

# THE VOICE OF THE RIVER



Henry's Fork Foundation

FALL 2013

## Meeting the Challenges of a Dry Year

*Drought management planning provides water when wild trout need it most*

By now, you know that the rainbow trout population in the Box Canyon this year is higher than it's been since the 1970s. The current population is bolstered by a large number of 2-year-old fish, which were spawned in the spring of 2011 and benefited from high river flows during the winter of 2011-2012. These fish will provide outstanding angling opportunities over the next couple of years. HFF's participation in drought management planning with Fremont-Madison Irrigation District (FMID) and other partners led to above-average winter flows during the winter of 2012-2013, despite below-average water supply. The result will be another strong addition of 2-year-old trout to the population next spring.

However, we are now in our second consecutive dry summer, and last winter brought us only 80-90 percent of average snowfall. What challenges face the river and its trout this year, and how is HFF prepared to address them?

### The Current Water Reality

There are many different ways to measure drought, but a simple measure in our case is the average flow in the river below Island Park Dam over a given water year (October 1 through September 30). Since 1940, the first full water year after Island Park Reservoir was built, flow below the dam has averaged 634 cubic feet per second (cfs), as shown in Figure 1 on page 4. Water year 2013 is projected to be about 80 percent of average, and is shaping up to be similar to 1961 and 2003 from a water management standpoint.

### The Formula for Winter Flows

The amount of water available for release from Island Park Dam during the fall and winter storage season is determined by subtracting the volume needed to fill the reservoir from the volume of water that will flow into the reservoir over the storage season. Because the Henry's Fork is fed primarily by deep groundwater springs, storage-season inflow to the reservoir is relatively constant from year to year. As a result, the amount of water available for release from Island Park Dam during the fall and winter is largely determined by how much water remains in the



Photo by HFF staff

There is evidence the Buffalo River is contributing a high number of fish to the Henry's Fork wild trout population, lessening the overall effect lower flows will have this winter. Above, Matt Cahoon of HFF holds a 24-inch female trout caught in the trap at the Buffalo fish ladder in March 2013. The fish ladder allows trout to access spawning and winter habitat above the Buffalo River Hydroelectric Project.

reservoir at the end of irrigation season. This is referred to as "carryover" by water managers.

Carryover in Island Park Reservoir is a complicated function of streamflow, reservoir storage, crop requirements, weather, water rights, and other factors throughout the upper Snake River system. This system extends from the

*Continued on page 4*

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# Pale Morning Dun Arsenal

*Why this ever-present mayfly emerger drives us crazy*

Anyone who's cast to trout feeding on Pale Morning Dun (PMD) emergers on the Henry's Fork, especially during this time of year, knows how painfully difficult—OK, impossible—it can be. A few years ago, I came across René Harrop on the Wood Road section during one of these emergences. As he watched his fly drift toward his target, I asked him if he had a good emerger pattern he could recommend. "Sure, I've got 100 of them," he responded, without lifting his eye off the fly, "and I've caught one fish on each of them."

## So, What's So Difficult?

PMDs begin appearing as early as the first or second week of June, and may continue into the first part of October. During the June-October season, they're arguably the most constant mayfly hatch. The first PMDs of the year are larger—size #14-16—and they become progressively smaller as the season wears on. By this time of the year, late summer and fall, they drop to a diminutive size #18-20. In appearance, PMD emergers are typical brownish-colored mayfly nymphs. During emergence, they dead drift along with the current, wriggling as they attempt to rid themselves of their nymphal shuck and become full-fledged adults.

When rainbows are sipping PMDs on the surface during the dun (or adult) stage, the fishing is thoroughly challenging yet manageable. Often a PMD Sparkle Dun, No-hackle, or Harrop Transitional Dun will get the job done (albeit with the typical difficulty of most Henry's Fork trout). But when the fish are on emergers, all bets are off. Feeding during this stage usually shows up in the form of an awe-inspiring surface bulge that actually takes place in the film, just below the surface.

Other than perhaps when a Henry's Fork trout attacks a Honey Ant or a Drake, nothing is more dramatic than witnessing an emerger rise-form. Often, a fish will surge for several feet, boil heavily on an emerger, then wake back to its original position. During the take, the trout may expose its dorsal fin and tail but not its head, or it's equally likely you won't see any part of the fish, yet because of the ring on the surface, many anglers assume this is a dry-fly rise and proceed to cast in vain exclusively with dun patterns.

## Choosing a Pattern

It's a sorry fact of life, but unless someone is guarding a deep secret, there doesn't appear to be a PMD emerger pattern that works with bona fide consistency. The ideal imitation would impart a wiggly motion, but that's easier said than done. I've seen and tied many emerger patterns, including variations of a wiggle-nymph — an extended body pattern described in *Selective Trout*, one of the original bibles of spring creek hatch-matching — with no happy results. I've found that the most productive patterns incorporate softer materials, such as marabou or CDC, that tend to "breathe" and sway — wiggle — in the water. The local fly shops offer plenty of options for PMD emergers (as well as for all stages of development), and it's worth seeing which ones work for you.

Given that the Holy Grail of PMD emerger patterns hasn't yet revealed itself, I've found the best solution is to come armed with a full arsenal of patterns in different sizes and stages of emergence. I carry my PMDs in one of those small C&F fly boxes with a flap page in the middle. The box holds 564 flies, and I've usually got every slot filled, plus another 40-50 flies stuck into the foam. I carry PMDs in sizes #14-20, with the greatest concentration in #16s and #18s.

I've never actually counted, but I'm certain I've tied up at least 25-30 different patterns. They include the full range of stages, including (among others) floating nymphs, cripples, Harrop transitional duns, tipped-over duns, no-hackles, soft hackles, and some



Photo by Bruce Raskin



unweighted and lightly weighted nymphs that I fish in the film, as I would present a dry fly, without an indicator. And, yes, even though the trout are feeding on emergers, a few dun patterns slotted into the rotation sometimes get the job done.

## Fooling Fish

During a PMD emergence, a drag-free presentation combined with frequent fly changes often proves to be the best bet for producing a take. My strategy is to show a fish a pattern just four to six times, and if it ignores the fly after that many drag-free drifts, I'll switch to another pattern. After the same number of casts, I'll change again—and again and again.

I like to mix up the stages of my offerings, perhaps a floating nymph on one set of casts, followed by a cripple, and then maybe a low-profile or tipped-over dun and on to an unweighted nymph. I'll also drop to the next smaller size and, in some instances, tie on the next larger size or even two sizes larger. On more than one occasion, I've worked a trout during an emergence of size #18 PMDs, and after no success on a variety of #18 emergers, I've tied on a #14 pattern and hooked the fish.

When none of these presentations do the trick, I'll change positions. If I've been casting upstream to a fish, I may wade in a wide arc around it and cast across-and-down or almost directly downstream to it, working my way through the



arsenal of flies all over again. Several position changes aren't uncommon. This approach often amounts to a long-term commitment—as much as an hour or two—with any given fish. Even then, success isn't guaranteed, and the trout may simply stop rising.

But isn't that another fish taking emergers just 40 feet away?

*By Bruce Raskin, former HFF board secretary*

## HFF Welcomes New Staff

### Paige Cahoon, Events Coordinator



The Foundation welcomed two new talented staff members this past spring. **Paige Cahoon** joined the Foundation's team in May 2013 as the events coordinator. She jumped right in, helping coordinate a record-breaking Henry's Fork Day in June. Paige is originally from Sammamish, Washington and moved to Idaho in 2007 with her husband Matt. Before joining HFF, she worked for Melaleuca in Rexburg, Idaho, where she created and managed a specialty program for 200 staff members. She is also a licensed cosmetologist and has managed a professional beauty supply store. In her free time, Paige can be found outdoors, camping, fishing, floating the river, or bow hunting with Matt and their dog Chevy.

### Cathy Koon, Office Assistant



Local community organizer and leader, **Cathy Koon**, joined HFF as a part-time office assistant in June. She spent 30 years as a journalist for eastern Idaho newspapers, leaving in 2000 to work as a public information specialist for the Idaho Transportation Department at District 6 in Rigby. Cathy was a charter member of several local community organizations, and served as president of the St. Anthony Chamber of Commerce, on the United Way board, and on the St. Anthony City Council. She is president of Media Network Idaho and treasurer of the National Federation of Press Women Education Fund. She is also secretary of the board for Upper Valley Community Health Services. Born and raised in St. Anthony, Koon is the mother of four and grandmother of four.

(Dry Year continued from cover)

headwaters to the Twin Falls area, includes nine major reservoirs, and provides 10 million acre-feet of ground and surface water to 2.5 million acres of farmland. (An acre-foot of water would roughly cover a football field to a depth of one foot.)

When a dry summer like 2012 is followed by another dry spring and summer like this year, these factors require managers to deliver almost the entire contents of Island Park Reservoir downstream to meet irrigation demand. Based on conditions in early July, water managers predict that out of the 135,000 acre-feet of water that Island Park Reservoir holds when it is full, only about 10,000 acre-feet (7.4 percent) will remain at the end of the 2013 irrigation season. Although low, this volume of storage is well above the level at which sediment mobilization occurred during 1992, when the reservoir was drawn down to 270 acre-feet. We project that filling Island Park Reservoir during the 2013-2014 storage season leaves only enough water available to release an average of 115 cfs from Island Park Dam between mid-September and early May.

## Optimizing Fisheries With Limited Water

Management of storage-season flow in the Henry's Fork downstream of Island Park Reservoir has evolved through three distinct phases. Between 1940 and 1971, storage did not begin until after November 15, the designated end of irrigation season in the lower elevations of the upper Snake River system. Starting the storage season that late in the autumn left only a short time window in which to fill the reservoir, so the traditional practice was to completely shut the gates at Island Park Dam on November 16 and not release water again until the reservoir was full, usually in March or April.

In the early 1970s, water was stored in Island Park Reservoir earlier in the fall in order to require a smaller percentage of flow to be stored on any given day. During the winter of 2002-2003, another water year similar to the one we are facing in 2013-2014, this management regime resulted in a constant flow of around 100 cfs for most of the winter (Figure 2 on facing page).

Under the current drought management planning process implemented in 2004, HFF, FMID, and other stakeholders meet several times each year to analyze all of the factors that affect management of Island Park Reservoir. They reach consensus on operation of the reservoir to optimize flows for multiple uses, while ensuring irrigation water rights are

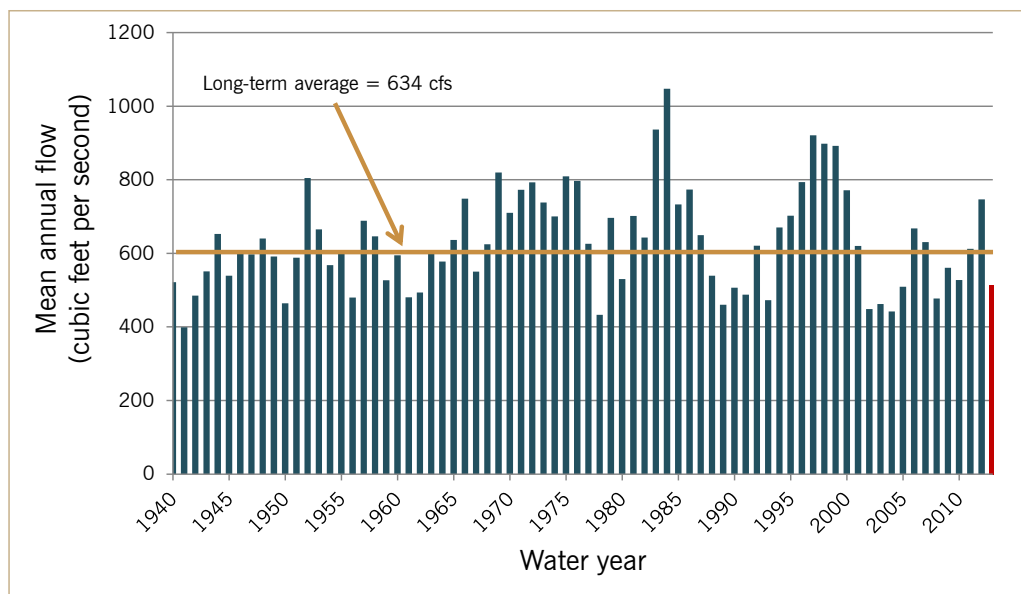


Figure 1. Mean annual flow in the Henry's Fork below Island Park Dam for water years 1940-2012. The projected value for the current water year (2013) is shown in red. The orange horizontal line shows the long-term average.

met. By the time this process was implemented, Idaho Fish and Game had identified the December-February time frame as the most critical time for survival of juvenile trout facing their first winter, so HFF and its conservation partners aim to maximize flow during this time period.

Projected flows over the winter of 2013-2014 under this regime are shown in Figure 2, from which it is clear that **among the three management options applied to very similar water years, the modern drought management planning regime maximizes winter flows.** The projected 2013-2014 winter flows will add far fewer 2-year-old rainbow trout than a year with far higher flows, but much more than when flows are cut off at Island Park Reservoir like in 1960-1961.

## Finding the Silver Lining

As bleak as the water outlook is for the upcoming winter, this year's conditions will provide some unexpected benefits to the river and to research. First, the complexities of water rights created a situation this year in which less than two-thirds of the water in Henry's Lake and Island Park belongs to irrigators in the Henry's Fork watershed. This water must pass through the watershed to be delivered to irrigators downstream keeping flows at St. Anthony higher than they would be if this water were either left in the reservoir or diverted for irrigation higher up in the watershed.

Second, because of the adult rainbow trout habitat-use study we started this spring, we will be able to collect valuable data on how habitat conditions and trout behavior respond to the low flows projected for the fall and winter. This information will help further refine our winter flow management strategy to benefit the trout population in the future. See the back cover for more details.



Lastly, even though the record Box Canyon trout population can be linked to high winter flows two years ago, the number of 2-year-old fish was more than twice what could be explained by winter flows alone, providing evidence that the Buffalo River may be contributing a substantial number of fish to the Henry's Fork population. If this is the case, not only will the population remain high despite the upcoming dry winter, but we will be able to detect this in our data.

## Preparation is Key to Trout Survival

With your support, HFF is better prepared than ever to obtain the best outcome possible for the river and its wild trout in a water year that will rank in the bottom 25th percentile. To be as proactive as possible, we convened the drought management planning committee in June of this year, rather than waiting until the end of irrigation season, and we will remain fully engaged in the management of Island Park Reservoir throughout the fall to ensure that water quality in the river is not compromised.

In a year like this, everyone will make some sacrifices. Irrigators in the Henry's Fork watershed will not get a full allocation of water, boat ramps at Henry's Lake will

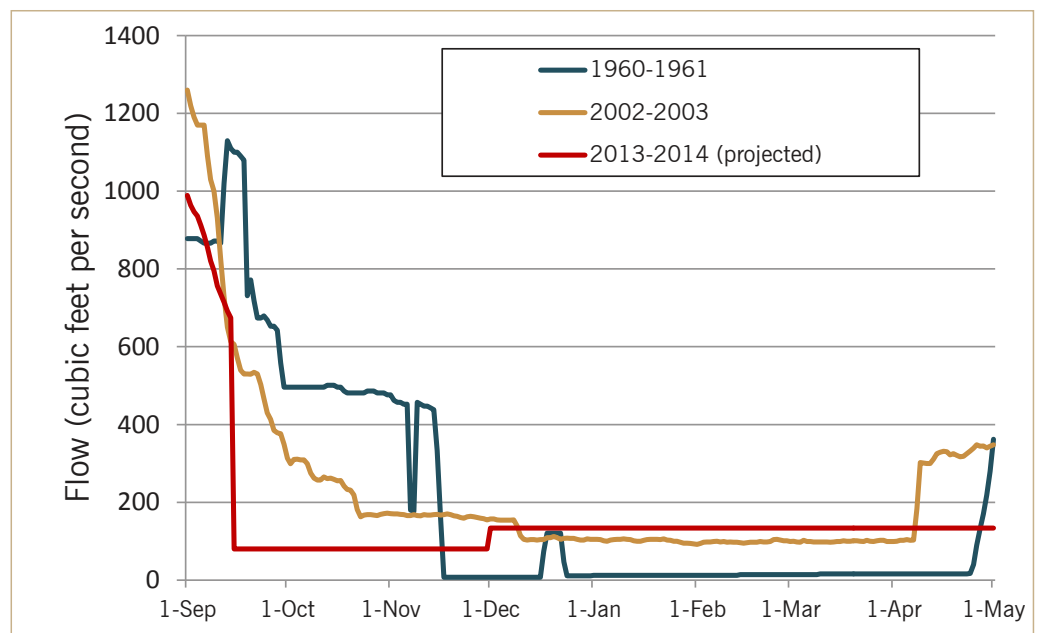


Figure 2. Storage-season flow in the Henry's Fork below Island Park Dam for three different water years, with values for 2013-2014 projected. These three water years are similar in reservoir level and water supply, but differ in management of reservoir fill.

be high and dry by the end of the summer, and less water will be available for hydroelectric power generation across the Northwest. Fisheries throughout the region will also be stressed, but our preparation and groundwork will mean the Henry's Fork and its wild trout will not bear a disproportionate burden.

*Rob Van Kirk*

## A Special Trout in the Classroom Conclusion

Last May, 46 fifth graders (shown below) concluded the Trout in the Henry's Fork Classroom curriculum with a field day at the Buffalo fish ladder, a day that was dedicated to the memory of their schoolmate Tejay Cikaitoga, who passed away in April. "Tejay loved helping at the fish ladder," said HFF's Anne Marie Emery. "His passing inspired us to share his experience with his schoolmates." At the ladder, students were divided into groups where they rotated between different stations that included fly casting, a nature hike, and most exciting, measuring huge, wild rainbow trout (Tejay's favorite). Each child had a chance to measure his or her own wild trout and then release it back into the water, where the wild trout life cycle that they spent the academic year learning about will continue in the Henry's Fork.



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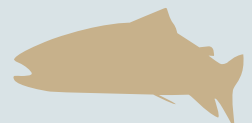
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Each year at Henry's Fork Day, HFF presents awards to members who have contributed significantly to the Foundation and conserving the Henry's Fork. The following generous members were honored this summer on June 15, 2013.

## Liz Storer, Conservation Award

Liz Storer (photo right) loves trout fishing, and loves the Rocky Mountain West. She understands the West is changing in many ways, and the challenge of protecting and preserving the things that make the West what it is—including trout and the places that they live—demands us to immerse ourselves in becoming part of the solution. That is what the Henry's Fork Foundation does for one of the Rockies' great watersheds. Liz recognized that, and we are profoundly grateful to her for her generous support. She is a great friend to HFF.



## Layne Hepworth, Manlove Award

A native Idahoan with homes in Boise and Island Park, Layne Hepworth (photo right) was an HFF board member for seven years (2006-2013), accepting a term extension during his tenure as Board Chairman at a time when his continued expertise and leadership were greatly needed. Layne was instrumental in setting a new level of board involvement with fundraising and watershed stewardship. It was evident from the start that Layne was going to pour his heart and soul into the Foundation as he spent nearly every waking hour thinking about how the Foundation could grow, leading the Henry's Fork Day fundraiser multiple times, and establishing a new, successful fundraiser in Boise. Those who have been around Layne know that he is not shy about asking for a donation of time or money for the Foundation. Layne also served on the Fremont County Planning and Zoning Commission during the creation of the most recent Fremont County Comprehensive Development Plan.



## Val Zupsan and Steve Whisler

Idaho Master Naturalist Val Zupsan, and her husband Steve Whisler (photo right) were recognized as "Volunteers of the Year." Val is a certified master naturalist and active since 2008. She is currently serving as the chapter's board president in addition to her volunteering activities. Val and Steve have assisted in numerous HFF projects, including the semiannual roadside cleanups, monitoring of fish traps on the Buffalo River, assisting in backcountry Yellowstone cutthroat trout assessments, helping with fly casting competitions, and the Foundation's fundraising efforts. Val and Steve motivate and encourage volunteerism in the Island Park community with their upbeat attitudes and dedication to conservation of the Henry's Fork watershed.



## Member Wins Big at Henry's Fork Day

Kem Williamson of Inkom, Idaho, won a Hyde drift boat (photo right), the grand prize in this year's Henry's Fork Day boat and gear raffle. Kem has been a member of the Foundation for more than a decade. Special thanks to Hyde Drift Boats, Patagonia, and Sage for donating the prizes.





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## Discovering How Trout Use Habitat

This spring, HFF kicked off a multi-year research project to study how adult rainbow trout use habitat in Harriman State Park. This study will provide important information about the life history of rainbow trout and give HFF and fisheries managers the ultimate link between the rainbow trout population and the angling experience in the legendary "Ranch" section. Forty rainbow trout have already been radio-tagged (shown below, center) and released back into the stretch between the "log jam" and the cattle bridge below Osborne Bridge.

Throughout the summer, we have tracked the radio-tagged trout (as shown below, left) to study fish that were implanted with radio tags during the spring. A cursory search for these fish showed that 80 percent of them were alive and well in the study section several weeks after being tagged, illustrating the success of our tagging methods. A thorough assessment of trout habitat at 180 random points in this stretch has revealed ideal water conditions during the first two weeks of the fishing season.

As you may know, two consecutive dry winters followed by hot summers will leave Island Park Reservoir nearly depleted by the end of the year. This provides an unparalleled opportunity to discover how adult rainbow trout use their habitat when river flows are limited. This is crucial information that we did not anticipate being able to collect when the study was initially designed, but you can help make it happen by sponsoring a radio-tagged trout for \$500. **Last week we sent you a letter with more details about this incredible opportunity. Please contact us if you would like to sponsor a radio-tagged trout or if you have any questions about this study. You can also find more information or make your gift at [www.henrysfork.org](http://www.henrysfork.org).**

## New Board Directors

Eric Adema of San Francisco, California; Will Connelly of Salt Lake City, Utah; Gary Gross of Austin, Texas; Larry Myers of Enumclaw, Washington; and Jonathan Stiehl of Last Chance, Idaho, became board members in June 2013. Thank you to these generous members for stepping up to serve on the board of directors. Learn more at: [www.henrysfork.org/board-directors](http://www.henrysfork.org/board-directors).

We also extend a special thank you to outgoing board members Bruce Raskin and Jeff Roberts for their tireless service over the last six years! You can read an article about PMDs by Bruce Raskin on page two.

## Upcoming Events

### San Francisco Reception

Friday, November 8, 2013  
*St. Francis Yacht Club, San Francisco*

### Salt Lake City Reception

Friday, February 21, 2014  
*Radisson Hotel, Salt Lake City*

### Boise Reception

Saturday, April 12, 2014  
*Riverside Hotel, Boise*

### Henry's Fork Day

Saturday, June 14, 2014  
*Last Chance, Idaho*



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