



## Wyoming Game and Fish Department

# Cody Region Angler Newsletter

Volume 12

2017

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### Fish Management in the Cody Region

Welcome to the 2017 Cody Region Angler Newsletter! We had another great year in the Big Horn Basin and 2018 is shaping up to be the same.

For us fish folks at Game and Fish, 2017 will be forever etched in our minds as the year of water. Record snowpack led to record inflows into local reservoirs. Although this resulted in a truncated fishing season on the Shoshone and Bighorn Rivers, fishing was as good ever in many regional waters. We hope you enjoy these highlights from 2017 and we look forward to seeing you on the water in 2018!

As always, please feel free to contact us with any comments or questions about the aquatic resources in northern Wyoming. Your input is important to us as we manage these resources for you, the people of Wyoming. You'll find all of our contact info on the last page of this newsletter.



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## Buffalo Bill Ice Fishing

According to Cody Region AIS Specialist and ice fishing fanatic Greg Mayton, Buffalo Bill Reservoir offers some of the most fantastic ice fishing the Big Horn Basin has to offer.

Located just six miles west of Cody, this reservoir is easily accessed from town and offers anglers an opportunity to catch several species of trout.

Mayton said, "While safety should always be a priority, anglers should exercise special caution while ice fishing Buffalo Bill Reservoir because ice conditions can change both quickly and drastically."

"Anglers should be aware that due to strong winds and geothermal spots in the reservoir, ice conditions can be very unpredictable and can pose challenging safety conditions for ice fisherman," Mayton said. "The wind that persists at the confluence of the North and South Forks of the Shoshone River can cause unstable ice conditions no matter how cold the winter has been. You also have to keep an eye out for geothermal warm spots that can occur across the reservoir. There have been winters with good, safe ice on parts of the reservoir, and in just a day or two, those same spots are open water."

Anglers wanting to ice fish the reservoir also need to consider the weather conditions. "When out on this reservoir, anglers should be prepared for brutal west winds that can crop up out of nowhere," Mayton said.

To check out the weather before heading out, Mayton advises anglers to visit Buffalo Bill State Park's website. "If there was one tip that I could give to help avoid a wasted trip, it would be to check out Buffalo Bill State Park's webcam and weather page to get an idea of what's happening before heading out. The webcam can be found at: <http://dayweather.com/cams/bbr/buffalobillres.htm>.

Mayton continues, "On the brighter side, if the weather cooperates and ice conditions are safe, Buffalo Bill anglers can have the thrill of catching some of the best eating and fighting trout the Basin has to offer."

Buffalo Bill's under water topography is diverse and ranges from shallow mud flats to steep rocky drop offs. While most ice fishermen are pursuing trout, the reservoir contains both warm and cold water fish species including cutthroat trout, rainbow trout, cutthroat rainbow hybrids, brown trout, lake trout, walleye and perch. Some of the most popular places to ice fish are Bartlett Lane off the South Fork Hwy, off the steep shores of Stage Coach Trail and the more easily accessible North Fork Hwy.

Fishing regulations on Buffalo Bill Reservoir are different than most other lakes in the Cody Region. Two rods are permitted since it is not a special ice fishing regulation body of water and the use of live minnows is prohibited. The creel limit on trout (excluding lake trout) is three per day or in possession.

No more than two shall be cutthroat trout; and no more than one trout (excluding lake trout) shall exceed 18 inches. Lake trout creel is six, with no more than one over 24 inches. Walleye are designated as nongame fish and shall be killed immediately with no creel limit or possession limit.

"When fishing Buffalo Bill, I like to have a lineup of different baits, rods and lures to key in on the species that I would like to chase that day. First and foremost is making sure you have bait available. For a trip out on Buffalo Bill, I never leave my truck without meal worms, sucker meat and shrimp. With these in your sled, you can just about catch any fish the lake offers," Mayton said.

"For chasing lake trout, I mostly use sucker meat attached to a jig or some sort of lure. Most of the time, I use a quarter-ounce or larger jig or lure that glows in the dark to help the fish see what I am presenting. While lake trout can be found throughout the entire water column when they are actively feeding, they are often close to the bottom, so this is always where I start when positioning bait," he said.

Mayton continues, "When going after rainbows, cutthroats and brown trout, I suggest using meal worms and shrimp for bait and using jigs and lures that are smaller than a quarter-ounce. Most of the time, these trout are cruising 20 feet below the ice but I have caught them within a few inches of the ice. Using a fish finder provides valuable information about the varying depths the different species of fish are hanging out in. When fishing Buffalo Bill, you will never see me out on the ice without my trusty flasher sonar unit."



## Upper Sunshine Reservoir Ice Fishing

While Upper Sunshine Reservoir attracts fishermen throughout the year, this picturesque fishery is particularly popular in the winter, drawing ice fishermen from across the Bighorn Basin.

“Upper Sunshine is extremely family friendly, with plentiful amounts of Yellowstone cutthroat trout swimming under the ice looking for the next morsel of food to bite,” said Greg Mayton, Cody Region AIS specialist and ice fishing fanatic. “Once good ice forms on the reservoir, it tends to stay safe for longer periods of time compared to other waters in the Cody area.”

There are a few things to keep in mind when planning a trip to the reservoir, especially in late winter as warm chinook winds can come through the Big Horn Basin. “Anglers should be aware that the gravel and dirt access roads around Upper Sunshine can get soft very quickly on warmer winter days. Also, be aware that while the ice on the middle of the lake can be rock solid, the edges can be soft and weak. To play it safe while getting out to the main part of reservoir, I bring a wood plank to put across the soft edges.”

“Upper Sunshine Reservoir is located 14 miles southwest of Meeteetse and no matter where you live in the Bighorn Basin, the fishing is well worth the drive. I have had days on the ice where I have caught close to 50 fish in one morning. The majority of those were trout ranging from 13 to 17 inches, which put up a good fight on light tackle,” Mayton said. “The limit and regulations are very simple for Upper Sunshine; you can have six trout of any size in your possession and the use of live bait is prohibited.”

Good bait is the key for catching great tasting cutthroats from this productive fishery. “My favorites are shrimp and meal worms but others prefer night crawlers and sucker meat. On a busy weekend day, you will see every combination of jig, lure and bait being used and all combinations catch fish,” Mayton said.

The west side of the lake offers the best access and is also the area that gets the most fishing pressure. “If possible, I prefer to fish away from those areas and have had luck getting into some trout that have not seen all the tricks. I like to look for water depths from 15 to 30 feet. When first on the ice, I always start out with my standard jigs and spoons and adjust size and color depending on the activity of the fish. On slow days, I go to a smaller jig with more natural colors, with a smaller piece of bait that takes less work for the trout to bite. But on the great days, you can get by with just about anything you put down the hole,” Mayton said.

Upper Sunshine is the shining star in the Bighorn Basin. If you have not yet been out there this winter, make sure to pack up the family, bring a lunch and enjoy some of the most memorable ice fishing Wyoming has to offer.



*Cody Region AIS Specialist and ice fishing fanatic Greg Mayton shows off a Yellowstone cutthroat trout he caught through the ice on Upper Sunshine Reservoir.*



*Greg Mayton and his wife Heidi on Upper Sunshine Reservoir.*

## Shoshone River Cleanup Success

On the morning of March 18, the public access on the Shoshone River just below Willwood dam looked like a parking lot. Approximately 80 people gathered that morning to join an effort spearheaded by the East Yellowstone Chapter of Trout Unlimited to clear trash and other debris from a section of the Shoshone River downstream of Willwood dam.

Members of the East Yellowstone Chapter of Trout Unlimited, Willwood Irrigation District, area landowners, Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Department of Environmental Quality, Cody High School Outdoor Club members, FFA students and many other volunteers showed up ready work. After a brief orientation, boat and ground crews along with heavy machinery spread out and cleared a seven-mile stretch of river picking up everything from old tires to hunks of metal.

*Cody High School Outdoor Club members Erin Woolley (left) and Miranda Williams work as a team to remove debris from the river channel during the Shoshone River cleanup in March*



*Fisheries Supervisor Sam Hochhalter, Andy Quick owner of Gradient Mountain Sports, and kayak instructor and river enthusiast Scott Stingley use a raft to clear debris from the banks of the Shoshone River.*

## Detection of invasive mussels in Montana underscores importance of boat inspections

In light of the recent detection of invasive mussels in Montana, Game and Fish reminds boaters of the importance of regulations in place to help prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species (AIS) in Wyoming.

“In the fall of 2016, tests came back positive for aquatic invasive mussels in Tiber Reservoir and suspect in Canyon Ferry Reservoir in Montana,” said Cody Regional AIS Specialist Greg Mayton. “Now that there are quagga or zebra mussels within a half days drive to Cody, we will be ramping up efforts at border check stations and will coordinate with other agencies to draft rapid response plans for Big Horn Lake and other regional waters so we can be better prepared should the mussels reach Wyoming.”

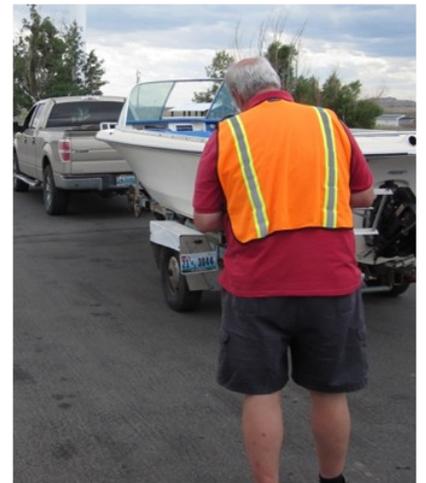
In response to the detection of invasive mussels in Montana, the North Cody check station will be operated seven days a week instead of four, as in years past. AIS check stations are an important component of helping to prevent the spread of AIS. Zebra and quagga mussels pose a great ecological and economic threat to the state. “The invasion of these mussels can affect every Wyoming water user in some way, as they can have significant, long lasting impacts on natural resources, recreational opportunities and the economy,” Mayton said.

“If transporting a boat into Wyoming from out-of-state from March 1 through November 30, boaters are required to have watercraft inspected prior to launching in Wyoming. This includes out-of-state boaters entering Wyoming and any Wyoming boaters who have left the state and are returning,” Mayton said. “During any time of the year, if your boat has been on a water suspect/positive for zebra or quagga mussels within the last 30 days, you are required to have your boat inspected prior to launching in Wyoming.”

According to Wyoming law, any person transporting watercraft that encounters an open AIS check station on a route of travel is required to stop and undergo an inspection, or show proof of a previous inspection. This year, AIS check stations at key entrances into the state will be open as frequently as possible from April 29 through September 17. “We encourage all boaters to plan ahead to have their watercraft inspected at one of these locations,” Mayton said.

“In the Cody Region, watercraft check stations will be operated at Buffalo Bill Reservoir, Big Horn Lake, Big Horn River at Wedding of the Waters and other waters on a rotating basis. The Frannie Port of Entry and the North Cody AIS check stations will be operated seven days a week from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday-Wednesday and from 7:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. Thursday-Sunday.” If an inspection is needed outside of these operating hours, contact the Cody Regional Game and Fish office at 307-527-7125 or Greg Mayton at 307-254-3554.

*AIS Technician Paul Cross inspects a boat at the Frannie check station.*



## Medicine Lodge Creek to receive improvements

A section of Medicine Lodge Creek near Hyattville received some much needed improvements this summer to address bank erosion, improve aquatic habitat and provide fish passage at two irrigation diversions on the creek.

Aquatic Habitat Biologist Laura Burckhardt said the project involved nearly a mile of stream from the Medicine Lodge State Archeological Site Headquarters downstream to the end of Medicine Lodge Wildlife Habitat Management Area.

“This section of Medicine Lodge Creek has experienced significant bank erosion and channel movement over the last 40 years,” Burckhardt said. “The channel before the project was wide and shallow with steep eroding banks and very little fish habitat. In addition, the upstream diversion was a complete fish passage barrier which means that fish could not get to all the pools and other habitats they need to thrive.”

Burckhardt continues, “In 2016, we measured up to 120 feet of channel movement and bank erosion. This unnatural rate of channel movement and bank erosion resulted in 2,458 tons, or 122 dump truck loads of sediment being removed from public lands. A natural rate of channel movement should be measured in inches not feet.”

In coordination with Wyoming State Parks, Trails and Historic Sites and private users of the irrigation diversions, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department repaired the channel degradation across this section of stream. “By replacing the bridge, improving the irrigation diversions, and restoring the channel dimensions across the entire reach, we will have a long-term solution to the channel instabilities and degradation. The project will greatly reduce a nonpoint sediment and E.coli source, will provide improved riparian function and fisheries habitat and it will provide an outstanding fishing access area for the public including children and handicapped individuals,” Burckhardt said.

Construction is started in August and continued into November. Users of the state park got a first hand view of the project as heavy equipment rebuilt the stream channel. Portions of two camp sites were temporarily closed for short periods to allow for construction access. After construction was completed, fish quickly took advantage of the new holding habitat and ability to swim upstream of the state park to spawn.

“Without this reach-wide restoration, Medicine Lodge Creek would have continued to erode its way across the valley at a rate of seven to 20 feet per year. The stream channel restoration that occurred in 2017 will stabilize the stream and prevent these large erosion events. This land has high recreational, wildlife habitat, and agricultural value. Preventing the stream from eroding this property in the years to come will greatly benefit all of these uses,” Burckhardt said.



*Eroding banks of Medicine Lodge Creek prior to the 2017 realignment.*



Funding partners for this project include the East Yellowstone Chapter of Trout Unlimited, Paint Rock Canyon Enterprises, Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Wyoming State Parks Historic Sites and Trails, Wyoming Wildlife Natural Resource Trust Fund, and WY Department of Environmental Quality.

*A section of the newly constructed stream channel of Medicine Lodge Creek.*

## Game and Fish dedicated to ensuring sustainability of trout fishery in Buffalo Bill Reservoir and the North Fork

Buffalo Bill Reservoir, located approximately 10 miles west of Cody, is one of the most unique and important standing water fisheries in the Bighorn Basin. Unlike other reservoirs in Wyoming, Buffalo Bill is not stocked with hatchery fish. "The fact that Buffalo Bill Reservoir is not stocked is extraordinary," said Cody Region Fisheries Biologist Jason Burckhardt. "In fact, it is the only self-sustaining, wild trout reservoir that exists in Wyoming."

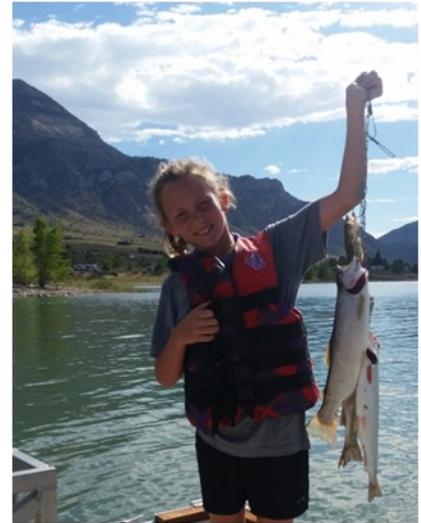
But there is much more to the story than just a quality wild trout reservoir fishery. Each spring, adult rainbow trout, Yellowstone cutthroat trout and their hybrids (cutbows) run up the North Fork Shoshone River and tributaries to spawn. This spawning run is well known to anglers near and far; thousands of anglers descend on the North Fork and its tributaries each summer to fish for the migratory trout.

With the illegal introduction of walleye in the reservoir in the early 2000's, this trout fishery and the unique angling opportunities it offers are threatened. Efforts are currently underway to ensure the sustainability of this incredible trout fishery for future generations.

During the summer of 2008, anglers began catching walleye in Buffalo Bill Reservoir and Game and Fish confirmed that walleye had been illegally introduced. "Walleye and trout living together in a reservoir, more often than not, leads to a decline in the trout population," Burckhardt said. "In these situations trout are often the primary forage base for walleye and as the walleye population expands, the trout population declines. In the end, managing for a quality fishery for either species is difficult."

Given the popularity with anglers and the uniqueness of this trout fishery, Game and Fish is remiss to let the situation play out unchecked. "We wanted to approach this situation in a thoughtful and coordinated fashion," Burckhardt said. "So we came up with a game plan based on experiences of other professional fish managers grappling with similar challenges."

Game and Fish had to answer two looming questions in order to determine how the illegal introduction of walleye could influence the trout population. The first was a food web study to determine lake trout and walleye consumption rates on trout. "This food web study was essentially a 'who's eating whom' investigation where we determined the diets of all predatory fish in the reservoir," Burckhardt said. "What we found was that trout, specifically juvenile trout, comprise a majority of a walleye's diet. This research confirmed what we had feared; that the introduced walleye had the potential to significantly impact the Buffalo Bill trout fishery, especially if that population continued to grow.



*Gracie Osterland with a stringer of trout at Buffalo Bill Reservoir.*



*Buffalo Bill Reservoir is a self-sustaining, wild trout reservoir located west of Cody.*



*A Buffalo Bill Reservoir cutthroat*

percent of the tagged fish which was a bit surprising given the fairly low abundance of walleye in the Reservoir.” Burckhardt said.

“Now that we had these key pieces of information, the final question was how many walleye could we remove with the tools we have available,” Burckhardt said. In the spring of 2017, when the walleye were congregating during spawning, Game and Fish used electrofishing and gillnetting to remove as many walleye as possible to determine if it is feasible to keep the walleye population low enough to prevent it from growing to the point that it may affect the Buffalo Bill Reservoir trout fishery. Over the course of three weeks a little over 800 walleye were removed from Buffalo Bill. While the field work is completed, the analysis of the data will continue through the 2018 winter.

The second series of questions that Game and Fish had to answer was how many walleye are in Buffalo Bill, how many are being harvested by anglers, and what would it take in terms of removal efforts to keep the walleye population from expanding. Beginning in 2016, in collaboration with researchers from Montana State University and Game and Fish began investigating the feasibility of suppressing walleye in Buffalo Bill Reservoir in order to sustain the trout fishery.

To estimate abundance of walleye and angler exploitation rates, Game and Fish tagged approximately 500 walleye in the spring of 2016 with reward tags. “We determined that the Buffalo Bill Reservoir walleye population was smaller than we anticipated, with only a few thousand sexually mature fish in the entire reservoir. We also determined that anglers harvested approximately forty

#### A brief history: Stocking Buffalo Bill Reservoir

- Buffalo Bill Reservoir was constructed in 1910 at the confluence of two major tributaries, the North and South Fork Shoshone Rivers.
- A variety of trout were stocked soon after the dam’s closure including rainbow trout, lake trout, and Yellowstone cutthroat trout.
- Rainbow trout were last stocked in 1949; lake trout in 1955.
- From 1955 through 1995, Yellowstone cutthroat trout were stocked.
- All stocking was discontinued in 1995 when it was determined that stocked fish were not substantially contributing to the fishery and that natural reproducing “wild” trout could support the fishery.

## What's going on with Renner Reservoir?

Renner Reservoir, located south of Hyattville, is an aquatic oasis in the otherwise dry, desert-like landscape of the Big Horn Basin. The carved red sandstone canyons on the Renner Wildlife Management Area are lined with juniper and sagebrush which creates a scenic backdrop to this small 70-acre reservoir. Historically, Renner produced quality largemouth bass fishing and was popular with local and traveling anglers alike. In 2014, the bass fishery was lost following a near complete winter-kill and Game and Fish is pulling out all the tools in the toolbox to bring this fishery back.

Cody Region Fisheries Biologist Joe Skorupski said, "While the loss of the bass fishery in 2014 was a shame, it presented us with an opportunity to address some key limitations that we had been struggling to manage over the last decade."

During the late 2000's, Renner had become overrun with stunted sunfish and bass. "Essentially, the predominantly shallow habitat and warm water of Renner provided near optimal spawning conditions for sunfish and bass," Skorupski said. "Growing quality bass in a relatively shallow water body filled with stunted sunfish is incredibly difficult. While lots of little sunfish for bass to eat may seem good, a small fish is a lower quality food resource than a bigger fish. Bass have to work extra hard pursuing small fish to achieve the same caloric value as a larger sunfish, which slows and limits their growth."

Following numerous conversations with members of the public and a public meeting in Worland, Game and Fish decided to breach the dam and drain the reservoir in July 2016. "By draining the reservoir, we were able to remove the stunted sunfish population," Skorupski said.

In November of 2017, the Cody Region Habitat and Access crew did some dirt work to create a few deeper water areas. While the amount of habitat improvement was limited due to difficulty in driving heavy equipment in the still wet mud, the improvements made should afford some additional overwintering areas for fish. "Unfortunately, natural springs present in the reservoir kept the sediment pretty wet so access with equipment was limited to just a few areas of the reservoir," said Cody Region Habitat and Access Supervisor Brad Sorensen.

The dam will be repaired and reinforced, and the outlet structure replaced once final engineered designs are approved by the Wyoming State Engineers Office. Game and Fish is hopeful that final designs will be approved by spring, 2018.

"We acknowledge that the time lost at Renner has been hard for some anglers. In the end, this plan is the best course of action to get a quality bass fishery back in Renner," Skorupski said.



*Renner Reservoir, located south of Hyattville, was drained to remove the stunted sunfish population and dig out sediment to increase water depths as part of ongoing efforts to improve the fishery for the future.*



*Cody Habitat and Access Supervisor Brad Sorensen (left) and Fish Biologist Joe Skorupski (right) inspect the newly constructed, vertical inlet pipe. This design will improve aeration of the water that feeds Renner Reservoir.*

## Tiger Muskie Stocked in Beck Lake



In September, tiger muskie were stocked at low densities in Beck Lake near Cody. Cody Region Fisheries Supervisor Sam Hochhalter said, "Tiger muskie, a reproductively sterile hybrid fish, were stocked into Beck Lake on a trial basis to see if they can capitalize on the abundant perch and crappie populations. Game and Fish will be closely monitoring their survival and growth, along with the response of the other fish populations in the lake over the coming years."

## Local, state, and federal partners work to operate Willwood Dam and protect the Shoshone River fishery

An interagency group composed of the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality – Water Quality Division (WDEQ-WQD), the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD), the Willwood Irrigation District, the United States Bureau of Reclamation, the Wyoming Water Development Office, the State Engineer's Office, and others have been working on developing a plan to allow for the operation of Willwood Dam while also protecting the downstream Shoshone River fishery.

This group is advising the public that they may notice slightly higher turbidity in the Shoshone River downstream of Willwood Dam between October 16 and October 31 as the water level behind the dam is lowered in preparation for winter. Lowering the water level is necessary to prevent the dam and other infrastructure from freezing, but will be done in a manner that will minimize impacts to the downstream fishery.



*The Shoshone River, downstream of Willwood Dam.*

This is part of a larger effort that has taken place since October/November 2016, when a large amount of sediment was released from behind Willwood Dam while maintenance work was being completed. In response to that event, WDEQ-WQD, WGFD, Willwood Irrigation District, and other partners formed three work groups tasked with 1) restoring aquatic life and habitat damaged by the sediment release; 2) evaluating alternatives for long-term management of the dam while also protecting downstream aquatic life; and 3) addressing sources of sediment upstream of Willwood Dam. Work thus far includes the following:

**Trash Clean Up and Flushing Flow:** On March 18 of this year, approximately 80 people from WGFD, WDEQ/WQD, Willwood Irrigation District, the Bureau of Reclamation, Cody-Powell Conservation Districts, Trout Unlimited, Cody High School Outdoor Club, Future Farmers of America, and the Greater Yellowstone Coalition joined forces to pick up trash and debris that was released with the sediment in the Willwood area.

Between April 3 and April 14 of this year, the Bureau of Reclamation assisted the effort through a request from the WGFD for a flushing flow of the Shoshone River by increasing the release of water from Buffalo Bill Dam from 2,000 cfs to 4,000 cfs. The purpose of the flushing flow was to remove fine sediment that had been deposited during the 2016 release and improve habitat for fish. In addition to the flushing flow, the Shoshone River also received natural flows of 6,000 cfs for several weeks, which was five times higher than typical summer flows. Evaluations of the habitat downstream indicate the flushing flow in combination with the high spring and summer flows removed nearly all of the sediment from the Shoshone River channel that was deposited in the 2016 release.

### Continued from previous page

**Evaluation of Fishery:** The WGFD sampled the fish population downstream of Willwood Dam following the 2016 sediment release. A majority of the fish sampled in 2016 were brown trout less than 15 inches and rainbow and cutthroat trout less than 12 inches. The rainbow and cutthroat trout had been stocked prior to the sediment release. There were an estimated 442 trout per mile and 310 pounds of trout per mile in the Shoshone River following the 2016 release. This was down slightly from the estimated 478 trout per mile and 385 pounds of trout per mile estimated in 2013. Though it is difficult to quantify the direct loss of trout due to the release of sediment from Willwood Dam in 2016, the data suggest the sediment release led to a small reduction in the trout population and biomass. Game and Fish plans to continue monitoring the fishery to determine how the fishery is responding to management changes at Willwood Dam.

**Measuring Sediment Load and Water Quality:** To better understand the amount of sediment that passes through and potentially needs to be passed through Willwood Dam, WDEQ/WQD has contracted with the United States Geological Survey to conduct real-time monitoring of suspended sediment in the Shoshone River upstream and downstream of Willwood Dam. Turbidity, and eventually suspended sediment data, will be available at <https://nrtwq.usgs.gov/> when the equipment is installed. WDEQ/WQD also continues to monitor water quality of the Shoshone River both upstream and downstream of Willwood Dam.

**Addressing Upstream Sources of Sediment:** Powell Clarks Fork Conservation District and WDEQ/WQD are leading an effort to identify potential sediment sources upstream of Willwood Dam and plan voluntary best management practices to address sources that can be mitigated. Representatives from state, federal, and local agencies are participating as well as local landowners and farmers. This group hosted a field tour in June 2017 to help educate agency personnel and other stakeholders on watershed characteristics and sources of sediment, including natural/background sources.

For more information, contact David Waterstreet, [David.Waterstreet@wyo.gov](mailto:David.Waterstreet@wyo.gov) or 307-777-6709, at the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality or Jason Burckhardt, [Jason.Burckhardt@wyo.gov](mailto:Jason.Burckhardt@wyo.gov) or 307-527-7125 at the Wyoming Game and Fish Department.



*A crew works to clear debris from the banks of the Shoshone River downstream of Willwood Dam last March.*

## 4-H club assists with Bighorn River sampling



Fisheries Biologist Joe Skorupski pictured with 4-H members and volunteers during a Bighorn River sampling effort on Oct. 18. From left to right: Alyssa Halls, Simon Ream, Joe Skorupski, John Thurman, Eli McCumber, Carson Williams, John Maier, Hardy Johnson, and Dick Staiger.

In October, members of the Hot Springs County 4-H Sport Fishing Club had a unique opportunity to participate in a mark-recapture population estimate of trout in the Bighorn River.

Cody Region Fisheries Biologist Joe Skorupski said that populations of trout in the Bighorn River are estimated annually in mid-October using a mark-recapture method. "Over four consecutive days, Game and Fish crews electrofished the Bighorn River from Wedding of the Waters to the Eighth Street Bridge in Thermopolis. Each day, captured fish are marked, processed, and released," Skorupski said. "The ratio of marked to unmarked fish captured is later analyzed to determine trout abundance." For the second year in a row, 10 members of the Hot Springs County 4-H Sport Fishing Club, along with leaders Dick Staiger and Joel Farber and other volunteers, partici-

pated in the population estimate.

4-H members, volunteers and leaders floated in drift boats behind the electrofishing boats as the sampling was conducted. Throughout the day when crews stopped to process captured fish, 4-H members helped biologists determine species and collect weight and length of individual fish. "The kids had a great time and we appreciated having them along to help out," Skorupski said. "What a great hands-on opportunity for the students to learn about the fishery resource in their own backyards and to see what it's like to be a fisheries biologist for a day."

The Bighorn River is one of the most popular and heavily utilized fisheries in the Bighorn Basin.

"Based on what was sampled, trout in the Bighorn River continue to do well," Skorupski said. "We continue to see exceptional numbers and quality of both brown and rainbow trout."



(left) Fisheries Technician Mark Komoroski nets a fish during the 2017 Bighorn River sampling effort on Oct. 18 while Fisheries Biologist Joe Skorupski drives the boat. Crews sampled a stretch of the Bighorn River from Wedding of the Waters downstream to the 8th Street Bridge. (right) Fisheries Biologist Joe Skorupski explains how to tell the difference between a sauger and a walleye.



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## Important Dates to Remember in 2018

- June 2, 2018— **Kids Fishing Day (Afton and Jackson) and Wyoming's Free Fishing Day**  
The Wyoming Game and Fish Commission has declared June 2, 2018 Free Fishing Day to coincide with the beginning of the National Fishing and Boating week. Residents and nonresidents may fish Wyoming waters (excluding Wind River Indian Reservation and Yellowstone National Park) without a fishing license or conservation stamp. Free Fishing Day will also coincide with Kids Fishing Day in Cody. Details on the event will be released in May.
- July into October, 2018—**Sunlight Creek Stream Restoration** Game and Fish has hired contractors to realign the Sunlight Creek stream channel upstream of the Game and Fish Commission owned land. This work will alleviate the nearly 40 years of unnatural bank erosion that has occurred in this section of stream.
- March 1—November 30—**Aquatic Invasive Species Boat Inspections** All watercraft transported into the state from March 1 through November 30 are required to undergo a mandatory inspection by an authorized inspector prior to launching. A list of authorized inspectors can be found on the Game and Fish website on the AIS page.
- August 11—**North Platte Walleyes Unlimited Kids Fishing Event** Join the North Platte Walleyes Unlimited, Buffalo Bill State Park, and Game and Fish for a day of fishing fun on Buffalo Bill Reservoir. Kids will have the opportunity to fish the reservoir, learn how to clean and cook their catch, and learn how to build lures.

We welcome all questions and comments on this newsletter or about the fisheries resources within the Cody Region. Please feel free to give us a call at 307 527-7125 or send an email to:

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