ANNUAL REPORT 2020
A LOOK AT THE YEAR’S ACCOMPLISHMENTS
Who We Are

The Henry’s Fork Foundation aims to promote favorable streamflow, good water quality, healthy fish populations, and a positive fishing experience, and to ensure the fisheries of the Henry’s Fork and South Fork of the Snake River endure for generations to come.

2020 River Ambassadors
A Message from the Executive Director

Brandon Hoffner, 
HFF Executive Director

We have heard a lot about 2020 and the impact that it had on our lives. What I will focus on while reflecting on this year is the support of the HFF community through what could have been a very difficult year for the Henry’s Fork Foundation. HFF is so fortunate to have generous donor after generous donor willing to step up in even the most adverse of circumstances to stand with us as we continue to perpetuate our mission. On behalf of the HFF Board and staff, Thank You!

Another year of strong winter flow and a full Island Park Reservoir led to another spring freshet below the dam. This freshet consisted of about 1,800 cfs for three days. Monitoring of water quality and macroinvertebrates continues to strongly suggest that regular annual flows near the natural spring hydrograph peak provide a positive impact on the health of the river. While we can’t guarantee the most prolific of hatches or numerous rising fish to target on any given day, these types of river management actions, coordinated with partners such as Fremont-Madison Irrigation District, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, and Idaho Fish and Game (IDFG), give optimal angling conditions a better chance to develop.

Success for HFF and partners was also found on the South Fork of the Snake River tributaries. Rainey Creek has long been viewed as a high potential restoration opportunity. The potential for stream restoration was proved out in 2019 when a portion of Third Creek, tributary to Rainey Creek, was restored. Within a few months, trout use of Third Creek increased dramatically due to improved water temperature profiles. While Rainey Creek is much larger, a similar restoration project started in late 2020 and the first phase was completed in early 2021 through HFF’s South Fork Initiative. Phase II is planned for 2021. Private landowners, Anheuser-Busch, IDFG, Jackson Hole One-Fly, and Patagonia all played a major role in the first phase of the Rainey Creek restoration. We are looking forward to seeing increased use by trout in upcoming years.

These are a couple of examples of the fantastic work HFF accomplished in 2020, none of which would have been possible without your continued engagement. There are a multitude of new and ongoing projects of similar impact happening at HFF at any given time - also due to the dedication of our members! Every time a challenge presents itself to HFF, our community steps up for the rivers of eastern Idaho. This dedication is also reflected by HFF’s Board of Directors and staff. HFF’s Board works tirelessly for the Foundation and always rises to the occasion. And I do mean always. I am honored to work with and for them. I am also honored to work with our staff. I can’t imagine a higher achieving, more dedicated, intelligent, and just generally good group of folks to associate oneself with. Without them, we couldn’t move the passion of the HFF membership into action. Future annual reports full of great mission accomplishment similar to 2020 are assured with such a dedicated river conservation community, Board, and staff.
Each year, we try to put the water situation into perspective as it has such a significant impact on our fisheries. Back in 2016, we noted that in recent years the Henry’s Fork Watershed experienced drought at levels not seen since the Dust Bowl. From 2017-2019, the water situation improved, each year at or above average, and baseflows from sources like Big Springs were finally starting to return to average. This year, 2020, was the first year of below average water supply since 2016, making it the first big test of the new programs we’ve put in place. Thankfully, 2020 was also evidence that those programs are having a real, measurable, positive effect. Not to mention, anglers have reported some of their best fishing in 20 years.

Collaborative efforts like the Drought Management Planning Committee allowed us to advocate for a good irrigation-season water management strategy for Island Park Reservoir that set up above-average reservoir carryover for the 4th year in a row. Good reservoir carryover benefits water quality, trout populations, and fishing experience.

HFF also advocated for a managed, springtime freshet, which removes fine sediment and improves aquatic insect habitat. Most recent data shows percent mayflies, stoneflies, and caddisflies at 57 percent compared to 17 percent after the 1992 sediment event.

Rob’s daily water quantity analysis (his daily water reports) benefit precision management as partners use his data daily to make decisions about water management. This precision management helped save almost 13,000 acre-ft of water in Island Park Reservoir*, taking a slightly below-average water supply and turning it into above-average carryover.

In 2020, HFF provided technical support to Fremont-Madison Irrigation District’s project to install and operate remote-controlled headgates in the lower watershed. This increased summertime flow in the lower Henry’s Fork by 14 cfs and lowered day-to-day variability by 35%, compared with 2019. And of course, it saved water in Island Park Reservoir, benefitting fisheries at both ends of the watershed.

Farms and Fish agreements with individual farmers saved 414 acre feet of water in Island Park Reservoir. Saving water in the reservoir benefits reservoir carryover, trout populations, water quality and fishing experience as well as winter flow, which is 55 cfs higher this winter than it would have been otherwise thanks to these and other precision management efforts.

We know that keeping more water in Island Park Reservoir and improving reservoir carryover increases winter flow, decreases sediment delivery from the reservoir, results in cooler summer time outflow from the dam, and increases trout habitat in the reservoir itself, which increases the number of large trout and kokanee salmon in the river upstream of the reservoir. And we know that springtime freshets and lower irrigation-season flows over the past three years have moved over 1,500 tons of fine sediment out of the Ranch and helped improve the percent of mayflies, caddisflies, and stoneflies in invertebrate samples at Osborne Bridge. This does not even include our Education and Outreach programs, Voice of the River role, access work or South Fork Initiative, which we know bring great benefits to river conservation on the Henry’s Fork and South Fork. HFF will continue to work with partners to ensure these crucial efforts continue to benefit our wild trout fisheries.

*Above what would have been in the reservoir in a similar water year under the average 1978-2019 water management practices.
**Henry’s Fork Watershed: Water Year 2020**

**Measurable Results in Water Year 2020**

- **90** Percent of average precipitation watershed-wide.
- **87** Percent of average precipitation in the upper Henry’s Fork subwatershed (89% in Fall River and 92% in Teton River subwatersheds).
- **92** Percent of average natural flow watershed-wide (rank 26 out of 43 water years since 1978).
- **88** Percent of average natural flow in the upper Henry’s Fork subwatershed (94% in Fall River, 97% in Teton River).
- **7** Percent of total annual sediment load from the Sept 8-25 turbidity event, despite being highest turbidity measured below the dam since sonde network was installed in 2014.
- **134** Percent of 2014-2019 average sediment export from Island Park Reservoir, due primarily to highest reservoir draft since 2016.

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**MEAN NATURAL FLOW, WATERSHED TOTAL (UPPER HF + FR +TR)**

**121** Percent of average carryover in Island Park Reservoir (ranked 15th out of 43 years).

**4** Number of consecutive years of above-average reservoir carryover.


**1,170 tons** Amount of sediment removed from Island Park Dam to Pinehaven reach*.

**57** Percent mayflies, stoneflies, caddisflies in samples at Osborne Bridge (in 2019) compared with 41% during and after recent drought and 17% in 1993**.

**~50** Percent of sediment deposited during the 1992 event that has been removed to date.

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*Thanks to a springtime freshet and relatively low aquatic vegetation growth.

**A high springtime freshet and low irrigation-season outflow from Island Park Reservoir, as occurred in 2018-2020, accelerates transport of sediment out of the Harriman reach, providing an explanation for improvement in hatches since 2017.
HFF Launches Predictive Water Management Project

HFF was awarded over $270,000 from the Bureau of Reclamation WaterSMART Applied Science Grant program in 2020. These federal grant dollars will fund HFF’s predictive water management efforts, in partnership with Fremont-Madison Irrigation District, Teton Water Users Association, and others. One of only two organizations in the state of Idaho to receive this grant, HFF is excited to announce the project has officially been launched.

During this three-year project, a team of seven HFF staff and two external consultants, will develop hydrologic models to better understand and predict water supply, apply those models to various scenarios, and develop a website to provide real-time access to this data. The website will also feature currently unavailable streamflow data and climate, hydrologic, and water-management data. Scenario testing will be guided by input from stakeholders via collaborative groups like the Henry’s Fork Watershed Council, which is open to the public. These modeling tools and hydrologic data will help enhance water management efforts, including water demand-reduction, and increase reservoir carryover, which we know benefits fisheries via improved water quality, increased winter flow and trout populations, and better fishing conditions. Stay tuned for updates and lessons learned as the project continues over the next three years.

We are grateful to Fremont County and the construction company for keeping us in the loop on the project, including providing updates on changes to parking or road closures, and allowing us to provide feedback. Thanks also goes to IDFG for advocating for minimized disruption to the fishing season and protection for rainbow trout spawning. In our Voice of the River capacity, HFF attended construction meetings throughout the two years and made regular site visits to ensure those protections remained. Access to the river remained uninterrupted throughout construction. Also, during the two years of construction, no significant turbidity or water quality disruptions occurred. The highest sustained turbidity recorded during that time was just under 10 FNU, although one instantaneous reading of 17 FNU was recorded in July of 2020. The Idaho Department of Environmental Quality standard is 50 FNU above background levels. Background at Ora Bridge is around 5 FNU.

To replace a failing bridge at one of the most popular fishing reaches on the Henry’s Fork without detriment to the fishery or loss of access is monumental. Thanks go to you because without your support, programs like water quality monitoring, aquatic insect monitoring, and Voice of the River would not exist.

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PhD Research Brings New Understanding of Fish Habitat

Upper Henry’s Fork

Jack McLaren is a former HFF graduate student intern and is now working towards his PhD at Utah State University. His research aims to better understand the upper Henry’s Fork fishery (upstream of Island Park Reservoir), specifically, which factors could be having an impact on fish growth and survival.

This year, Jack led snorkel surveys to answer the question “What is the connection between fish and submerged aquatic plants in the upper river?” The answer wasn’t exactly what he expected. Results showed that fish preferred to rest and feed in deeper water mostly free of submerged plants, but near locations that had lots of these underwater aquatic plants.

Jack will continue to collect data and analyze how aquatic vegetation plays a role in the productivity of the fishery, including the role nutrients play in growing both this vegetation and big fish. His data and findings will be shared with fisheries and water managers with the aim of improving the health of the fishery, fish habitat and fishing conditions.

Lower Henry’s Fork

Christina Morrisett is a former HFF intern who is now working towards her PhD in the Watershed Sciences Department at Utah State University. For her PhD research, Christina partnered with HFF to better understand groundwater-river dynamics and identify a low flow strategy for the lower river that benefits fisheries and the fishing experience, while still meeting irrigation needs.

This summer, she and HFF staff installed piezometers (mini wells) and streamflow gages, and took depth-to-groundwater measurements. Christina’s project aims to understand when the river gains or loses water and where. Her preliminary results indicate 85 cfs is gained between St. Anthony and Parker between July and October from groundwater returns. Also, water entering the river from groundwater springs are 7°F cooler than the river itself at low flows.

Christina plans to use this data with a state-created groundwater model to simulate alternative recharge strategies to identify strategies that maintain streamflow and temperatures needed for aquatic ecosystems. Increasing late summer streamflow through managed aquifer recharge could benefit fish habitat in the lower river as well as keep more water in Island Park Reservoir, conserving water supply and maximizing reservoir carryover.
South Fork Initiative
2020 in Review

While 2020 brought trials, challenges, and hardships, the HFF South Fork Initiative (SFI) continued to grow and move forward in nearly every aspect of the program. The SFI continued to move projects and discussions forward, and worked tirelessly towards the mission of conserving and protecting the South Fork Snake River Watershed and fishery.

In 2020 the SFI:

- Collected South Fork macroinvertebrate (aquatic insect) data for a second year in a row.
- Installed a second sonde (water quality monitoring equipment) in the Lower South Fork and continued to maintain the Upper South Fork sonde.
- Hosted the first ever South Fork intern who conducted an online South Fork Angler survey.
- Worked with state, federal, and NGO partners to secure funds and implement a 0.25-mile restoration project along a heavily degraded reach of Rainey Creek (major tributary to the South Fork utilized by Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout for spawning and juvenile rearing).
- Helped secure funding for an additional 0.25 miles of restoration work for spring 2021.
- Hosted our first virtual fundraising event (South Fork Gala, 2020) with great success.
- Worked with our state and federal partners to identify, and implement when possible, flow strategies that would benefit the fishery and angling experience while satisfying water rights.
- Conducted multiple willow cutting and planting days with the help of volunteers and partners.

For a one-year-old program to not only survive the trials and tribulations of 2020, but to continue to grow, speaks to the success of the science-based collaborative approach, but even more so, it speaks volumes about the dedication and passion of HFF South Fork Initiative members, volunteers, committee members, and partners. Your support has made this work possible.

SFI Notable Numbers of 2020

$110,000 Grant dollars awarded to SFI projects from government, business, and family foundations.

1 Number of sondes (continuous water quality monitoring device) added to the HFF network on the South Fork.

18 Macroinvertebrate (aquatic insect) samples taken on the South Fork at 3 different sites (Upper, Canyon, and Lower South Fork).

19-35 Percent increase in relative abundances of mayflies, stoneflies, and caddisflies across all South Fork sites.

1 Number of interns (first ever!) working on South Fork projects in the summer of 2020.

32 Volunteers who helped cut and transport willows for the Rainey Creek restoration project.

0.25 Miles (or 1,320 feet) of Rainey Creek restored in winter 2020-2021.
YOU make our work possible.

YOU ensure these fisheries and watersheds endure.

YOU are the HFF Community.

THANK YOU!
$20,000 +
George Borkow and Marilyn Volpe
Thomas and Joan Brown
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Lyman and Carol Casey
Caterpillar Foundation
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Jackson Hole One Fly Foundation
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Celebrating new Wild Trout Club members or level advancements in 2020

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M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust
River Steward Level $250,000 +
George Borkow and Marilyn Volpe
Rainbow Trout Level $100,000 +
John and JoAnne Gaynor
Brown Trout Level $50,000 +
Paul and Irene Buehner
Henry and Flory Ellis
Jackson Hole One Fly
Jerry Nielsen
Patagonia Environmental Programs
Douglas and Lauri Siddoway
Steve Simper
Tom and Doris Squeri

Cutthroat Trout Level $25,000 +
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Jon and Karyn Hodge
Ron Malone
Wesley and Janet Nelson
Lee Schmitt
John and Leslie Soderquist
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
David Wood

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Steve and Daryl Barrett
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A Message from the Board Chair, Jack Roberts

In June I will have completed my 7th year on the Henry’s Fork Foundation Board, having served the last two as Chair. It has been a privilege, and one that Janet and I will always cherish.

Looking back on the last year, there is no doubt that the Foundation was challenged in many respects. And had it not been for the strength and dedication of our staff and board members things would likely be quite different than they are today. But let there be no mistake that the Foundation membership was the wind at our backs. Our members and supporters were resolute, dedicated, and generous. They pulled us through the challenges, and we are stronger today than we were a year ago. The significant programs undertaken by the Foundation such as the Farms and Fish Program, the ongoing, rigorous monitoring of the health of the Henry’s Fork and South Fork, and the South Fork Initiative, continue to advance.

Our capable Foundation leadership kept our staff safe and productive. Without them the Foundation absolutely could not move forward. And our Board (most of whom probably hope they never hear the word “Zoom” again) were relentless in their participation in Board meetings and Foundation activities virtually. Our Foundation has stepped up to meet the challenges. Certainly, the easy decisions and the path of least resistance are sometimes tempting paths to follow. We have not shirked from difficult decisions.....we have embraced them. And for it all the Foundation is stronger, and the Henry’s Fork will be better tended.

So my heartfelt thanks goes out to all of you who continue to support the Henry’s Fork Foundation. It’s success resides in your hands and hearts. I know that, before too long, we’ll all be able to once again gather on the banks of the river we love so much and celebrate.

Stay well and safe.

And may God Bless the Henry’s Fork!