

VOICE OF THE RIVER

Winter Newsletter 2021

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THE VOICE OF THE RIVER

SINCE 1984

HENRY'S FORK

FOUNDATION

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HFF Board Chair Message

by Doug Siddoway

I've had the good fortune of getting to know many of you this past year and listen to what you've had to say about our Foundation and its work. It's comforting to be reminded of our shared passion for the Henry's Fork and what it brings to our lives.

The Foundation, like its namesake river, is ever evolving, and the only constant is change itself. Among these are the legal, climatic and hydrologic changes affecting reservoir and irrigation management that have been laid at our doorstep since our founding in 1984—among them the Swan Falls settlement, the Snake River Basin adjudication, the Henry's Fork Basin Plan, the implementation of conjunctive water management, the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer Comprehensive Management Plan, the groundwater/surface water users settlement agreement, the advent of large-scale managed aquifer recharge, the Island Park and Chester hydro plants (and the refurbished Buffalo hydro plant), lower Snake River salmon and steelhead Endangered Species Act listings, and rising springtime air temperatures and declining groundwater returns to the lower Henry's Fork.

These changes are unparalleled in Idaho water history and coupled with decades of Foundation research point unequivocally to the conclusion that nearly everything about the Henry's Fork fishery is now dictated by water management, especially impoundment and drafting decisions affecting Island Park Reservoir. It is a complicated situation and one the Foundation must not only constantly monitor, but adapt and adjust to through its programs and work with partners, water managers, and other important Henry's Fork stakeholders. The good news is that the Foundation's scientific leadership in basin-wide water management is now solidly recognized, which is important. If management of Island Park Reservoir is the key to the Henry's Fork fishery, then having a respected seat at the tables at which broader water decisions affecting the Henry's Fork are made is the key to the Foundation's continued influence and success.

A good example of our adaptability to change is the South Fork Initiative, or SFI, the Foundation's two-year old effort to bring our knowledge and experience to bear on issues affecting that river. The Henry's Fork and the South Fork are part of an integrated system whose water—

the life blood of the Henry's Fork fishery we strive to enhance and protect—is owned by irrigators and other senior appropriators located far downstream from the Menan Buttes confluence. While decisions about South Fork flows and impoundment and drafting at the Jackson, Palisades and American Falls reservoirs might seem distant, they could easily pose a threat to the Henry's Fork if rising temperatures and drought persist. Your board of directors approved SFI, believing—rightly, I would add—that it was in the Foundation's best interest to be involved in basin-wide water management decisions at the front end, rather than having to react to the consequences of damaging decisions afterwards. That SFI is funded entirely by the South Fork stakeholders, or that it has unearthed new sources of funding not previously available to us, or that its riparian work on South Fork tributaries will improve the fishery, relieve pressure on the Henry's Fork and help protect the Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout population (and the Henry's Fork) from the effects of an Endangered Species Act listing are only added benefits.

Thanks to your support, the Foundation is responding to these changes by dedicating more staff time and resources to the Henry's Fork, and by growing its scope of work to keep pace with the complex problems and challenges confronting the entire watershed. We know this involves a significant investment, but it is something we can and must continue to do. While it is not and never will be a perfect organization, the Foundation is the voice of the river. If you've any doubts, ask yourself what the Henry's Fork would be like today without it?

I will end this by thanking our dedicated staff for their work and by thanking my fellow directors for their passion and commitment to our mission. Every one of them understands and takes seriously their solemn obligation to steward the Foundation and preserve and protect the resource for which it is named.

Be safe and be well, and please don't hesitate to call me at 509-413-3013 or send me an email at djs@randalldanskin.com, if there is anything you want to discuss. We're all in this together.

Douglas Siddoway 



Making the Most of a Record Low Water Year

The Henry’s Fork Foundation (HFF) has developed programs to study and conserve the Henry’s Fork Watershed, but after four years of drought ending in 2016, the worst since the Dust Bowl, it became clear that new strategies would be needed to meet these unprecedented challenges.

Water year 2021 (October 1, 2020 – September 30, 2021) proved to be as dry or drier than 2016, with 6th lowest precipitation on record (81% of average vs. 86% in 2016) and 4th lowest water supply (76% of average vs. 74% in 2016). However, springtime temperatures were cooler in 2021, which preserved the meager snowpack until early June. Unfortunately, that was quickly followed by the mean temperature during June and July setting a new record high by a large margin, and April-September natural flow dropping to only 69% of average (vs. 72% in 2016).

Those conditions put two new HFF programs to the test. The first, the Upper Snake Collaborative Farms and Fish Program works with local farmers to reduce irrigation demand through irrigation deferment leases, soil health initiatives, new markets, crop conversions, and modeling and scheduling software for irrigation infrastructure. Under the second program, Precision Management, Senior Scientist Rob Van Kirk has developed statistical models on available water supply, precipitation, and snow-water equivalent to predict water conditions a few months to a few hours in advance and help water managers more

precisely manage, and thereby conserve, water in the Henry’s Fork Watershed. New canal-operation and flow-management infrastructure, some installed and maintained by HFF, allows water managers to take full advantage of improved hydrologic information by making small adjustments to water delivery in real time.

These efforts have saved an estimated 20,000 acre-feet of water (equivalent to approximately 85 cfs of added winter flow) in Island Park Reservoir in each of 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2021, compared with years of similar water supply prior to HFF’s new programs. Despite less precipitation and lower summertime water availability, Island Park Reservoir will end up with better carryover than in 2016 (41% full in 2021 vs 15% in 2016), and that’s thanks to partnerships, system-wide water rights limitations keeping diversion low, and programs like precision management and Farms and Fish.

This fall, Island Park Reservoir outflow will remain around 110 cfs to store as much water in the reservoir as possible before December 1. With inflow to the reservoir projected to be the 4th lowest since the 1930s, filling the reservoir as quickly as possible to maximize outflow during the coldest months of the winter will be crucial to the long-term health of the fishery. 



Henry's Fork 2021 Guide Season Recap

by Jonathan Heames, Big Sky Anglers

Great years on great rivers happen when a number of factors align. In 2021, we benefitted from a long run of good water years and favorable management that have collectively led to a fishery in a very healthy state from top to bottom. In a year when much of the west was suffering from lack of snowpack, high temperatures, and river closures, the Henry's Fork started off with a fair snowpack and benefitted from cool water temperatures, high flows during the heat of mid-summer, and a strong population of trout in both the upper and lower river.

May kicked off the season with unusually fair weather and relatively low flows due to a high priority placed on water



storage in Island Park Reservoir for pending irrigation demand. The high flows of spring runoff never really materialized. Stable flows combined with good weather resulted in good caddis hatches throughout the system, most notably in the lower river. The same combination of factors led to good stonefly hatches by the end of May and an early start to the dry fly season. Indicator nymphing rigs were quickly replaced with dry/dropper rigs and the trout moved out of their "winter water" earlier than in most years.

June followed in the same vein and trout were looking up for food early in the month in the upper and lower river. After the explosive green drake season we experienced in 2020, this year's drake hatches were more normal, but we had plenty of great days and fooled some terrific trout on the big mayflies. The stable weather and flows provided us with consistent PMD activity, good Flavs, golden stones and solid caddis. Day after day of fair mornings led to very good and reliable PMD and Flav spinner falls, and afternoons were punctuated with good emergences of both. The lower river stopped fishing well earlier than usual as water temps quickly warmed and flows reduced before the end of the month.

The Railroad Ranch fished well at the opener, with low flows and consistent mayfly and caddis hatches providing anglers with excellent opportunities through much of July. Thankfully, the rising flows in the last week of June and

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into July weren't so drastic as to shut down some of the most consistent action of the year. Ranch anglers were generally able to find solid targets through much of July. Spinner falls happened like clockwork due to stable and fair weather. Combined with a very healthy upper river fishery, they provided excellent sport.

The Ranch continued to fish very well through the end of the season. This pleasant surprise was the result of what we have been calling "Spinnerpalooza". This activity began in August with heavy hatches of tricos, and continued on into October with strong hatches of pseudos, baetis, and mahoganies. Good numbers of quality fish could be found on the feed most days, providing excellent angling through a period that is typically more sparse in hatches and targets.

The Box Canyon, arguably the workhorse of the river, boasting a very solid population of 15"- 17" rainbow trout in 2021, gave us a terrific showing and shared her wealth generously with anglers throughout the season, from May through October. Population estimates show that we have excellent age classes in the river for the coming seasons, this was a great year and the future is bright!

One of the unique characters of the Henry's Fork is its flow management in the heat of summer. When many of the rivers in the west are dropping in flow, the upper Henry's Fork begins to rise due to irrigation demand downstream. This leads to a high water situation in the middle of summer that can affect dry fly fishing but in general is favorable to the trout residing in these sections. Often some of the best nymph fishing of the year is during the hottest months of summer on the Henry's Fork. This doesn't come without its risks, however, as irrigation demand can lead to a reservoir that can be dangerously low come winter. The Henry's Fork Foundation stays tuned into this and carefully monitors inflows and outflows with a long-term view focused on having enough water for the critical winter months ahead. For those of you that receive Rob Van Kirk's invaluable daily water update, you know exactly what I mean.

I won't be so bold as to make a forecast for next year's fishing here, but I can say with certainty the following: if we are able to navigate the difficulties of this year's water management and emerge with a fishery in 2022 that is as healthy as 2021, it will be due in large part to the Henry's Fork Foundation's efforts. These are the types of years when careful management of our river resources are the most necessary to ensure quality angling in the seasons to come. 🐟



TURN YOUR VALUES INTO YOUR LEGACY

Include the Henry's Fork Foundation in your estate plans and be recognized as part of our respected Legacy Society of the Wild Trout Club.



For more information about the Henry's Fork Foundation Legacy Society and planned giving please contact:

Gordon L. Nelson, CPA, CFP®

Planned Giving Specialist

Email: legacy@henrysfork.org

Phone: 435-213-9986

Visit our new planned giving website at: www.HFFLegacy.org.

Wills

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These are just some of the ways you can give to the Henry's Fork Foundation. Your support is vital to the long-term mission to conserve the unique wild trout fisheries and watersheds of the Henry's Fork and South Fork.

Help ensure generations to come will enjoy the wild trout and wild places you treasure. Contact us today!



Grant Awards and Partner Support Have Big Impact

The idea of collaboration gets mentioned quite a bit at HFF, and that's because it is foundational to the work we do. As our members know, HFF does not have water rights, nor do the wild trout of the Henry's Fork and South Fork. HFF is also not an entity with water management authority. That means, if we hope to effect change for these fisheries, we need partners. We need to build and maintain relationships with the organizations who do make decisions that impact our watersheds.

Similarly, we rely on grants and support from agencies and foundations to help our member's donation dollars go even further to make meaningful conservation work possible. In 2021, these grants brought nearly half a million dollars for specific programmatic work. We'd like to highlight and thank a few of the agencies, organizations, and foundations who have partnered with HFF by helping fund our work through grant awards or contributed in-kind support this past fiscal year. 

Thank you

- Cross Charitable Foundation
- CHC Foundation
- Crystal Springs Foundation
- Friends of the Teton River
- Idaho Department of Fish and Game
- Jackson FlyFishing Film Tour (WorldCast Anglers)
- Jackson Hole One-Fly
- M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust
- National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
- Reservoir Fisheries Habitat Partnership
- Simplot
- Trout Unlimited - Snake River Cutthroats
- US Bureau of Reclamation WaterSMART
- USDA Forest Service
- US Fish and Wildlife Service
- Voigt Foundation



HFF Hosts Madison High School Students on Field Trip

This fall, Education and Outreach Coordinator, Kam Allison, South Fork Initiative Program Manager, Dave Weskamp, and Conservation Program Manager, Bryce Oldemeyer hosted 46 students from Madison High School for field trips across eastern Idaho. The first field trip brought half of the students to Warm River Campground to learn about HFF programs, including water quality monitoring and aquatic insect monitoring. The students also got to see demonstrations and test equipment including an integrated depth sampler, turbidimeter, flow meter, acoustic doppler current profiler (ADCP), Hess sampler (for collecting insects), and gravelometers (for taking sediment samples).

As the internship coordinator, Kam also talked to them

about HFF's internship opportunity specifically for local students, the Don C. Byers Memorial Internship. The second field trip will allow the other half of the students this same opportunity.

In addition, Dave Weskamp hosted all 46 students on the South Fork where they assisted with planting trees that had been grown at their own school. As mentioned in earlier newsletters, the school's FFA program has been growing trees to be planted at Rainey Creek restoration sites, and this was the first time some of those trees were planted. Students were able to see in person how concepts they learned in their environmental science class, or efforts in their FFA program, can have real-world, positive impacts. 🐟



NOTABLE NUMBERS

- 81%** Percent of average precipitation (6th lowest on record).*
- 76%** Percent of average water supply (4th lowest on record).*
- 20,000** Acre-feet of water conserved in the Island Park Reservoir in each of water year 2018, 19, 20, and 21.**
- 41%** Percent full; lowest point Island Park Reservoir reached in water year 2021 (vs 46% full on average from 1978-2021).
- 15%** Percent full; lowest point Island Park Reservoir reached in water year 2016.

**Figures for water year 2021 in the Henry's Fork Watershed. Record goes back to 1989.*

*** Compared with years of similar water supply prior to HFF's new programs.*

Congratulations and Thank You to our Henry's Fork Days XXXVII Award Winners

Each year, the Henry's Fork Foundation awards three incredible members custom, hand-crafted wooden bowls made by longtime HFF member, Bill Hackett, for their support and contribution to the Foundation and the Henry's Fork Watershed. Congratulations to our 2021 bowl award winners:

Jack and Janet Roberts

Manlove Award Recipients

Joselin Matkins

Conservation Award Recipient

Tim Hopkins

Volunteer Award Recipient





Contributions: July 1, 2021 - September 30, 2021

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Paul Waldon
David and Susan Work

In Memoriam

RJ Bush
Larry Weiss
Steve Whisler

Support the Henry's Fork Foundation by giving a **YEAR-END GIFT**

Together we are the Voice of the River and together, we will ensure the incredible experience of fishing the Henry's Fork and South Fork is available to the next generation of anglers yet to discover it.

With a donation of \$50 or more, you will receive gifts that will make your time on the river even better!

Visit henrysfork.org/donate today.



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