

VOICE OF THE RIVER

FALL 2026

The DNA of a River

INNOVATIVE DATA COLLECTION WITH
THE SALMONFLY PROJECT

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Get to Know Our Staff

Shawn Holwegner, Technical Coordinator

This year, Shawn celebrates five years with HFF as our Technical Coordinator. Drawn to the Ashton area from Billings, Montana, Shawn brought with him a wide-range of technical skills, from designing potato sizing and grading equipment to managing complex computer systems. Today, that same practical, problem-solving mindset helps keep HFF's fieldwork moving and our staff supported behind the scenes. In a season when accurate monitoring, river-specific science, and timely information matters deeply to anglers, guides, donors, and partners, Shawn's work is part of the quiet infrastructure that keeps HFF's science moving—and helps turn field observations into a better understanding of the river 🐟



In Memoriam

Art Shartsis



A founding director and longtime member, Art dedicated decades of leadership, legal counsel, and generous support that helped shape HFF and its mission. We extend our sincere condolences to his family and are grateful for the legacy he leaves behind.

Summer Interns



Patrick Nardi - *South Fork Initiative Intern - Colgate University*

Patrick spent his time on the South Fork in Swan Valley assisting with our Morning Bites program, setting a record for people reached. He also helped with social media, newsletter content, and the South Fork Gala.



Audrey Hunter - *Science Communications Intern - Stanford University*

Audrey spent the summer shadowing and taking pictures of our on-the-ground DIRT projects out in the field. She also contributed to newsletter content, education and outreach events, blogs, and social media.

Sam Pruitt - *Baucus Climate Scholar - Montana State University*

Sam worked with Dr. Otto Lang on our Snowmelt project. This included going out in the field to photograph forest canopy and analyzing this information in preparation for the installation of our weather monitoring stations.



Kate Shiffler - *Field and Laboratory Intern - University of Idaho*

Kate took weekly water quality samples at Island Park Reservoir as well as monitored our temperature data loggers throughout Harriman State Park. To see this data, go to: henrysforkdata.shinyapps.io/HSPTemperature/

Tate Sargeant - *Don C Byers Intern - Utah State University*

Tate worked with Joe Hively and spent his time maintaining the Buffalo Fish Ladder, aiding Kate with the data loggers at Harriman State Park, taking weekly samples at Island Park Reservoir, and conducting any other fieldwork as needed.



Claude Morris - *River Use and Riparian Fencing Intern - Washington & Lee University*

Claude helped to monitor the river-use cameras we have at 2 locations, administer recreational surveys, analyze the data collected, and maintain our two sections of riparian fencing.



DIRTT: Early Lessons from eDNA

How are Hatches Changing and Why?

For decades, anglers have sought out the solitude of the Henry's Fork—enjoying the challenge of a rising rainbow trout, matching the hatch, or watching a big fish rise. Pale Morning Dun (PMD) hatches help to forge memories. HFF has collected macroinvertebrate data for 11 years at 6 locations throughout the Henry's Fork. These long-term monitoring efforts show healthy insect populations on the river bottom, but late-winter numbers of nymphs on the river bottom don't necessarily translate to the hatches anglers are used to seeing.



HFF Partners with The Salmonfly Project

To address these questions, HFF has partnered with The Salmonfly Project, a Montana-based nonprofit, as part of our DIRTT Plan, to expand the methods that we use to collect data. By using environmental DNA (eDNA), traditional stream-bottom counts, and several types of emergence traps, we are getting a better idea of whether future water-quality improvements—including water temperature improvements, turbidity reduction, and reservoir oxygenation—could move the needle for fish, insects, and the river.

Mountain Whitefish

HFF is also using eDNA to look at the populations and migratory patterns of Mountain Whitefish on the Henry's Fork. The first thing we learned was that our local mountain whitefish were not even in the existing DNA reference catalogue! After collecting genetic samples from our Henry's Fork whitefish, we found they were genetically distinct from all whitefish previously included in the catalogue. We knew the Henry's Fork was unique because of its geologic history, but these results suggest it is even more unique than we thought.

This project is ongoing, so stay tuned to learn more about the results along the way! 🐟

Breathing Easy

Oxygenation In Island Park Reservoir

Story by Audrey Hunter, Science Communications Intern

It's no secret that late summers on the Island Park Reservoir haven't been in perfect conditions in recent years. Warm, turbid, algae-filled water plague reservoir recreationists while diminishing water quality downstream. Cyclical algal blooms decrease water clarity and create less-than-ideal circumstances for the reservoir's flora and fauna. What's the solution? HFF's DIRT Plan.

In-Reservoir Oxygenation

Nutrients released from reservoir sediment fuel algal blooms. Since sediment releases fewer nutrients in oxygenated water, oxygenation is incredibly effective in reducing algae blooms. Without algae, water clarity improves greatly in the reservoir and the Henry's Fork downstream. By installing infrastructure at the bottom of the lake, we can bring oxygen bubbles directly to where they're needed most.

Changing with the Seasons

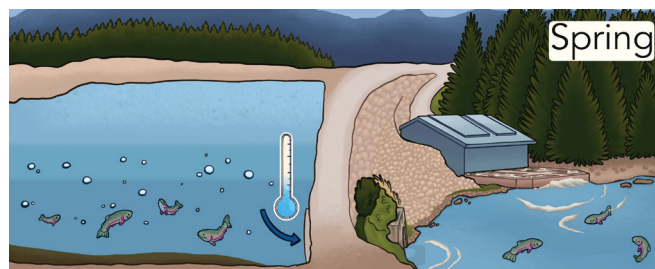
In summer and fall, oxygen levels in the reservoir frequently get low enough that habitat is diminished—not only for fish, but for zooplankton that feed on algae. In-reservoir oxygenation works year-round to maintain an oxygen-rich bottom layer that supports these algae-eating zooplankton.

A Wide Range of Benefits

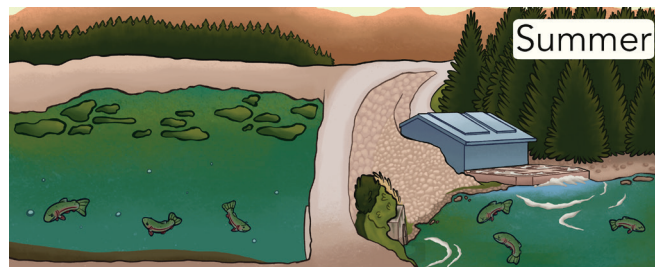
Oxygenation increases water clarity in the Henry's Fork, improving your fishing experience, but it also provides the foundation for a healthier reservoir. Oxygenation could dramatically increase fish habitat—by up to 350%. Fewer algal blooms allow rooted aquatic plants to grow, stabilizing bottom sediments, absorbing nutrients, and creating clearer water.

We're working with HDR and J-U-B Engineers to understand the cost and feasibility of reservoir oxygenation in Island Park Reservoir. Oxygenation is just one part of our vision. We're committed to finding the most effective solutions to the reservoir's biggest problems.

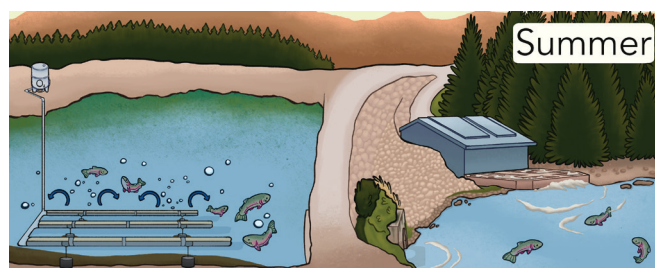
Learn more at henrysfork.org/dirtt-plan 



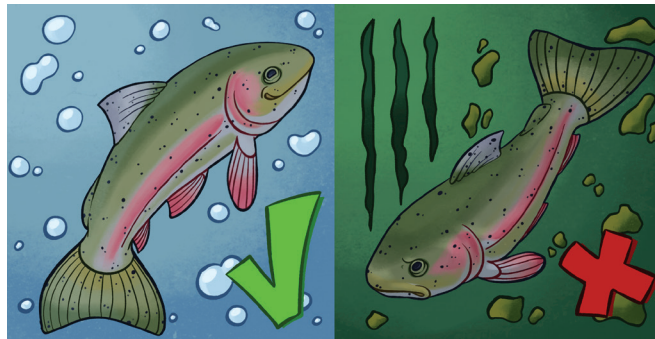
Spring: Oxygen is plentiful throughout the reservoir.



Summer: Warm water and algae reduce bottom-water oxygen.



Summer: Oxygenation helps maintain an oxygenated bottom layer.



All illustrations on this page by Teddy Montalvo

Encouraging News from Box Canyon

This spring, Idaho Fish and Game's population survey produced a preliminary estimate of **4,663 rainbow trout per mile** in Box Canyon—about **47% above the long-term average**. Even more encouraging was an exceptionally strong class of year 1 trout, despite the low winter flows experienced in 2025.

For decades, winter streamflow has been one of the strongest predictors of trout abundance in Box Canyon. This year's survey suggests the record-warm winter may have helped offset some of the effects of low flows by improving the survival of young fish. Long-term data sets like this are essential for understanding how the Henry's Fork responds to changing conditions, allowing scientists to identify patterns unique to this river and develop conservation strategies tailored specifically to its watershed.

The Henry's Fork continues to face significant water challenges, but this year's survey highlights the importance of long-term monitoring. Many thanks to Idaho Fish and Game for collecting this critical data, allowing us to gain the insight needed to understand changing conditions and help guide science-based management for the future.

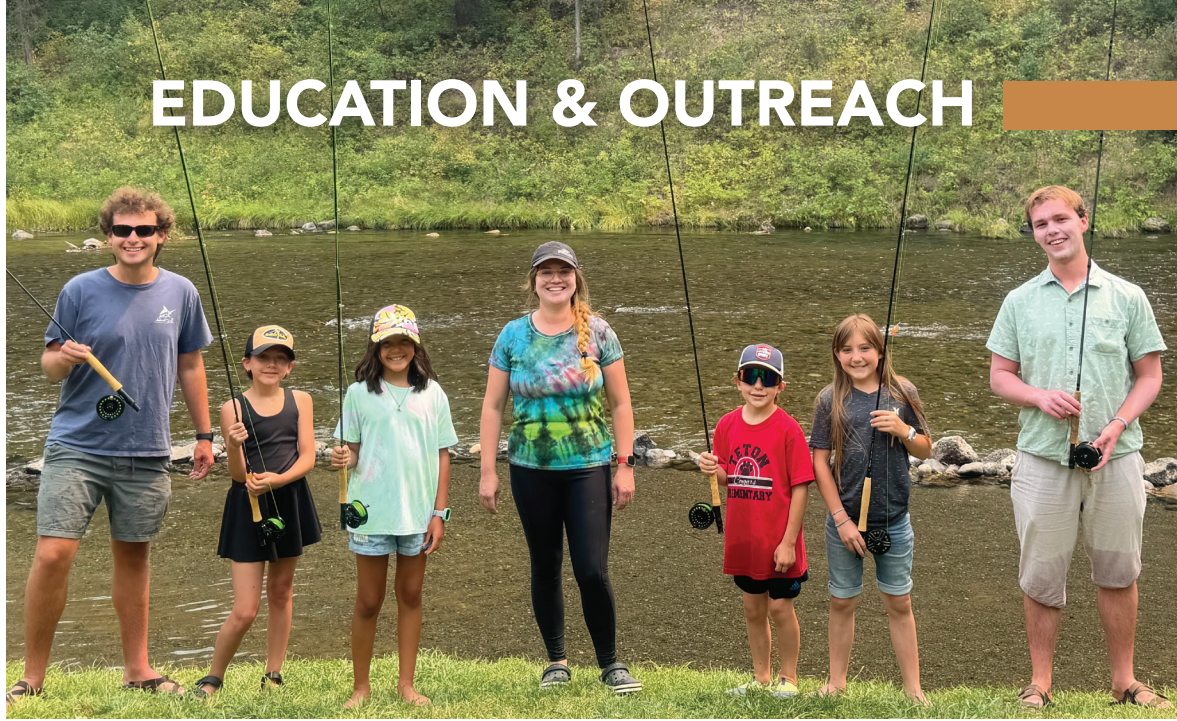
Preliminary survey results provided by Idaho Fish and Game. 🐟



4,663
rainbow trout
per mile



EDUCATION & OUTREACH



Students from Island Park Charter School, Teton Elementary, and Ashton Elementary completed another successful year of Trout in the Classroom by releasing the rainbow trout they raised into the Henry's Fork. During their field day, Jasper Davis led hands-on activities focused on water quality, macroinvertebrates, and the water cycle. Later in the summer, many of those same fifth-grade students returned for our Youth on the Fly program, where they learned the basics of fly casting and fly fishing with the help of Jasper and volunteers.

We also enjoyed sharing our work with the community at Island Park Fest and the Henry's Fork Wildlife Alliance Wildlife Festival as well as participating in Ashton's 4th of July Parade. And finally, our Annual Membership Meeting brought members together at the Fisherman's Access in Last Chance, where science team members Jack, Rob, Otto, and Matt answered questions during an engaging "Ask Us Anything" science panel. 🐟

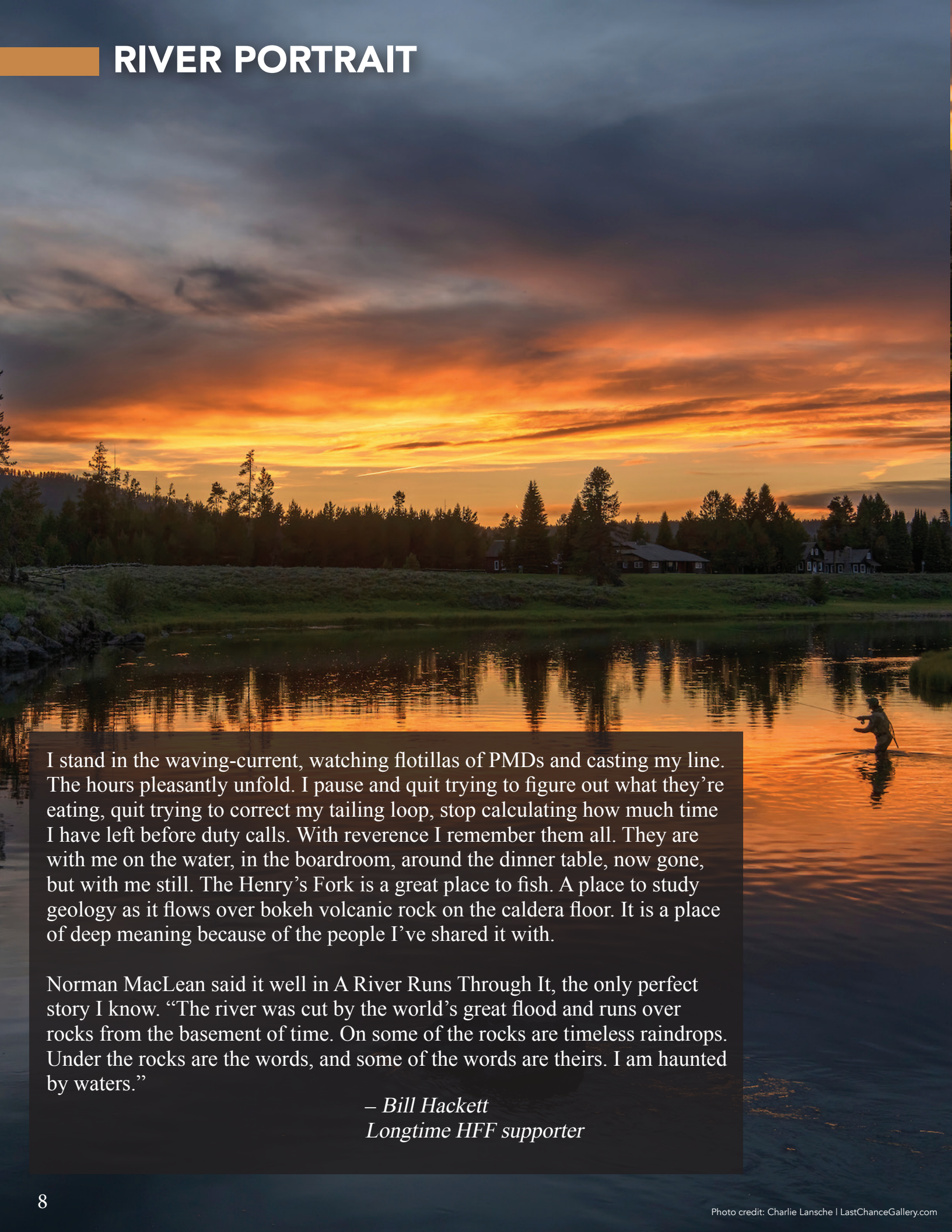
Voice of the River

On June 11, HFF staff and volunteers worked to weed, remove riparian shrubbery encroaching onto the pavement, and clean up any trash at fisherman access in Last Chance. Thank you to everyone who helped! This is just part one of this project, so stay tuned for future volunteering opportunities.

Looking to volunteer? Email jasper@henrysfork.org to be added to our volunteer list.



RIVER PORTRAIT



I stand in the waving-current, watching flotillas of PMDs and casting my line. The hours pleasantly unfold. I pause and quit trying to figure out what they're eating, quit trying to correct my tailing loop, stop calculating how much time I have left before duty calls. With reverence I remember them all. They are with me on the water, in the boardroom, around the dinner table, now gone, but with me still. The Henry's Fork is a great place to fish. A place to study geology as it flows over bokeh volcanic rock on the caldera floor. It is a place of deep meaning because of the people I've shared it with.

Norman MacLean said it well in *A River Runs Through It*, the only perfect story I know. "The river was cut by the world's great flood and runs over rocks from the basement of time. On some of the rocks are timeless raindrops. Under the rocks are the words, and some of the words are theirs. I am haunted by waters."

– *Bill Hackett*
Longtime HFF supporter



South Fork Initiative

Growth and Restoration

Story by Patrick Nardi, South Fork Initiative Intern

South Fork Initiative (SFI) Program Manager Devan Ence spent the year working closely with donors, lodges, guides, and other agencies to continue to grow SFI. From a sellout SFI Gala to Morning Bites, and everything in between, the word is spreading and it's spreading fast. With over 600 membership signups this summer from the Morning Bites program—hats, Yeti cups, and fly pucks distributed—there are no signs of slowing down. SFI has also acquired two new Sonde housings that will better serve the South Fork water quality studies. One was launched in the spring of 2026 at the Great Feeder. The second will be launched Fall 2026. Devan is also working closely with IDFG on a Fall 2025 plan to reduce canal entrapment.

SFI Restoration Manager Dave Weskamp has been hard at work on projects encompassing Rainey Creek and First, Second, and Third Creeks. By working with landowners, SFI and partners were able to accomplish this restoration. These projects work to reintroduce stream morphology, gravel bars, riffles, and aquatic habitat complexity for the benefit of Cutthroat trout and their spawning habitat.

Learn more at henrysfork.org/south-fork-initiative 



“This fishery is nothing short of AMAZING!”
- Patrick Nardi, SFI Intern

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Art Shartsis

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THE DNA OF A RIVER

WHAT ARE CHANGING HATCHES
TELLING US ABOUT THE FUTURE
OF THE HENRY'S FORK?



Explore the science &
support the work

HFF and The
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collaborators are
pioneering a new
application of eDNA
on the Henry's Fork
to better understand
PMD hatch timing.

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