

## Treasure has changed on Encampment

In 1897, people were piling into the communities of Encampment and Riverside. Seemingly rich veins of copper and gold had been discovered, and there was wide speculation that the fabled El Dorado had at last been found. Within a short time, investors built a 16-mile-long aerial tram to carry ore from the mountains to a smelter outside town. By 1908, the frenzy was over.

Miners bent on instant fortune weren't the only ones living and working along the Encampment River. Railroads were expanding about the same time, and between 1868 and 1940, an estimated half-million railroad ties, hacked from trees on the forested mountain, were floated downriver to aid in their construction. Like all of the many tie-driven streams in the state, this practice significantly impacted fish habitat. Even today, the Encampment River has more shallow riffles and fewer deep plunge pools than you find in similar-sized streams that escaped the scouring effects of tie drives. Though full recovery is still decades away, most anglers find the stream and fishery a wild and incredibly scenic resource full of its own brand of treasure.

### The Fishery

Except during snow-melt runoff that extends from mid-May through early July, the water in the Encampment is remarkably clear and cool. Near the bottom end of the instream flow reach (about a mile south and west of the town of Encampment), the fishery is dominated by brown trout, some of which can exceed 18 inches. Farther upstream, the river produces more rainbow trout; and even higher, brook trout make up a significant part of the fish in the stream. No hatchery fish are stocked here, as the amount of flow and quality of gravels in riffles is adequate to provide all the fish needed to meet angler expectations.

A variety of dry flies work well in late summer and fall as do bead-head nymphs. Because the water is generally cooler in this stream than in other streams that are more open to sunlight, fishing can extend almost all day in the summer.

Though the specific fly pattern can change from day to day, general attractors like elk-hair caddis, Adams and humpies are usually good patterns to start with. Statewide regulations apply that allow anglers to keep six fish a day, only one of which may be longer than 20 inches. As with many of the most popular streams in the state, a majority of all the trout caught in the Encampment find themselves back in the river at the end of their fight—voluntarily released by anglers.

### How to Get There

About one mile west of Encampment along Wyoming Highway 70, a sign directs you to turn left onto Forest Service Road 3407. There is a BLM campground along the Encampment River at the end of this road. At the far (south) end of the campground, there is a sturdy footbridge that leads to the Encampment River trail. The trail parallels the river for nearly 16 miles through BLM land, national forest and into the Encampment River Wilderness. The trail terminates at Commissary Park on the Wyoming-Colorado line. About two miles up the trail, a submerged concrete structure is all that's left of the Pipeline Dam, a remnant of the area's mining days.

Another popular access point can be reached by traveling about four and a half miles west from Encampment on Highway 70 to Forest Road 550. Take this gravel road south to an access point about two miles past Hog Park Reservoir, or hike down Hog Park Creek to the Encampment.

### The Instream Flow

**Permit Number:** Temporary filing 26-5/399

**Priority Date:** August 4, 1989

**Status of the filing:** A public hearing was held in the Saratoga Library on September 27, 1991. The state Engineer has not yet issued (approved) the water right, and as a consequence, the Board of Control has not adjudicated the water right.

**Quantity:** 54 cubic feet per second (cfs) year round

**Location and length:** The approximately 13.6-mile-long reach extends downstream from the mouth of Hog Park Creek to the downstream boundary of BLM-administered lands about a mile south and west of the town of Encampment.

**Landownership:** With the exception of two small segments of stream within the segment, all of the lands through which the instream flow segment pass are owned and administered by the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management. Public access is not provided to the private lands as a function of the instream flow right.

**Rationale:** The amount of water filed for was based on detailed studies done by the department in 1981. The primary purposes of the filing were to 1) maintain adequate spawning habitat for rainbow and brown trout, 2) ensure adequate winter habitat for all life stages of trout and 3) provide enough water in the summer to maintain existing levels of productivity for adult and juvenile trout of all species.

**Related details:** After subtracting potential demands of all other existing water rights, whether or not they are actively used, a Water Development Commission feasibility study found that the recommended instream flow amounts were naturally available on average 100 percent of the time from April through October. The requested flow slightly exceeds the natural average flow in winter months. This filing does not protect channel maintenance flow levels that will sustain long-term physical habitat characteristics, nor are recommendations adequate to flush sediment from the gravel. At present, natural flow patterns are adequate to provide these functions, but the proposed instream flow water right would not prevent the diversion of those higher flows.



Though the area was hard-hit by copper and gold miners in the late 1900s and the bed was scoured by railroad ties in later years, the Encampment River is still a wild and scenic place to drop a line. *Photo by Tom Annear*

To get more information about instream flow, visit the Wyoming Game and Fish Department's Web site at <http://gf.state.wy.us/fish/instreamflow>