



## INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Membership Drive	2
How's the River?	2

## From the Desk of the President

**A**fter several years of dormancy, the Bighorn River Alliance was reconstituted in March 2004 with new resolve and energy. Facing us was an issue of extreme urgency. The National Park Service sought to transfer ownership of the Three-Mile river access site to the Crow Indian Tribe in exchange for a right-away to lands bordering the road to Ok-A-Beh Marina. Senator Nighthorse Campbell of Colorado planned to sponsor a bill which would legalize and facilitate the transaction. The Bighorn River Alliance notified the appropriate governmental officials and succeeded in calling for several public meetings to discuss the issue. During the course of these meetings Alliance representatives determined that if the transaction was completed, open and affordable access to Three-Mile might not be guaranteed in the future. The

decision was made to oppose the bill. Through Alliance organization and political pressure, Senator Campbell eventually decided to drop the bill. This proves the axiom, "never underestimate the power of a small group of people." While pleased with the outcome, it is quite possible that this issue will resurface in the future.

Bighorn River Alliance recently opened a dialogue with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP) officials in hopes of establishing a positive working relationship with them. We have organized meetings and discussed issues facing the Bighorn River fishery, particularly habitat problems caused by the drought over the last several years. (See article by Frank Johnson on pg. 2). We have been pleased with the outcome of these meetings.

The Alliance's long term

goals are consistent with our driving principle of preserving, protecting, and enhancing the Bighorn River in order to ensure a quality recreational experience for all user groups involved. Last July saw a very successful river cleanup. We plan to sponsor two such cleanups in 2005.

Currently, the Alliance Board of Directors is creating several committees that will study and monitor current and future issues. We hope to be an example of leadership and environmental stewardship for many years to come.

Welcome aboard.

Michael Mastrangelo



## Silt and Flushing Flows

Alliance directors, MFWP personnel, and Bureau of Reclamation water managers have met throughout the winter in an effort to evaluate the need for and the mechanism of some sort of

flushing flow to remove accumulated silt in the river. In more than a few



places the silt is so deep as to cause safety concerns. It is very possible to literally become 'stuck in the mud.' This silt accumulation has not only eliminated any number of our favorite holes, but it has a direct effect on the dry fly fishing. Some insect species that are dry fly stand-bys have virtually disappeared from the river.

All parties recognize the need for flushing flows and there has been a plan

developed for a single 8-hour, 5,000 cfs flushing flow sometime in late March, IF snow-pack and runoff projections develop adequately. The plan is in place and we are all standing by watching the sky and hoping for snow. The proposed flush is not large or long term but we feel it will help and give us measurable data regarding the movement of the silt accumulation.

*Continued on pg. 2*

## ALLIANCE OFFICERS & BOARD MEMBERS

*Pres.: Michael Mastrangelo*

*Vice Pres.: Hale Harris*

*Rec. Sec.: Steve Hilbers*

*Treas.: Matt McMeans*

*Corr. Sec.: Ron Oates*

*Clint Krumm*

*Membership Committee Chairman:  
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# currents

VOL. 2, ISSUE I

MARCH 15, 2006

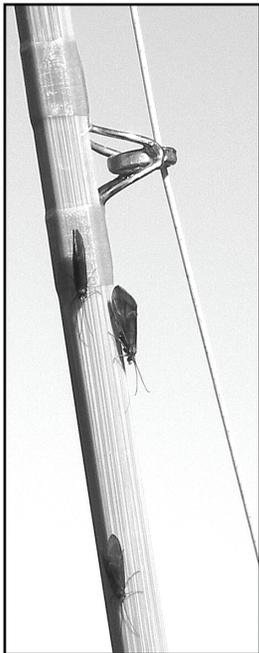
**INSIDE THIS ISSUE:**

Flows & Snowpack 2

How's the River? 1

## From the Desk of the President

I would like to personally thank all of our contributors to the Bighorn River Alliance. In the past



*Black Caddis  
on cane rod*

two years we have steadily rebuilt our membership base and this needs to continue. A powerful Alliance is essential in protecting and preserving this great resource. Remember, "Apathy is the enemy."

We ask for your continued financial support. Please ask friends, acquaintances, or anyone who fishes the river if they would be interested in becoming a member. The future looks good, but there are always issues that have to be monitored and addressed.

The river has

been running at 2,500 cfs all winter. Snow pack looks good for this time of year as we have received about 35-40% of our moisture during March through May. Yellowtail Reservoir is at 80% capacity and the trout are in fine shape.

We look forward to seeing all of you on the fabulous Bighorn this year. We are only limited by the limits we impose upon ourselves.

Very truly yours,

Michael Mastrangelo  
President



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*Clint Krumm*

*Eric Finsted*

*Glen Strickland*

*Membership Committee*

*Chairman: Frank Johnson*

## How's the River? *Frank Johnson*

If the winter fishing success is any indicator, the river is wonderful. Both nymphing and streamer fishing have been excellent all winter. After a storm or two in December the weather turned spring-like during January, and most of February. January ended up being the

warmest, driest on record. Those anglers who took advantage of the weather were handsomely rewarded.

The experience, of anglers, has been that there are good numbers of big, fat rainbows and that the browns have started to recover from the spawn. Ken Frazier,

Biologist for the river reports that his preliminary analysis of last summer's shocking activity indicates that on the upper thirteen miles of the river the mix is about fifty-fifty browns and rainbows. We should expect a good representation of all age classes. This is good. The river below Bighorn Access was dif-

ferent, having a six to one ratio rainbows over browns. Ken expects that over the course of the season many of these rainbows from the lower river will migrate to the upper river and unbalance the fifty-fifty ratio toward more rainbows. This, too, is good. Surveys show that most anglers prefer rainbows to browns. Some of us, like this writer, think browns are more difficult

to catch and therefore more challenging. He does admit that browns are not the fighters that rainbows are.

Current data from The Bureau of Reclamation is as follows: Bighorn Reservoir is eighty percent full, inflow is two thousand eighteen cfs outflow at Afterbay is two thousand sixty-cfs. For the entire winter the river flow has been kept and

right around two thousand five hundred CSF, which was the flow of the river last summer. We would be happy to maintain that flow again this year. In general the bureau is projecting that flow for this year as well but it is impossible to predict spring snow and rain. We could have a time of high water and we could possibly have flows less than two thousand five hundred cfs.

## River Flows and Snow Pack Data Available Online

There are three web sites which, combined, will give you more information about the river than you want to know.

[http://waterdata.usgs.gov/mt/nwis/uv?site\\_no=06287000](http://waterdata.usgs.gov/mt/nwis/uv?site_no=06287000)

This site, if you scroll down a little, will show a graph of the flow of the river in cubic-second-feet at a station about 600 feet downstream from the afterbay dam.

<http://www.usbr.gov/gp/water/rflow.cfm>

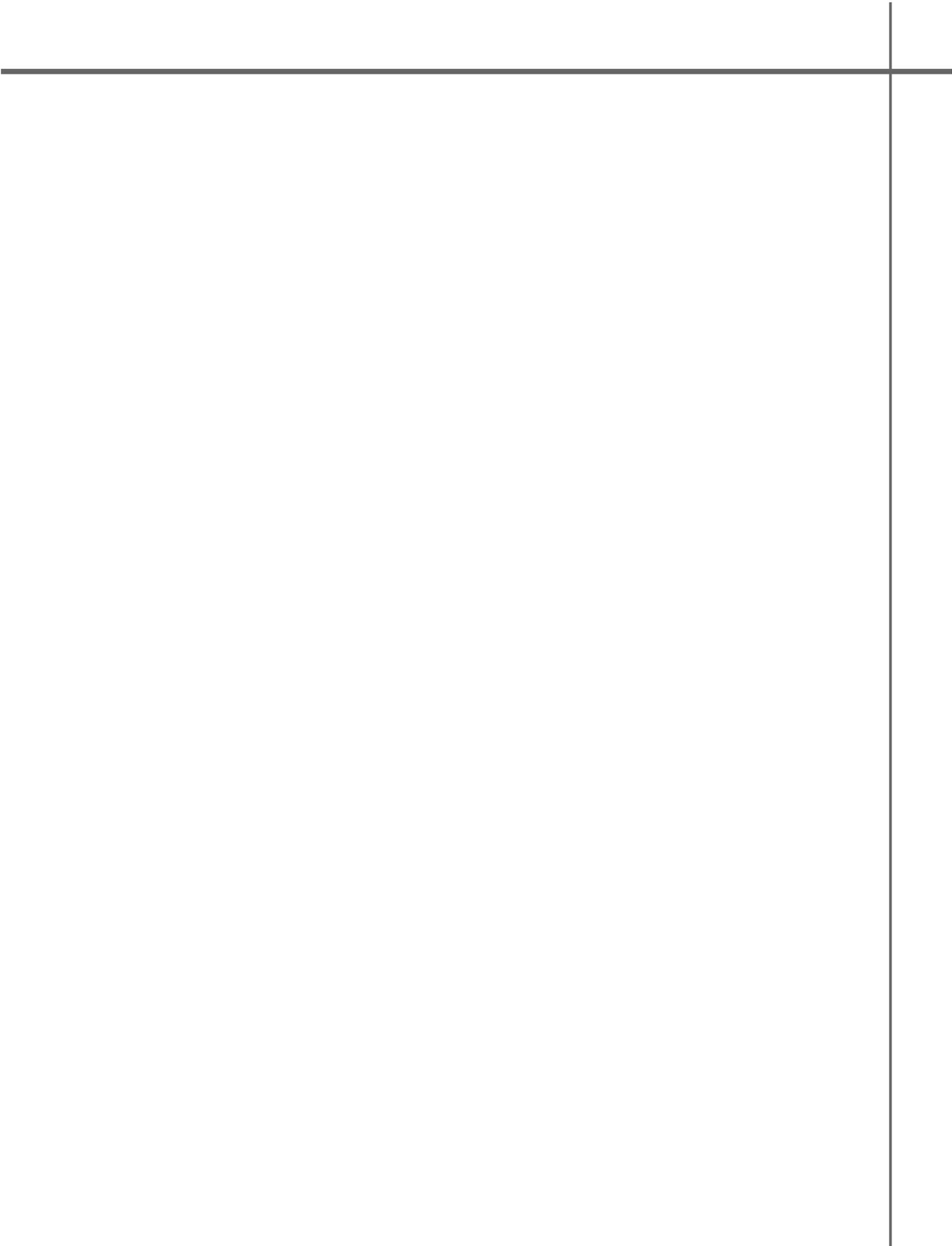
This site relates to Yellowtail Dam and Bighorn Reservoir. When you arrive at this site highlight Bighorn Lake, MT. and then click "GO" and you will be at the site showing the reservoir and the related data. The information to the right of the page will show you current inflow and outflow and the percentage full of the reservoir as well as other items. This is a very good site.

<http://www.wrds.uwyo.edu/wrds/nrcs/nrcs.html>

This site relates to the snow pack in Wyoming which provides the water for the Bighorn River. The drainages of interest are: Bighorn River, Wind River, and Shoshone Rivers. You can either look at the map or the graphs that will show the current percentage of average snow pack.



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*Silt and Flushing Flows*, from pg. 1

In reality, one year of 'normal' flows would do the trick. It is believed that flows of 2,500 cfs over an extended time period would remove much of the silt. The reservoirs in the Bighorn River drainage are all nearer capacity than last year, and snow-pack in some of the areas is much better than last year. The Alliance Directors who have been attending the meetings have a positive feeling about the probability and value of this river flush.

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## How's the River? ...

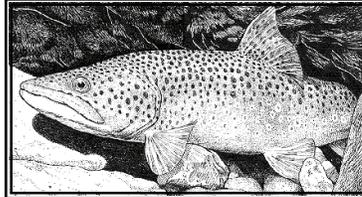
According to Ken Frazier, MFWP fisheries biologist in a recent Billings Gazette article: "It's an amazing river. I keep waiting for the bottom to fall out, but the Bighorn always seems to catch itself."

The ongoing drought and five years of low flows have caused some dramatic changes in the river itself. Side channel habitat that in years past provided nurseries for young fish has disappeared from the river system. Spawning of the trout has been excellent but the small fish are having to survive in the main river channel. During summer of 2004 we saw great numbers of year one fish—and they were, and are, thriving. These fish that were six inches to ten inches in 2004 could be as big as 18 inches by mid-summer 2005. At a recent meeting with Frazier, he stated to this writer that those fish could grow as

## 2005 Membership Drive

Our membership committee will place posters, brochures, and newsletters in the hands of many business owners in the Bighorn River valley. Lodges and fly shops will all have colorful displays of our information.

In addition to the availability of membership applications, the Alliance will



much as one inch per month.

Frazier, based on his 2004 population studies, also reported that, "Our big trout are in better condition than we've ever seen. Their size has been tremendous.

We may be catching somewhat fewer fish, but the size of the larger fish is better than ever. During the 2004 season it was sometimes frustrating in that many fish were lost simply because they were 'too big to pull in.' If trout quality is what you are looking for, now is the time to fish the Bighorn River.

The low flows have allowed a large and troubling amount of silt deposition to occur in the river. The silt has effected the distribution and density of the aquatic insect species in the river. Mayfly, Caddis, and Stonefly populations are dramatically down and Scud, Sow

hold two drawings over the summer for the possibility of winning free guided float trips, fly reels, and other prizes for those who join the organization.

There, of course, is a continuing effort on the part of the Directors to personally contact clients and others for membership. We would like to recognize and thank Gerald Hinds of Kansas and Joe DiPaulo of California for becoming Sponsor Members (\$1,000 or more). Both Gerry and Joe are longtime Bighorn anglers who care about our river and have stepped forward. We thank them.

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Bug, and Midge populations are thriving. In the case of the Scuds, populations have skyrocketed. After all, Scuds are silt lovers.

Although all the data has not yet been compiled from the summer (2004) fishshocking surveys, Frazer said MFWP counted more than 2,000 age one (7 inches and smaller) rainbows and about 2,500 age one browns per mile. Two year old and older (7.5 inches and larger) brown and rainbow trout in the same section numbered about 500 for each species.

The winter months have provided excellent angling for those hardy souls willing to brave the elements. The condition of the trout is wonderful. 2005 appears to be very promising, both in improved numbers and size as well.

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## Silt & Flushing Flows Follow-Up

After the on-again, off-again planned river flush by the Bureau of Reclamation was cancelled this spring, we were all prepared for another year of dramatically low flows and more of the harmful silt beds in the Bighorn River. But Mother Nature stepped in with late season moisture that filled Boysen Reservoir upstream and brought the level of Bighorn Reservoir into the flood pool.

As a result, the Bureau of Reclamation opened the gates and brought the river level up. On May 30th flows were at 2,000 cfs for the first time since September 2001 (2,500 cfs is the recommended minimum flow for the river). Flows were then increased to a maximum of 7,200 cfs on June 29th. Flows remained between 6,500 and 7,000 cfs until July 11th. They were then dropped down to 2,500 cfs at which level they remain at this writing.

The result of these higher flows was dramatic. The huge silt beds that carpeted the river bottom are gone. In some places actual scouring occurred—rocks were rolled and the floating algae was flushed. And, very interesting to me, the color of the bottom of the river is no longer that ugly brown. We can now see rocks of different colors. Wading is much easier and safer, and we can return to those old fishing holes we once fished.

We are once again seeing hatches, although not always heavy

enough to bring pods of fish up, of Pale Morning Duns. Black caddis are also beginning to hatch. This shows much promise for the days and weeks to come. There are also other species of small mayflies hatching. Seeing these insects emerging now after the flushing flows bodes well for the future, as the insects are laying eggs for next year.

After observing the flushing effects of the past six weeks it is clear that the planned (and canceled) flush of 5,000 cfs for 8 hours would have done little to clean the river. Siltation was such that several weeks of high flows were necessary to adequately clean up the river channel.

Plans should be developed to maintain the health of the Bighorn River. The Bureau of Reclamation creates planned flushing flows on the North Platte River in central Wyoming every spring and fall. The result has been to greatly enhance the fishery on the Platte. Presently, no such plan is in place for the Bighorn. The Bighorn River Alliance will be working toward establishing regular cleansing flows whenever nature does not step in, as has been the case each of the previous five years. As Bob Krumm stated in a recent Billings Gazette article, "It shouldn't take six years to clean up a river."

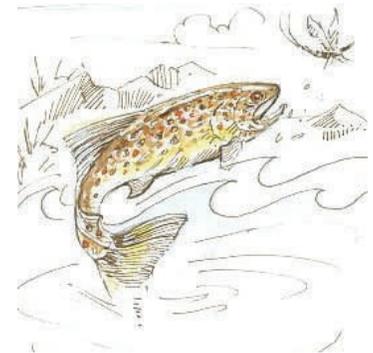
The Alliance agrees. A proactive approach is essential.

Frank Johnson

## Alliance General Meeting September 1, 2005 7:30 PM

All Alliance members and interested parties are encouraged to attend the General membership meeting which will be held on September 1 at the Big Horn Baptist Church. Alliance business, river issues, and goals for the future will be discussed. Mike Atwell, Sage sales representative and traveling sportsman, will give a slide presentation on fishing in Chile. Afterwards, Mike invites Alliance members to demo various Sage rods and other top-of-the-line tackle.

Refreshments will be served during the meeting, plus there will be several tackle items raffled off, including a 9' 5 wt. Winston Boron IIX rod. This could be your lucky night!



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