



July 22, 2016

A mid-season message from the HFF Board Chair:

It is no secret that over the past few weeks, fishing has been dismal on the Henry's Fork between Island Park Dam and Riverside. This reach is the most iconic on the river, the one that made its reputation as the best trout stream in the country, and the one that motivated a group of devoted anglers to form the Henry's Fork Foundation in the first place. The Board and staff of HFF have heard loud and clear from anglers – particularly those fishing the Railroad Ranch – that fishing is poor, releases from Island Park Dam have been well above average, and the water is turbid. Many of us have personally experienced these same conditions and have stood in parking lots in Last Chance hearing directly from anglers, guides, outfitters, and business owners. We understand the negative impact that poor fishing has on the local economy, especially if current river conditions become the norm year after year. We understand that you are angry and frustrated, that you want answers to why the river is in its current condition, and that you want to know what HFF is doing about it.

As you've all heard before, the answers to these questions are complicated. Not a satisfying response to the current situation. However, the mission of the Henry's Fork Foundation is based on policies and actions driven by science and the legal and regulatory environment we live in. Attached is a technical memorandum to provide the facts behind the answers to the two questions. To cut to the chase, the short answers are these:

Why is the river in its current condition? – Answer: We are experiencing a nearly perfect storm of climatic and weather conditions that are resulting in adverse physical, biological, and chemical conditions in the river. Four years of drought; the hottest spring and summer ever recorded; reduced fish populations due to low winter flows; and much lower than average natural streamflows in the Henry's Fork watershed.

What is HFF doing about it? – Answer: Multi-faceted initiatives to increase winter flows, wild trout recruitment, and water quality have been underway for years. Our understanding of the chemistry and hydrology of the river informs policy-making at state and local levels to support these on-going efforts. When an opportunity arises to take action to achieve short-term positive effects, the HFF takes them. A recent case in point was holding Fall River Rural Electric Cooperative accountable for complying with the terms of its Federal Regulatory Commission license to operate the Island Park hydroelectric plant.

What next? Systemic changes in the storage, delivery, and use of water in Southeastern Idaho are necessary. Our goal is to identify 20 projects that would each provide 10 cfs of water that would replace water currently delivered from Island Park reservoir for irrigation, and thus provide 250 cfs of additional winter flow. These initiatives are described in the attached memorandum.

The conditions we are experiencing now are symptoms of growing challenges of providing enough water, at the right temperature and quality, at the right times to secure the future of the Henry's Fork fishery. We welcome your input and questions and thank you for your love of and support for the Henry's Fork.

Jim Carter