

# VOICE OF THE RIVER

2016 WINTER NEWSLETTER

An Outfitter's Perspective:  
Season 2016 Exceeded Expectations

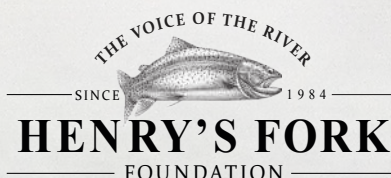
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## Meet Our Members: Bruce Raskin and Kathy Boone



As part of a whirlwind camping and fishing trip with my wife Kathy, I first visited the Henry's Fork in 1975. That's when I fished the great rivers of the West for the first time—the Henry's Fork, Silver Creek, the Madison, and many more. I remember tying a Trico onto my tippet, and my hands were shaking—hey, this is the Henry's Fork!


In the early 80s I began fishing the Henry's Fork more regularly, usually in the fall with one of several fishing friends, and on summer camping trips with Kathy and our now-grown twin daughters. We'd stay at the Box Canyon campground or the KOA, which is now Buffalo Run Campground. After one of those trips in the late 90s, I realized that this is where I wanted to spend more time. Not being an angler, Kathy wasn't convinced she'd find enough to interest her, but we now have a cabin in the terrific Pinehaven community, where we spend five months each year. When I'm on the river, Kathy is equally busy as an Idaho Master Naturalist, and she does a lot of hiking, birding, and volunteering.


I joined HFF in the late 90s and became a Board member in 2006. Friends on the Board convinced me to take a seat at the table, and I quickly found myself at home in the meetings. We live in the Bay Area, and with Bob Rosenberg, then Board Chair, the two of us organized the first San Francisco Reception in 2007. I still serve on the organizing committee, and the event has become a major annual fundraiser for HFF, with more than 200 attendees this year.

Over the past several years, my work life has been winding down, having spent my career in magazine publishing—many of those years as Executive Editor of Parenting magazine—and, more recently, at a variety of websites. With less work, I can spend more time with family—our first grandchild arrived a year and a half ago. Our daughters live five hours away from us in California, but we get to see them fairly often, and they visit in Island Park every summer. During the off-season, I've started building fishing rods and assist in teaching a class on rod building. That's when I also tie up a considerable stash of flies, many of which go to friends and HFF auctions.

The Henry's Fork remains a never-ending challenge. I remember one year, when Robert Dotson was on the Board, we auctioned off a half-day of fishing—with me guiding and Robert taking pictures. Our angler had never caught a Ranch fish, and with 15 minutes left and still no fish we started working our way in, and Robert headed back to his car. That's when our angler hooked a fish and I signaled Robert to hustle back down to take photos. The fish, landed, measured 22 inches!



The river and the Island Park community have provided us so much pleasure that we feel a commitment and responsibility to give back, which we do by staying involved with the Foundation. 



# Season 2016 Exceeded Expectations

By Chris Lawson, Henry's Fork Anglers Manager

Excerpts taken from the HFA blog on [Henrysforkanglers.com](http://Henrysforkanglers.com)

Photo by Henry's Fork Anglers

We certainly headed into our 2016 season with some uncertainties. First off, we lost our runoff. We had normal winter precipitation through early February, maybe even a little above normal. In the middle of February, things warmed up and never cooled back off. With a couple of other back-to-back mild and low precipitation winters, the water we had just went into the ground. Not only was this disturbing to the angling community, it was also very concerning to the irrigators as there is only so much water to go around. I hate to say it, but the fish in the river are put on the bench as compared to the agriculture in this area. With a big thanks to the Henry's Fork Foundation and the hard work over the years in building a good working relationship with the irrigators, we as an angling community at least have a seat at the table with the irrigators in major water resource decisions.

Our early season fished very well, with the best fishing on the Henry's Fork from early May to the middle of June. We saw some fantastic stonefly, caddis, PMD, and drake hatches. The lower Henry's Fork fished fantastic from the Ashton Dam to far downstream of St. Anthony. Plenty of fish to go around. As things got hot in the middle of June, coupled with the increase in irrigation demand, we had a tough Ranch opener. It was just plain tough, no other way to put it. Was all lost....? Well, for a couple of weeks,

maybe. Normally, the irrigation demand is at its peak in August, but this year the peak was in early July. The flows coming out of the Island Park dam were pushing 1600 cfs. We just didn't get any rain to offset irrigation demand. Did this affect the fishing? Of course it did, but it wasn't as bad as it could have been. Due to the dry summer, we had grasshoppers everywhere. I can't remember another year that had as many hoppers. In the middle of July with very high flows, the big fish slid into the banks and gorged on hoppers. We saw this not only in the Ranch, but also all the way down the whole river. Normally, the fishing below the Ashton dam is done from the middle of July through the

middle of September. Not this year! I remember in early August Mark (Smitty) Smith coming back off a guide trip on the lower Henry's Fork with a huge smile on his face. "There were hoppers everywhere! Those big browns were sipping them like drakes! We hammered them!" The terrestrial fishing held the Henry's Fork together clear through September when we started getting moisture, cloudy days, cooler weather, and low water conditions. I spent several lunch breaks watching Todd Lanning nail fish in the Last Chance area with fantastic Mahogany Dun and Beatis hatches.

Could things have been better on the Henry's Fork in 2016? Absolutely! Was it as bad as everyone kept hearing? Absolutely not! Do we need to pray for a big winter? Absolutely! We are concerned with the back-to-back drought years, as the winter flows do affect fish growth and population. All I can say is, this year was not as bad as it could have been.



Photo by Henry's Fork Anglers


In a nutshell, this season turned out far better than expected. We are so fortunate to have so many different options to offer clients. We had plenty of ups and downs, but we saw the majority of ups. We need a big winter. Let's all do some praying or rain dances. The clouds need to open and dump on us all winter in order to get where we need to be for 2017. 





Photo by James Chandler

# Aquatic Insects Indicate High-Quality River Habitat

By Rob Van Kirk, HFF Senior Scientist

Aquatic macroinvertebrates—insects and other creatures that live in the stream bottom—feed trout and are the basis of fly-fishing on the Henry’s Fork, but they are also important indicators of aquatic habitat quality. HFF is two years into a long-term program of monitoring aquatic macroinvertebrates at Flatrock, Last Chance, Osborne Bridge, Ashton, and St. Anthony for what they can tell us about overall aquatic habitat quality.

**Primary conclusions from the 2015 and 2016 data are:**

1. Abundance of macroinvertebrates averages about

47,000 individuals per square meter of stream bottom, with no statistically significant differences across sites.

2. Mayflies, stoneflies and caddisflies dominate the invertebrate assemblage at Flatrock, Last Chance, and Ashton, but are outnumbered by other organisms at Osborne and St. Anthony, reflecting finer stream-bottom substrate at these locations.

3. Aquatic habitat quality ranges from “excellent” at Flatrock to “good” at St. Anthony, decreasing with distance downstream from the headwaters.

*continued on page 6*



Photo by James Chandler

# The Results Are In: Angler’s Weigh in on Summer 2016 on the Henry’s Fork

By Jamie Laatsch, HFF Conservation and Outreach Coordinator

In October, HFF created a survey to better understand the conditions anglers experienced on the Henry’s Fork this summer. We don’t have the space to share all of the survey results here, but we do want to share some initial findings.

High flow out of Island Park Dam was the number one factor selected as having impacted fishing conditions from Island Park to Riverside this summer. A number of people also selected high turbidity, lack of rainfall, warm summer temperatures, wind, and low flows out of the dam.

Survey respondents focused their fishing effort on Harriman State Park (the Ranch) and adjacent reaches; 75 percent of respondents fished the Ranch in 2016, 62 percent fished Last Chance, and 50 percent fished Pinehaven/Wood Road,

**What Year Did You Begin Visiting the Henry’s Fork?**

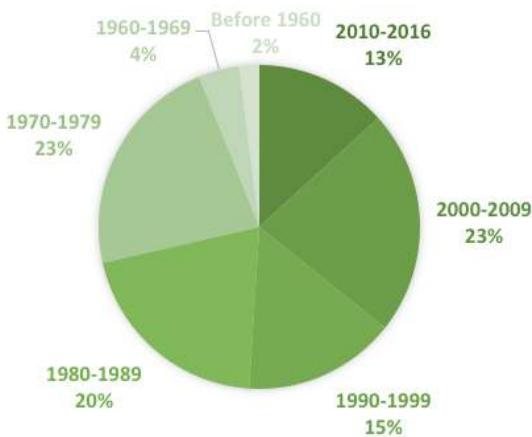


Figure 1. Stylized depiction of responses to the question, “What year did you begin visiting the Henry’s Fork?”



whereas only 44 percent of respondents fished Ashton to Chester and 37 percent fished Box Canyon.

One thing was clear: Many anglers experienced fishing conditions that were less than ideal this summer. Many described the glory days of catching big fish after big fish on the Ranch, or of wet years and better flows below Island Park Dam. Unfortunately, this year simply brought more drought, early snowmelt, and little rain, leading to higher and earlier irrigation delivery.

Going forward, HFF will focus on creative solutions and finding new ways to conserve this river in the face of unprecedented challenges. A few folks suggested drastic changes, specifically a potential decades-long legal battle to change water law in Idaho; others hope we'll boost our applied science and monitoring programs, so we can stay ahead of challenges and innovate new solutions; and

others want us to focus on strengthening partnerships to work towards solutions. But here's the good news: We're up for the challenge. 🐟



## How Far Downstream of Island Park Dam Do High Turbidity Levels Persist?

*By Melissa Muradian, HFF Research Associate II*

This fall HFF initiated a new water-quality monitoring study designed to answer the title question. Our 2016 Byers intern, Hunter Hill, collected and tested weekly samples from six locations between Island Park dam and Pinehaven from September 7th to October 20th. After only eight weeks of testing, some trends emerged. On average, turbidity decreased by 53 percent over the first 2 river miles from the dam. Recall that the Buffalo River confluence occurs within the first half mile, so the change in clarity is helped by the addition of spring-fed water from the Buffalo. Over the next 3 river miles to the Log Jam in North Harriman, we found that turbidity levels further decreased with distance to 33 percent of IP dam levels, resulting in a 67 percent decrease over the first 5 river miles. Then, turbidity levels decreased to

just 20 percent of IP dam levels over the next 5 river miles to Osborne Bridge, resulting in an 80 percent total reduction over 10 miles.

Next year we'll resume testing before spring snowmelt and continue through late fall. After further data collection, we will be able to determine other factors that potentially influence how long (and how far) material remains in suspension. These factors might include flow rate or density of rooted aquatic plants, which slow water velocity and trap sediment. Study results will be used to predict which reaches of the river will be most affected, and to what extent, during periods of high turbidity below Island Park Reservoir. 🐟



# Winter Flow Outlook Improves

By Rob Van Kirk, HFF Senior Scientist

On August 9, when HFF staff and Board members participated in a meeting of the Island Park Drought Management Planning Committee (DMPC), the outlook for winter streamflow downstream of Island Park Dam was bleak—perhaps the worst in the modern era. The reservoir was 28 percent full and dropping at 1,000 acre-feet per day. The watershed had received less than one inch of rain in the preceding 11 weeks. Could we prevent complete drawdown of the reservoir? Would mid-winter outflow be as low as 80 cfs? Would we have to consider a period of zero outflow in the fall to achieve that?

After consideration of HFF's water-quality data, irrigation needs, and system-wide conditions, the DMPC set an objective to keep the reservoir above 20,000 acre-feet (15 percent of capacity). This would be achieved through aggressive and precise outflow reductions at the dam. It also required mutual agreement to reduce the streamflow target at the St. Anthony gage from 1,000 cfs to 850 cfs. HFF believed that the benefit to the river at Island Park outweighed potential negative consequences at St. Anthony, given that water temperatures in the lower river were much cooler than they had been earlier in the

summer. This decision saved 10,000 acre-feet of water in Island Park Reservoir.

As it turned out, the reservoir stayed above 20,000 acre-feet and started filling on September 13. The aggressive management strategy and careful implementation put all stakeholders in a position to capitalize on record-setting October rainfall. The reservoir is now over 45 percent full, only 5,000 acre-feet short of last year's volume on this date, despite starting 20,000 acre-feet lower. This was accomplished with Island Park outflow falling below 80 cfs for only two days—and averaging 105 cfs—during October and November. Because of better snowpack in 2016, winter inflow to the reservoir will be at least 18 cfs higher than that in 2015. As a result, the DMPC agreed on November 21 to release 160 cfs from Island Park Dam during the upcoming winter, 36 cfs more than last year. The higher 2016 snowpack also increased the Buffalo River's projected winter flow by about 10 cfs over last year, giving us 355 cfs in the river through Box Canyon and Last Chance during the coldest part of winter, compared with 309 cfs last year. This difference is worth an expected 16 percent increase in trout recruitment in 2018. 🐟

## *Aquatic Insects, continued from page 4*

4. The only statistically significant differences between 2015 and 2016 occurred at Osborne Bridge, where total abundance of invertebrates decreased—primarily because of a decrease in non-insects such as worms and leeches—and where habitat-quality index increased from “fair” to “good,” reflecting an increase in percentage of mayflies, stoneflies, and caddisflies there.

5. Most of the mayflies and stoneflies important to fly anglers were found at all five sites. These were pale morning dun, flav, blue-winged olive, green drake, trico, brown drake, and yellow sally.

Full details of our sampling methods and results are available on the HFF blog. 🐟



Brett Marshall of River Continuum Concepts and HFF's Melissa Muradian collect invertebrates from the Henry's Fork upstream of Ashton Reservoir.

# Contributions: July 1, 2016 - September 30, 2016

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Craig Brewerton  
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