and then they can decide where to apply it. We take some of our federal Sportfish Restoration funds for Fishing is Fun."

IS FUN!

***Yep, Fishing is Fun!
(and it's a CPW program, too)***

By Mary Taylor Young

Grantees range from local and county governments, parks and recreation departments, water districts, angling groups such as Trout Unlimited and other organizations. Since 1987, Fishing is Fun has helped pay for all manner of projects: improvements to streams and watersheds; physical improvements or right-of-way easements that create access for fishing; construction of new fishing ponds, even amenities such as restrooms, benches, picnic shelters or shade structures that make fishing more comfortable and extend the fishing day.

Ground Rules

There are a few requirements for a project to be considered for a Fishing is Fun grant. First, the project must be 100 percent accessible to the public. It can't be in a private club or a site that only allows in the public occasionally. That makes projects on public land, like a town park or within a national forest, particularly suitable. Though not a requirement, projects that increase opportunities for kids and young people, or provide needed fishing spots in counties with few other options, are looked at favorably.

The applying organization or group must provide matching value of at least 25 percent of the overall cost of their project, either through cash or in-kind services, or both. If the applicants are short on cash to contribute, which is often the case in small, rural communities, they can provide value such as volunteer work or donated materials and services. "They're small donations but they add up," says Guthrie. The Jackson Pond project in Eads, in southeastern Colorado, was a great example. "They get \$500 from this landowner, \$1000 from that one. Someone brings a backhoe to do work. 4-H volunteers donate 40 hours. The FFA [Future Farmers of America] high school youth help lay bankside vegetation. They're all involved. That's what Eads did that was great. It shows broad support, that the town is behind it, that it's really a community project." It's a lot of work to pull in multiple sources of funding and so much in-kind contribution rather than just one source of funds, Guthrie says, "But that's kind of neat to see."

The value given to volunteer time is based on annual surveying by Independent Sector, a national organization that helps nonprofits serve communities. As of April 2019, volunteer time averages \$25.43 per hour.

Program sponsors make a 15-minute presentation to an independent review panel that recommends what projects to fund. If the review panel can't fund all the projects, they still like to move worthy projects forward, says Guthrie. "If they ask for \$100,000, and we don't have that much, we might award \$50,000 and have them spend the next year finding other sources. It seems when CPW puts in some seed money, it helps get the other funds."

There is generally a three-year timeframe to use the funds. "But if they show they're moving forward and making progress, we'll work with them. The grant period might also be extended due to unexpected events such as a forest fire that diverts local funds to remedy it."

In June 2018 (the most recent project information at the time this article went to press), Fishing is Fun awarded \$400,000 to help fund eight projects around the state. The projects were aimed at improving angler access, building aquatic habitat, creating new piers and new ponds, lake renovation and river restoration. They spanned the state from west to east and back again: new fishing ponds in Meeker and Akron, fishing piers in Loveland and Berthoud, Eagle River access at Minturn and more. Thirteen applications came in for 2019, asking for \$1.2 million. The final list of projects approved by the Director of Colorado Parks and Wildlife will be released in mid-June.

Projects Great and Small

Fishing is Fun projects vary widely in size, scope, cost and time frame. Sometimes a simple effort and small investment can yield big benefits.

A low-cost improvement to a fishing pond in a local park outside the town of Elizabeth, in Elbert County, funded and completed in 2018, greatly improved fishing opportunities for the entire county. Dragonfly Pond in Evans Park is a small fishing pond that CPW annually stocks with trout. It was plagued by the common problem of seasonal algae blooms that covered the surface, leading to low oxygen levels, fish loss and poor angling conditions. "At times in the past it has been completely covered with algae and impossible to fish," explains Mike Barney, Executive Director for Elizabeth Park and Recreation District.

There aren't many publicly accessible fishing holes in Elbert County, making the pond in Evans Park especially important as a place for locals to fish. But often by the middle of summer, algae completely covered the water surface. Anglers couldn't cast a line without getting the line and bobber completely lost in the muck.

There was a simple solution, however. An aerator. Sometimes called a "bubbler," an aerator increases the amount of dissolved oxygen in the water, reducing algal growth and improving water quality for fish.

The project cost \$3,544, of which Elizabeth Park and Recreation District contributed \$886 in cash and Fishing is Fun put in \$2,658. The actual work was done all in one day. "The aerator is next to the pump house shed," says Barney. "It's like an air compressor unit in a cabinet. Heavy weighted tubes run underground into the pond. They sit at the bottom and cycle the water."

Now they have a much-improved fishing hole that is an



amenity for the local community. "We work with CPW on our youth fishing day, so our pond is a great community asset for us," says Barney. "As far as I know, it's one of the only public bodies of water in Elbert County, so we serve a large regional population with our pond. The Fishing is Fun grant allowed us to improve our fishing resources." Last June, about 30 kids participated in their Youth Fishing Clinic. "This will allow us to do more." With the population of Elbert County growing, Barney expects to see more and more people using the pond.

At the other end of the spectrum, one of the broadest-reaching successes of Fishing is Fun over the years is a series of projects along Clear Creek, from Golden to Silver Plume. "Each one wasn't huge," says Guthrie, "but when you string them together you have a much bigger resource, make fishing there more attractive, attract more people. Now there are lots of opportunities on Clear Creek that, before, anglers hadn't thought of."

Miles Williams spearheaded what became five projects for West Denver Trout Unlimited (WDTU) that made use of Fishing is Fun grant money between about 2003 and 2019. Other partners included Jeffco Open Space, the Clear Creek Watershed Foundation and others.

The first Clear Creek project began just above the kayak run in the town of Golden. The goal was to improve stream habitat for fish, and angling opportunities, by creating a series of pools, runs and ripples. "There were virtually no pools, no place for trout to rest or overwinter when the creek freezes," says Williams. But WDTU had been having a hard time getting grants. "Once we made contact with Jim Guthrie and Fishing is Fun and got funding, it gave instant credibility to the project and made it infinitely easier to go out and do fundraising." They were able to approach the Albert Frei and Sons Walstrum Quarry for donations of stone used to build cross veins and J hooks, rock structures constructed in the stream to alter flow and create pools and ripples. "We couldn't have done any of these projects without their free stone."

Another project improved angler access to Clear Creek. Though the creek offered good fishing just outside the Denver Metro area, anglers took their lives in their hands to park along busy U.S. Highway 6 and clamber down the steep embankment to the creek. Once a trail built by Jefferson and Clear Creek counties provided canyon access and some safe parking places, WDTU proposed a project to build steps down to the creek for fishing. "We noticed early that Clear Creek is very important to a great number of fishermen," says Williams, "if we could only improve the access to it." The project installed 11 sets of granite steps down to the creek, beginning from near Tunnel 5 along U.S. Highway 6 on the east to just above Silver Plume on the west.



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"I would guess the total amount we got [from Fishing is Fun] for all five projects is about \$300,000," says Williams. "We were able to leverage the contribution that Fishing is Fun made into almost exactly one million dollars in projects over about 10 years." Countless anglers in the Denver area and beyond are benefitting from that money. "I'm going to guess our projects enhanced fishing opportunities five or six fold." And as more anglers enjoyed the fishing, they wanted to preserve the resource. "When you put that much effort into enhancement, it creates a respect by the users." A survey by CPW of people fishing along Clear Creek revealed that practically everyone was doing catch and release, says Williams. Would those projects have been possible without Fishing is Fun? "Not remotely," says Williams. "Not a one."

Beyond improving fishing, Fishing is Fun projects promote community support and a sense of ownership, explains Williams. "What's so nice is that its expenditures are made to fund locally

originated projects so it inspires a lot of local activity and grassroots support. It provides that important rallying point."

Another major, multiphase project is the Swan River Restoration Project near Breckenridge. In 2012, Fishing is Fun awarded \$135,000 for the first phase of the project. The goal is to restore 3,500 linear feet of the Swan River from the devastating impacts of dredge mining. In the early 1900s, dredging chewed up more than two and a half miles of the Swan River. It covered the river channel with stone and cobble, destroying the natural ecosystem. Eventually some 15 miles of the river's main channel and two tributaries will be reconnected, riverside riparian habitat will be restored, and trails and access points built. After a century, anglers will once again have access to the river.

Anglers Make Fishing is Fun Possible

Fishing is Fun has truly done a lot over 30-plus years to help make fishing fun in Colorado. Nearly anyone who fishes Colorado waters or boats recreationally can take pride in knowing they have done their part by helping fund the program through purchases of fishing equipment and motorboat fuel. Anglers, next time you see a sign noting that this pond or that stretch of river was improved through Fishing is Fun, you can know you helped make that happen! ☺

*Mary Taylor Young is a zoologist, nature writer and author of 17 books about wildlife and the outdoors, including *The Guide to Colorado Reptiles and Amphibians*, *Colorado Wildlife Viewing Guide* and *Rocky Mountain National Park: The First 100 Years*. She is a frequent contributor to Colorado Outdoors. MaryTaylorYoung.com.*