

Douglas Creek: A totally connected stream

So tell me: Where would you be if you were fishing Nugget Gulch, Lake, Camp, Beaver, and Horse creeks on the same afternoon? Odds are, you've never fished any of these obscure streams. You won't find big fish, lots of fish, or important native fish species in any of these waters, which might lead you to wonder why the state has instream flow rights on them. But they're all critically important fisheries.

These streams are tributaries to Douglas Creek (located high in the Snowy Range Mountains west of Laramie). Douglas Creek is a popular fishing and camping destination that flows into the North Platte River south of Encampment, and draws a large share of the water flowing in its channel from these and other small tributaries. Shut off the flow from any one of these streams and Douglas Creek would no longer be the fascinating fly-fishing stream sought by many anglers in southeastern Wyoming. The water from these streams not only supports a healthy trout population, it also helps maintain spawning habitat for the brown and rainbow trout that migrate from far away in the North Platte River into Douglas Creek. Some brown trout travel 50 miles or farther to reach spawning riffles. These spawning runs not only make for great angling for big fish, but the offspring that hatch in the clean gravels of Douglas Creek help

THE INSTREAM FLOW

Permit Number: Douglas Creek: 65IF.

Priority Date: June 21, 1991.

Quantity: A year-round flow of 5.5 cfs.

Land ownership: This segment is located entirely within Medicine Bow National Forest.

Location and length: This segment is 22.3 miles long extending upstream from its confluence with the North Platte River in section six of Township 13 North, Range 80 West.

Rationale: Douglas Creek is an important tributary to the North Platte River in terms of providing spawning habitat and recruitment of young fish to maintain this blue ribbon trout fishery. Douglas Creek is also a popular place for anglers throughout the year when road conditions permit access. The recommended instream flow level was secured to maintain nominal base flows at all times of year. Embracing the amount of water required by the U.S. Forest Service as a state-owned water right was a way to assert state authority over the protection of base flows and provide an extra measure of assurance that water will flow in Douglas Creek whenever rainfall and snowpack conditions permit.

Status of the filing: A public hearing was held in Saratoga by the State Engineer's Office on October 12, 1993. The application was approved by the State Engineer on February 28, 2007. The final step in securing a water right is called adjudication but this water right has not yet received this designation from the Board of Control.

BECOME AN X-STREAM ANGLER

- Choose "Click Here for X-Stream Angler Information" at wgfd.wyo.gov/InstreamFlow.
- Use the interactive map to read about instream flows and find instream flow segments.
- Go fish in three instream flow segments (seven for Master X-Stream Angler status).
- Take a picture of yourself next to each segment you fish (you need not catch a fish).
- Fill out the downloadable application and send it, with your photos, to: Wyoming Game and Fish Department, X-Stream Angler Program, 5400 Bishop Blvd., Cheyenne, WY 82006.
- Get an X-Stream Angler hat that recognizes your accomplishment.

support the outstanding wild trout fishery in the North Platte.

Though relatively remote, the streams also play an important role in providing water to the city of Cheyenne. Water was first captured from these streams and piped to Cheyenne in 1965 and diversions were expanded in 1982. To make sure the streams continue their important natural functions, U.S. Forest Service special-use permits required the city to leave enough flow in each stream to protect the fisheries. These federal protections were ultimately embraced as state-owned instream flow water rights to afford more direct control over the water left for fisheries. Douglas Creek serves a prime example of how all streams are the sum of their parts. Disconnect any of the pieces—either the water flowing down or fish swimming up—and anglers would realize only a fraction of the stream's fishery potential.

THE FISHERY

Anglers can find rainbow, brown, and brook trout in Douglas Creek. Resident fish tend to be smaller (up to about 12 inches), but large browns ascend the stream from the North Platte in the fall (October) to spawn. In the spring during their spawning period, migrating rainbow trout likely concentrate in the stream, but angler access is typically blocked by deep snow. During the summer, dry flies and nymphs work well, but larger spawning browns are often vulnerable to a variety of streamers.

Current fishing regulations allow anglers to catch and keep three trout (any species), no more than one of which may be over 16 inch-

es. However, regulations allow anglers to keep 16 brook trout (in addition to the limit for rainbows and browns) from Douglas Creek, which is certainly possible in the headwaters above Rob Roy Reservoir. Always consult the current fishing regulations before fishing any water.

HOW TO GET THERE

Leaving Laramie, travel west on Wyoming Route 130 for 17 miles to where state Route 11 branches off toward Albany on the edge of the Medicine Bow National Forest. Leaving Albany, the road becomes Forest Service Road 500. Continue on this road about two miles and then take Forest Service Road 542 that branches off to the left. Turn right (north) in four-and-a-half miles where this road forms a T-shaped intersection with Forest Service Road 543 and go about one-and-a-half miles to where Forest Service Road 511 branches to the left: Take that road. In another two miles Forest Service Road 511 turns sharply right (north) and the road straight ahead is Forest Service Road 512. You'll take Forest Service Road 512 and stay on it another eight miles until it leads down to the North Platte River. Consult the U.S. Forest Service road map for the Medicine Bow National Forest to find other places upstream from the mouth.

For information about the instream flow rights on Nugget Gulch, Lake, Camp, Beaver, and Horse creeks or to learn more about instream flow on Douglas Creek or other instream flow segments in the state, visit the Game and Fish Department's web page at: wgfd.wyo.gov/InstreamFlow.

PHOTO COURTESY OF AL LANGSTON



Douglas Creek was one of the seven instream flow segments fished by Master X-Stream Angler Al Langston (who also writes "Fly-tying Vise," page 14).