

# A look back—and what's ahead

Quick—name one state fish and game agency in the United States where you can fish a handful of streams and get a hat. If you said “Wyoming” you’re right. Wyoming is the only state in the entire country that offers a program that encourages people to discover important streams and rewards their efforts with high quality, U.S.-made baseball caps.

The X-Stream Angler program encourages anglers to discover where instream flow segments are and why they’re important. Several years in the making, it’s intended to increase public awareness of and support for places that have instream flow water rights.

Instream flow water rights are designed to maintain and improve fisheries. They are just like any other water right except they allow scientifically determined quantities of water to stay in the stream channel for fisheries. Keeping a little water in streams all the time seems like a logical thing to most folks, but in the West you need a water right to use water

for any purpose. It wasn’t until 1986 that it was legal in Wyoming to get a water right that could protect even a drop of water in streams for fish. According to the law passed that year, only the state can own an instream flow right. In the ensuing years, the Water Development Commission has filed applications for 130 such rights in cooperation with the State Engineer’s Office and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department.

Public attitudes toward instream flow rights have changed a lot during the past quarter century, but there’s still a need to help people better understand this complex subject. Game and Fish has long recognized the importance of public education when it comes to helping the public better understand the challenges of fish and wildlife management. That’s especially true with a subject as complex as instream flow.

In July 2012 Game and Fish launched the X-Stream Angler program. In exchange

for fishing just three instream flow segments and filing an application, Game and Fish recognizes fishermen and fisherwomen as X-Stream Anglers. If they fish seven instream flow segments, they get recognized as a Master X-Stream Angler ... and receive a hat with the program logo that recognizes their accomplishment.

The portal to this program is a section of the Game and Fish website with articles and reports we’ve written on instream flow over the years. The first step in becoming an X-Stream Angler is to visit this site to identify streams they want to fish—and learn more about the streams.

One of the first applications Game and Fish received after launching the program was from Steve Perry—all the way from Mason City, Iowa. Perry has made annual fishing trips to Wyoming for many years but when he learned about the X-Stream Angler program he decided to give it a try. Turns out, he did everything right.

Perry followed the banner on the Game and Fish webpage to the instream flow page ([wgfd.wyo.gov/InstreamFlow](http://wgfd.wyo.gov/InstreamFlow)), read articles about several instream flow segments, picked some streams he wanted to fish, used the interactive map to find out where they are and then planned his trip. Perry learned he’d already been fishing several instream flow segments; but also he discovered several more that he had no idea were good fishing spots, let alone instream flow segments. Perry was like a kid in a candy store. He fished more streams than he needed to become a Master X-Stream Angler—a total of eight. He took pictures of himself at each stream, filled out the application and mailed it along with a detailed letter describing his trip and relaying what a great time he had. In his words:

“The Middle Fork of the Powder River canyon is my favorite to fish ... It was lower than I had seen it in the past which made crossing the stream easier but I caught fewer numbers of fish... Seeing this stream and others like the Tongue below Dayton or Shell below the forest boundary makes me appreciate the instream flow protection.”

Discovering new places to fish, learning about instream flow rights, and appreciating the work the state has invested to ensure there will always be places that we, our kids, and visitors from across the country can find high-quality fishing is what the program is all about. It’s not too early for you to begin your own quest to become an X-Stream Angler. Whether you’re a first time angler or have fished your entire life, this program is your opportunity to get fishing, get a hat, and just maybe make a difference in future fishing opportunities in the state. It’s easy to think this program is simply about having a good time in our great state and getting baseball hats, but the opportunity is there for you to do more. If this program helps convey a better understanding and appreciation of instream flow rights and leads you to voice support for continuation or expansion of instream flow, that’s the real benefit.



The Middle Fork of the Powder River



Sand Creek



Medicine Lodge Creek