

Spring Newsletter

2017

Late Spring Flow Outlook

Doug Haacke, BHRA Board Member

As is so often the case when it comes to river releases and the Bighorn River in Montana, Mother Nature is once again letting us that she remains the boss when it comes to snowpack, precipitation and timing.

This year we saw snowpack above Boysen Reservoir climb dramatically above average in mid-December, and that climb continued until the last day in April. Where Boysen normally saw about 12 inches of snow water equivalent, by the end of April that number doubled to 24 inches, exceeding both the 1997 and 2011 levels. Many of us who watch the Bighorn Basin water management closely began to wonder back in December why Boysen wasn't moving water, and that wonderment became a deeper concern when the entire basin started showing signs of a very wet 2017, and neither Boysen nor Yellowtail were moving water at the start of February.

In fact, by the end of the first week in February, Reclamation's monthly operating plan had not only exceeded its most probable plan, but had exceeded its maximum probable plan. [Note: Each month, Reclamation distributes three monthly operating plans: one showing the most probable scenario, one showing the minimum probable (driest), and one showing the maximum probable (wettest)]. At that point, the Alliance began lobbying Reclamation for increases in river flows to start creating storage in the reservoir, and to Reclamation's credit, they began moving water, albeit small and very conservative releases. It still puzzles most of us that even in the face of the makings of a record setting water year, Reclamation acts so conservatively with its water. As time passed, the snow kept coming, and along with it more lobbying by the Alliance for additional releases. Reclamation continued to gradually bump flows until reached the releases as of this writing: 13,000cfs. Reclamation is now warning us that the average flows for May should amount to



Bighorn Trout Shop guide Pierce Oja puts client Bill Schultz on a nice Bighorn rainbow.

14,000cfs with June releases expected to be even higher. In doing the math on this it is clear that for us to average 14,000cfs in May, we are going to have to start seeing discharges increase to 15,000cfs immediately. So, here's where we're at today, May 18, 2017:

- There is over 2.4 million acre feet of water forecast to flow in to Yellowtail throughout the remaining runoff period of May, June and July.
- There is currently only 326,000 acre feet of storage available.

If the runoff comes off slowly and spanning May, June and July, and there are no surprises like above normal precipitation or a heavy, wet storm (Continued on next page)

Current River Stats

- ▶ River Flows - 13,038 cfs
- ▶ Reservoir Level - 73%





Increase Your Gift

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Become a Wild Trout Society Member

The Wild Trout Society is a group of particularly dedicated Bighorn Alliance supporters who contribute \$1,000 or more annually. Members of the Wild Trout Society are invited to exclusive events like the Wild Trout Society Social held in Fort Smith each July. This year's social will be held on July 9th at the Bighorn River Lodge and include guest speakers Yvon Chouinard and author Dan O'Brien.



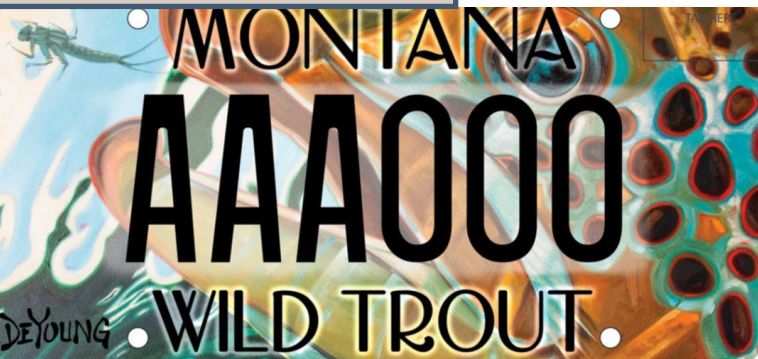
First time members receive an outdoor vest with the Wild Trout Society logo embroidered on it. Join the Wild Trout Society with an annual \$1000 donation today.

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Membership Renewals

Each spring the Alliance mails out its annual membership renewals to our committed supporters. This year in particular we are asking for your continued support in helping the Alliance continue its growth as we transition into a stronger voice for the river and the wild trout we value so much. Please consider renewing your dues today to help us during our transition from a board run organization to a staff hired organization. Your tax deductible contribution given today is our main source of funding and allows to continue protecting the Bighorn River. As our thanks to you we are including raffle tickets for you to return with your payment that put your name in the drawing to win a 590 Sage Bolt, a Hatch reel or a Patagonia Black Hole bag.



Coming to your Vehicle in July

Show your support for the Bighorn River Alliance and its work to protect wild trout by upgrading your Montana License plate this summer with a custom Derek DeYoung brown trout. The plates will be \$30 and available for purchase by July 2017 at the Montana Department of Motor Vehicle Division. All proceeds will go towards wild trout conservation on the Bighorn River. Special thank you to artist Derek DeYoung for supplying this beautiful image for the plate.

2017 A Record Setting Spring Continued

sitting for days over the basin, we could see flows stay below 15,000cfs with fairly high flows continuing through the entire month of June. However, if we were to get a period of very warm days (even without rain) that would cause the reservoir to fill by July 1st, we could see inflows jump to over 20,000cfs and river releases get in to the 17,000cfs range or even higher (if we had rain accompany that warm period). As of this writing, the forecast is for a wetter than normal May with additional snowpack accumulation, but no long periods of warm days on the horizon. The good news is we'll have plenty of cool, clear water for the near future, and the epic fishing that has been a constant for the last 3 months should continue well in to summer.

Our Work

Preserving Bighorn Access

High, sustained flows on the Bighorn affect ease of access at ramps along the Bighorn, especially at the Bighorn Boat Access. Last month, the Alliance worked with the Montana FWP to devise a workable partner solution to improve the ramp where a large wave had formed making it difficult for anglers to stage their boats. Through a cost-share agreement with MFP, the Alliance received a permit to remove vegetation and fence posts at the access and hire an excavator to expand an irrigation return that enters the river above the ramp to increase slack water for boat staging and boat launching. This work helped make the popular access safer for boaters, and prevented it from possible closure due to high flows.



Reducing Impact

While essential for reeling in large Bighorn trout, monofilament (fishing line) has become an increased problem on the Bighorn River. Improperly disposed line not only spends a long time in the environment, but can also be very hazardous to river life and local area raptors. In an effort to reduce the amount of fishing line that ends up in our local waterways, the Alliance has aligned efforts with the Boat U.S. Foundation's "Reel In And Recycle Monofilament Recycling Program" to construct and install fishing line recycling containers at access sites along the upper 13 miles of the Bighorn River. The containers, which will be overseen by the Alliance, allow anglers to not only dispose of their line properly, but also recycle it.



Connecting Community

Last month, the Bighorn River Alliance hosted its first Bighorn River Informational meeting in Fort Smith. Speakers included representatives from the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR), Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) and the National Park Service (NPS). The purpose of the public meeting was to inform river users, landowners, outfitters and county commissioners on upcoming agency projects and updates, with most emphasis placed on dam management practices that often times favor lake recreation over river recreation. Attendees were able to create a direct dialogue with BOR to express their concerns over the current dam operating plan, with BOR given the opportunity to address those concerns while also developing a better understanding of who the Bighorn River Alliance represents.



Monitoring Water Quality

Since 2015 the Bighorn Alliance has monitored water quality along the wild trout section of the Bighorn River to 1) establish long term monitoring trends and 2) identify possible nutrient impairments and their sources. Sampling results revealed elevated levels of total nitrogen throughout the river, with highest levels being detected directly below Afterbay dam. For 2017 the Alliance will be expanding its sampling locations upstream above Afterbay to determine the source of total nitrogen. Earlier this year, the Alliance received a grant from the Montana Watercourse program that provided training to our volunteers and allowed us to purchase field equipment to build upon our monitoring program.

BIGHORN RIVER DAYS

CARP TOURNAMENT AND BENEFIT FOR THE BIGHORN RIVER ALLIANCE

Friday, July 14th

FORT SMITH, MT

Silent Auction

Live Drift Boat Drawing

Wild Idea Buffalo Burgers

Apollonia

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

Carp Tournament - \$40 per team

9:00 am - Registration opens at Ok-A-Beh Marina

10:00 am - 4:00 pm - Big Lips Carp Tournament

Benefit Dinner and Fundraiser

6:30 pm - Reception & Silent Auction Begin

7:00 pm - Benefit Dinner: \$20 per person

Sponsored by Wild Idea Buffalo

7:30 pm - Award presentations

8:00 pm - Silent auction closes, membership and boat raffle drawing

REGISTER FOR CARP TOURNAMENT AND MORE AT:

WWW.BIGHORNIVERALLIANCE.ORG



Register for the Bighorn Carp Tournament!

Sign up your team of two for the 2017 Bighorn "Big Lips" Carp Tournament on Bighorn Lake!

Registration and rules are available on line at:

bighornriveralliance.org

Mark your calendars for the Bighorn River Days celebration and Carp Tournament scheduled for July 14th 2017! We are excited to announce that we have teamed up with author Dan O'Brien and Wild Idea Buffalo Company to provide local, grass fed bison burgers for the celebration - just one step we are taking to reduce our carbon imprint and commit to low impact, environmentally friendly events! If you would like to help our conservation efforts on the Bighorn River and donate an item to our silent auction, please contact us. We love giving recognition to companies/individuals that support wild trout conservation!

Help Keep the Bighorn Mussel Free

Did you know it is illegal to transport invasive species in the state of Montana? If you are coming to fish the Bighorn from out of state, you will be required to have your boat inspected for invasive mussels prior to launch. On April 15th, the state opened up an inspection/decontamination station off I90 Westbound near Hardin which will be open 18 hours a day through October 15th. The National Park Service will also have an inspection station open in Fort Smith starting Memorial Day weekend. Please remember to stop and get inspected before entering the Bighorn!

