

Stream of Dreams

If you build it, the salmonids will come. Waterways by fishermen for...everyone.

by Jayme Moye

At 11 years old, Shannon Skelton went out with his dad on Oregon's Union Creek and caught his first fish on a fly. The youngster promptly planted a giant kiss on the 15-inch rainbow trout. Later, Skelton, now a fly fishing guide, fished 200-plus days a year at exclusive commercial and private ranches in Colorado, Montana, and Wyoming. He paid a lot of attention to controlled fish habitats. To his eye, the techniques used to keep waterways full of fish looked contrived. "It just irked me," he says. "Even in the way they placed the rocks to create plunge pools, the presence of man was obvious."

Beyond aesthetics, Skelton thought that conventional methods of building and improving streams often solved hydrology issues at the expense of biology. Upstream structures built to improve flow rates downstream would flood zones where insects live and breed, eliminating the fishery's food source. Oftentimes, this means that you have fish, says Skelton, but you have to supplement their diet with pellets because the insects are gone.

Working with his wife, brother, and a \$1,500 loan, Skelton launched CFI Global in 1997. Today, the Fort Collins, Colorado company employs seven people with revenues of \$4 million a year from stream healing projects around the U.S. and overseas. It's science-based manual labor that gets results: CFI developed proprietary engineering software for its planning, and it collects quantitative data and photos before and after a project to ensure that both insects and fish are flourishing. To date, CFI has restored, enhanced, or developed plans for more than 1,000 miles of streams. "Cold water, warm water, saltwater—anything to do with fish, bugs, and water, we're on it," Skelton says.

The bottom line, though, is the fish. A staunch catch and release advocate, Skelton still kisses every fish he hooks—that's thousands of scaly smooches since he was 11. Only one has ever kissed him back: "A common carp that fought like hell and had horrible breath."



Deepening the bend in a river results in eddies and pools. A few well-placed rocks and a subtle channel make upstream travel possible. The trick is to make it look natural. That's where companies like CFI Global come in.

Photographs courtesy of CFI.