

Working to lessen climate's impact on mountain streams

By Krista Langlois, High Country News

If you've ever dreamed about fishing in the West, chances are you've pictured something like the South Fork of the Flathead, an achingly beautiful turquoise river tumbling over multicolored pebbles and wending through the deep forest of northwest Montana.

Wade Fredenberg is among the few lucky enough to have grown up fishing there, and his childhood recollections read like a passage from Norman Maclean's legendary book "A River Runs Through It". Fredenberg was a farm kid, and summer mornings, after rising at 4 a.m. to fix an irrigation pipe, he and his Uncle Art would sneak off in a robin's-egg blue 1959 Chevy Apache to stalk bull trout in the deep pools of the Flathead. Later, stacking hay bales in the hot sun, Fredenberg would remember those moments, imagining that instead of stacking hay he was stacking bull trout as long as his arm, their flanks the color of the river.

Fredenberg is now a U.S. Fish and Wildlife biologist, and the gleaming 20-pound bull trout of his youth are increasingly rare. The trout have been devastated by mining pollution, agricultural runoff and non-native fish, and surviving populations are threatened by rising stream temperatures. Yet while their trajectory from abundance to scarcity is a story we know all too well, Fredenberg and his colleagues believe that new research can turn the narrative around – not just for bull trout, but for other cold-water fish species across the West as well.

Read the whole story