

A Habitat Restoration Odyssey

by Matteo Moretti, 5 Rivers Odyssey Student
foreword by Levi Old, Trout Unlimited

Foreword: Trout Unlimited's Costa 5 Rivers Program is a flagship program sponsored by Costa Sunglasses, which supports college-based angling and stewardship programs throughout the nation. The program is co-sponsored and led by Trout Unlimited and the U.S. Forest Service. Each year the program sends several college students on an adventure to learn about the connection between river conservation, native fish, and their local human communities. The summer 2019 program sent a handful of students to the Columbia Basin to experience the challenges facing the basin's fisheries and rivers and local communities' connections to these special places. The crew started their travels on the Willamette River, then traversed up the Mackenzie River and down the Deschutes River. After these adventures, they jumped across the Columbia and into the North Cascades, and finally to the Lower Snake and Grande Ronde Rivers. While in the Grande Ronde River Basin the crew of four conservation-minded anglers visited the Sheep Creek Restoration Project, Bird Track Springs Fish Enhancement Project, and the Wilson-Haun Ranch on the Wallowa River. Their Grande Ronde adventures included fish salvage work, hand-based in-stream wood placement, and a fishing trip with a passionate landowner-conservationist on private lands. Below is an account and photos by one of the program's students, Matteo Moretti.

As a college student and environmentalist interested in pursuing a career in the outdoor media industry, I am constantly amazed by all the wonderful opportunities offered to passionate young anglers and students. The journey I embarked upon through the Trout Unlimited Costa 5 Rivers Odyssey is one that exemplifies a dedication to creating and providing such opportunities.

I am so grateful for my experience traveling across the Pacific Northwest for half of the summer with the Trout Unlimited 5 Rivers Odyssey. Moreover, I am honored

to be able to highlight the people, stories, and places we came across and to emphasize *why* an experience like this is so important for young students and for the future of our environment and fisheries.

Throughout our journey, we were fortunate enough to meet, talk with, and really get to know so many incredible people. As avid fishing nerds and outdoorsmen ourselves, we approached this trip with a level of excitement, wonder, and curiosity that I thought could not grow any larger. However, in our search for genuine and honest stories, what we found was true inspiration. It was in the eyes of volunteers, the gravity in the voices of our native people, and the sweat and grit that were evident on maps, blueprints, and design plans for cutting-edge fish habitat restoration projects.

Our experience in the Grande Ronde River Basin could not have epitomized our odyssey any more perfectly. Working with two inspiring conservationists, Levi Old (a project manager for Trout Unlimited) and Ian Wilson (a fish habitat specialist for the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation) showed us the true power of dedicated individuals and the importance of small projects.

Ian and Levi's excitement and love for their rivers were contagious as we worked on improving both headwater and mainstem sections of the Grande Ronde River. They explained every aspect of their projects, pointed out the progress already being made, and, most importantly, made us feel like we were just as crucial to their mission as they were.

In between fish salvage attempts and grueling hand crew work, we exchanged fishing tales, talked about our personal goals and



Dyer Benjovsky, a Costa 5 Rivers Odyssey student, enjoys an evening of fly-fishing on the Wallowa River (courtesy of Matteo Moretti).