

A New Approach to Fisheries Restoration

In a specialized industry that is catering to a certain clientele there is still an opportunity to stand out, in principle and in project success. CFI – Global Fisheries Management a Fort Collins, Colorado based company, is carving a niche into a path less traveled.

As a fisheries consulting, stewardship and management firm, with projects around the globe, their results are commanding attention.

At the helm of CFI is Shannon Skelton, senior fisheries and aquatic biologist. Shannon and his staff of industry professionals have made a commitment to true restoration. This begs the question, “What is true restoration?” Restoration is a return to nature’s blueprint. The reading and implementation of those blueprints are CFI’s specialties. Human and agricultural practices have led to the degradation of many of our nation’s fisheries. Skelton, and his company are committed to reversing this trend. With preservation in mind, and a solid, thorough plan they are returning these precious resources to thriving fisheries.

“Our approach is simple”, says Skelton, “we take the cues from nature and create the environment that inhabitants want to live in.” They see no need for artificial or contrived structures in this enhancement, because there is nothing artificial in nature. There is a great deal of variety. Skelton adds, “When a landowner enlists our services, we take the time to research the true cause of the problem, before we embark on a solution. We can only understand how to appropriately restore when we let the river itself tell us what is wrong.” Thus begins the courtship of scientific studies and practical application. By using advanced data gathering methods and standard-setting techniques, CFI is pioneering the restoration landscape.

The staff members at CFI are well aware that there are several approaches to the restoration of a stretch of river. However, they are uncompromising in the mission to naturally and lastingly restore, taking all ecology into account. “What was a common practice in the past,” Skelton says, “has been usurped by better technology and better understanding. We build on what we have learned, but the future points to a better way.”

One, often employed, fast food approach to restoration involves creating a series of plunge pool structures. These structures are a template overlay that provides a band-aid to a broken leg. The landowner’s resources are entrusted to ones he believes will improve and enhance the fishery. This is not a job to be taken lightly. The quick fix may save time, in the beginning, but will only cost in the end without the habitat to sustain it.

Skelton was a professional fly fishing guide for many years. His love for the outdoor life and passion to preserve our national fisheries has led him to his where he is now. His wholehearted belief and contagious enthusiasm are evident. “It’s not enough just to create a structure, we want to create a legacy, a fisherman’s paradise that will thrive on



its own after we are gone.” What better way to do this, than to put things back the way they were before the damage.

“We are not interested in creating an artificial environment that will go against the natural course of the water, nor do we believe we have truly restored if we are leaving the landowner with the dubious proposition of continual pellet feeding and seasonal fish stocking.”

The ideas and methods expressed by CFI may be swimming upstream, but the productivity is worth the trip. “We have seen miles of river, completely exploited, the banks toppling into the stream. In such places the riparian vegetation seems non-existent. We’ve even faced abandoned cars littering the landscape and piles of manure clogging a stream”, adds Skelton. “Through research and careful planning we have been able to enhance the environment to naturally bring back indigenous aquatic habitat and promote amazing recovery to these places.”

There is a bigger picture in mind here. The philosophy of stewardship implies that we don’t own it, but it is ours to care for, and to leave it better than we found it.

BY ANNE GRIFFIN

The author is a Colorado native covering emerging ideas in the fisheries industry.

Name
Shannon L Skelton

Vocation
Fisheries & Aquatic
Biologist

Age
32

Home Base
Fort Collins, Colorado

Known For
Pioneering new methods
in stream restoration

He says
“If you do what you’ve
always done, you’ll get
what you’ve always got.”