

VOICE OF THE RIVER

Winter Newsletter 2020

**Why Have Insect Hatches
Improved in 2020?**

pg. 6

**Henry's Fork Guide
Season Recap**

pg. 3

**SFI Assists With Restoration
on Rainey Creek**

pg. 8



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Member Highlight: Parmer and Mary Van Fleet

"The Henry's Fork Foundation is a high priority for us because we enjoy seeing our donations at work maintaining the quality of the fishery, dear to our heart after more than 40 years of fishing it. It's a unique and special fishery and we are blessed to live here and be able to enjoy it."



Parmer and Mary were both health care professionals/hospital pharmacists in the Bay Area of California for 35 years. Parmer managed the computer system for pharmacy and the interface to the nursing system and Mary was a middle manager with both Pharmacy and Materials distribution.

The Van Fleets started coming to the Henry's Fork in the mid-70s. Andre Puyans' (Andy) Creative Sports shop — Andy had a fly casting school at Elk Creek on the Fork every year — was in Walnut Creek, where they lived. Parmer spent a few years working with Andy in the shop in evenings after his regular job, getting a great education. It was Andy who introduced them to the Henry's Fork. After camping for years fishing the Fork at Last Chance, they purchased a lot at Henrys Lake and built a cabin in 1991, usually managing to spend 6 weeks a year here until they retired in 2007.

In 2008, Mary answered a call from the non-game division of the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) to "start a Master Naturalist near you", and created the first ever Idaho chapter of Master Naturalists. Mary has served on her HOA Board for years, IMN Chapter Board, and Henrys Lake Foundation (HLF) Board. Parmer is a HLF Board member as well and worked, for months, on the water quality study on Henrys Lake that the Henry's Fork Foundation managed through an IDFG Commissioner's Grant.

The Van Fleet's give to several resource conservation organizations where they feel their dollars are coming back to them and the public in the benefits of the work they do, keeping landscapes and rivers preserved and habitats unspoiled.



Henry's Fork Season Recap

by Craig Richardson, WorldCast Anglers

The season of 2020 was by far the best I've seen on the Henry's Fork even though it was by far the busiest I've seen. The constant good work by the Henry's Fork Foundation is really showing how correct management will drastically improve the fishery. The bug life this year was phenomenal starting with smaller bugs earlier on in April.

Midge, BWO and caddis brought some great fishing for that time of year. Nymphing was the name of the game through this period with small windows to actively target rising fish. As the spring progressed the talk and excitement of the salmon fly hatch started. With out-of-state licenses being sold, tons of people flooded to the lower river. The hatch was solid and continued for several days. The fishing was consistent even with so much pressure through these days. Some really big fish were caught, but the average size fish was the most impressive part for me. Chunky healthy fish spread throughout each section.



Through June the lower river fished incredibly well. My favorite hatch was about to start, the Green Drakes. This year was the thickest and longest lasting Green Drake hatch I have seen. More seagulls were on the river than previous years. The drake hatches seem to last all day with some of the best dry fly fishing I have ever seen. The river was covered in rising fish from mid-morning all the way into the afternoon. Once the Ranch opened, I spent the rest of June and some of July wading. My best days of fishing were the really cold, rainy late June days. The Green Drake hatch was thick, and it felt like every fish in the river started looking up. Then as soon as we thought the Green Drakes were done the Brown Drakes started. This continued with the terrible cold weather and I had

continued on page 5



Water Year 2020 Highlights


92% of Average Water Supply

Water is crucial to the quality of the fishery and fishing experience. How much precipitation falls and natural flow comes down the river is up to Mother Nature, but the way that water is managed can have significant benefits for fisheries. Watershed-wide, water year precipitation was 90 percent of average and total natural flow was 92 percent of average, ranking 26th out of the 43 water years since 1978. For the upper Henry's Fork, the river upstream of Ashton, total natural flow was only 88 percent of average, compared with 94 percent in Fall River and 96 percent in Teton River. Even the past three years' snowpack have only been slightly above average at 102 percent, yet Island Park Reservoir carryover during the three-year period ranks in the top 4 since 1979. That is measurable mission



accomplishment brought about by precision management through partnerships with Fremont-Madison Irrigation District, US Bureau of Reclamation, canal companies, and individual farmers.

That better than average carryover made way for above average winter flows. Outflow during the 2019/2020 winter was 532 cfs and 560 cfs during the 2018/2019 winter, compared to a 1978-2019 average of 356 cfs; and outflow during the upcoming winter is expected to be above average despite below average natural supply.

Read more about climate, water quality, and temperature for water year 2020 by clicking [here](#). 



my most memorable dry fly days back to back. All the fish were healthy and very fat. We caught a lot more fish from 14-16 inches this year and a lot of fish in the 18-19 inch range. This shows how keeping higher winter flows improves life in the river.

Most of July and August I spent on the Teton and South Fork, with the occasional trip to the Henry's Fork. All of my July Henry's Fork trips were on the Ranch. The fishing was great, and the bug life continued to keep the fish looking up. The smaller mayflies kept fish looking up and we got to fish at some very picky fish through the PMD hatches. The Hopper fishing from the middle to end of August was really good. Big browns sitting in the shallowest runs made it super exciting. The worry of warm water and potentially killing one of the lower river giants made me reluctant to fish there regularly, but as soon as the water started cooling down in September, I



made my way back to the Ranch. Mahogany and Trico hatches were thick, but the wind through this period made it a little trickier. The wind through September seemed to blow a lot of the bugs off the water and make every scenario a little harder. The baetis hatches through early October were thick with a lot of fish looking for them. I had a few days where the wind was slightly down and the river would turn on with fish rising everywhere. The lower river really kicked back into play with great nymphing and some really good small dry fishing through early October. The only downside I've seen is more face scaring on fish and some handling damage than previous years.

There are very few places that have the diversity of water and hatches and consistently large trout. I'm extremely lucky to return here every year! 🐟



Why Have Insect Hatches Improved in 2020?

HFF investigates potential factors that might play a role

Following three good years of winter flow, we would expect to see large numbers of 3-year old fish (14-18 inches long) in the river between Island Park Dam and Riverside campground in 2020. What was less expected was the dramatic improvement in aquatic insect hatches observed. Anglers have reported hatches as good or better than in the 1980s, and certainly better than anything seen in recent years. HFF Senior Scientist, Dr. Rob Van Kirk, who has fished the Ranch since 1977, wanted to analyze the data and investigate some potential factors that could be creating this formula for great fishing. He considered:

- HBI (Hilsenhoff Biotic Index) averaged 3.8 (“very good”) in 2019, compared with 4.8 (“good”) during and after the 2013-2016 drought and 6.1 (“fair”) in 1993. The HBI reflects the overall condition of the aquatic ecosystem as it is based on tolerance of aquatic insect species to habitat degradation (1 = intolerant; 10 = tolerant), so lower scores indicate better habitat conditions.
- Percent mayflies, stoneflies, and caddisflies in invertebrate samples at Osborne Bridge averaged 57 percent in 2019, compared with 41 percent during and after the recent drought, and only 17 percent in 1993.
- 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.
- In the long run, net sediment transport out of the river between Island Park Dam and Pinehaven is around

1,600 tons per year. At that rate, at least half the sediment deposited during the 1992 event has been removed to date.

Based on the data, limiting draft of Island Park Reservoir is critical to maintaining a high-quality invertebrate community, as this allows for high springtime flows followed by relatively low irrigation-season flows to scour leftover sediment from the 1992 event in the long run, and maintain high-quality substrate from year to year. HFF’s programs to limit draft of Island Park Reservoir were initially aimed at improving winter flow to benefit trout recruitment, but we now know that limiting draft of Island Park Reservoir also improves water quality and fish survival in the reservoir, as well as water quality and fishing experience downstream of the reservoir.

Given the apparent success in improving invertebrate communities with the combination of a high springtime freshet and relatively low irrigation-season flows, HFF will continue to work with the Henry’s Fork Drought Management Planning Committee to meet these flow-management objectives to the greatest degree possible in a given water year. We will also continue our collaborative programs with irrigation entities and individual farmers to reduce irrigation demand and improve irrigation-system management. And of course, we will continue to collect data, refine our understanding of the aquatic system, and provide the best science possible to inform water management decisions.

Read more [here](#). 



Unusual Labor Day Cold Front and Turbidity Below Island Park Dam


After a summer of fantastic fishing and hatches, an unusual Labor Day cold front had the effect of pushing around 1,000 ac-ft of water in Island Park Reservoir temporarily out to the west end, where large areas of reservoir bottom were exposed because the reservoir was only 54 percent full at the time. When that water returned back to the east side, where the dam is located, it carried a large sediment load that increased turbidity in the river downstream for over two weeks. Sediment export from the reservoir as a result of the event was 7% of total export during the spring and summer, and thankfully, over 85% of it stayed in suspension as it traveled through the reach between the dam and Pinehaven. For the year as a whole, more sediment was removed from this reach than was deposited, thanks to the managed springtime freshet and relatively low aquatic plant growth. The total daily sediment load during the event, although disruptive to fishing conditions, was very low compared to the 1992 event (17 tons/day vs 3,000 tons/day) and is not expected to have negative impact on fishery health.

On any given day, the probability of a northeast wind event lasting longer than 24 hours is 1.5%. Only 127 such events have occurred since 1986, and only 43 of these have occurred during the summer and fall, when the reservoir isn't covered with ice. Of those 43 events, the September

2020 event lasted for 32 hours and ranked fourth in terms of wind speed oriented in the direction of the reservoir's long NE-SW axis.

Although weather is beyond anyone's control, the collective management of Fall River Rural Electric, Fremont-Madison Irrigation District, and US Bureau of Reclamation put us in the best position to minimize the effects. In the long term, in the face of these extreme weather events, we can keep as much water in the reservoir as possible all year, work to deliver a springtime freshet as often as possible to remove sediment (requires a full reservoir at the end of the winter to do this), and maximize winter flow.

This event is certainly unusual, if not unprecedented in the reservoir's 82-year history; and without the knowledge provided by our water quality program, we would be at a loss to understand and explain phenomena like this. Thank you for your support of HFF's science programs, including water quality monitoring, macroinvertebrate monitoring, collaboration and more.

Read more about the event, data collected, and what HFF has learned [here](#). 




South Fork Initiative Assists With Restoration Work on Rainey Creek

Over the last several years, the HFF South Fork Initiative (SFI) has collaborated with the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG), USDA Forest Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service and other partners on a long-term effort to restore lower Rainey Creek and improve habitat for native trout and other aquatic species.

This fall, the SFI assisted IDFG in pre-restoration trout abundance surveys, conducted aerial drone surveys, helped support these projects monetarily, and organized volunteer days to cut, transport, and stage willows at restoration reaches. In total, about a quarter of a mile of lower Rainey Creek was/will be restored in 2020.

Thanks again to our great partners, volunteers, and various funding organizations who helped make this possible!

To support the South Fork Initiative and future restoration work in the South Fork Watershed, click [here](#). 



DID YOU KNOW?

Upper Henry's Fork streamflow had just recovered to the 1930-2019 average last year for the first time since 2012, before falling below average again this year.

Natural flow in the upper Henry's Fork has **exceeded the 1930-2020 average** in only 3 of the past 11 years: 2011, 2012, and 2019.

In general, the groundwater springs in the upper Henry's Fork **respond to precipitation over a time frame of around 3 years.**

Water year 2020 in **the Henry's Fork Watershed** was most similar to water years 1979 and 2014.

Science and collaboration are how we can conserve fisheries and fishing experience in the face of less than stellar water supply.



Congratulations and Thank You to our Henry's Fork Days XXXVI 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 2020 bowl award winners:

Gary and Cathy Gross

Manlove Award Recipients

Friends of the Teton River

Conservation Award Recipients

Parmer and Mary Van Fleet

Volunteer Award Recipients





Contributions: July 1, 2020 - September 30, 2020

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James Wypijewski
Yellow Sally

In Memoriam

Bruce Elliston
Larry Evans
David Wood

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.



801 Main Street
PO Box 550
Ashton, Idaho 83420
208.652.3567
hff@henrysfork.org

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