

New Fork River: Great fishing on an historic stream

In 1858, travelers heading west on the Oregon Trail couldn't wait to get to the New Fork River near Pinedale. The crossing there was about halfway along their journey to the West Coast, but more importantly offered a needed respite on the heels of an 18-mile waterless stretch of trail from South Pass. The crossing was one of the more difficult ones along the entire trail but well worth the risk considering this new route along the Oregon Trail shaved a week's travel across dusty desert and bypassed expensive ferry fees at the Green River crossing to the south. The new shortcut, known as the Lander cutoff, had just been built by Frederick Lander and was the first federally funded road in the western U.S. The cutoff improved travel for more than 256 miles of trail from Burnt Ranch near South Pass, Wyo., to Fort Hall, Idaho.

Today, the land along this portion of the Oregon Trail and the New Fork River is far from the barren, uninhabited expanse it was in the mid-1800s. Extensive oil and gas resources have been discovered here that lead to development of drilling platforms, pipelines and roads. In some areas, development has compromised the visual and physical remnants of the Oregon Trail. To mitigate the impacts of development, the Sublette County Historical Society, major oil companies and others recently joined to preserve a portion of Lander's legacy trail by acquiring and developing an 82-acre site at the historic New Fork River crossing for public use. The site was opened in 2011.

Much like their emigrant predecessors, fishermen today experience a special excitement when reaching the New Fork. Modern visitors' sentiments aren't grounded in survival, but the solace and world-class fishing provide valuable respite from the pressures and demands of busy schedules and heavy workloads. There are lots of streams that offer excellent fishing in Wyoming but the New Fork is near the top of streams that are easy to get to, easy to fish from bank or

THE INSTREAM FLOW

Permit Number: 71F

Priority Date: Feb. 10, 1989

Quantity: The instream flow water right application requested 95 cubic feet per second (cfs) from Oct. 1 through March 31 to maintain habitat for brown trout spawning and over-winter survival; 95 cfs from April 1 through June 30 to maintain habitat for rainbow trout spawning, and 135 cfs from July 1 through Sept. 30 to maintain trout production at existing levels.

Land ownership: The lands through which this segment passes are Wyoming State Trust lands administered by the Wyoming Office of State Lands and Investments.

Location and length: 1.5 miles

Status of the filing: A public hearing was held in Pinedale by the State Engineer's Office on Aug. 7, 1990. Consistent with Wyoming water law, the State Engineer determined that the application would not injure any other water right and approved the right on Jan. 7, 1992. The water right was adjudicated by the Board of Control on Aug. 14, 2009 for the full amount of water recommended.

MARK GOCKE / WYOMING GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT



The New Fork instream flow segment is easily fished by boat or bank and offers some of the best brown trout fishing in the state.

HOW TO BECOME AN X-STREAM ANGLER

- Go to the X-Stream Angler page on the WGF website.
- Read about instream flows and find instream flow segments on the interactive map.
- Go fish in 3 instream flow segments (7 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 on-line application and send it with your photos to the address on the application form.
- Get a cool hat with the X-Stream Angler logo that recognizes your accomplishment!

boat, and played an important role in the settling of the American West.

THE FISHERY

The New Fork is one of the more productive trout streams in the state with a reputation for yielding large brown trout up to 7 pounds and good numbers of hefty rainbow trout. Though trout over 4 pounds are rare, it's not uncommon to catch a number of fish over 20 inches long in a good day. The best way to fish the New Fork is by boat, although the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) has recently acquired public walking access to over more than a mile of the stream near Pinedale (see below).

Fishing regulations allow anglers to keep three trout (any species), no more than one of which may be longer than 16 inches. Artificial flies and lures are required downstream from Mesa Road (outside of the instream flow segment). Check current fishing regulations before fishing any water.

HOW TO GET THERE:

WGFD has recently developed public access at three locations on the New Fork River consisting of the Airport Public Access Area (PAA), the East Fork Confluence PAA

south of Boulder, and the Remmick PAA upstream from the Wyoming Route 351 bridge. The Airport PAA provides direct access to the instream flow segment. To visit this area, take U.S. Highway 191 approximately four miles south of Pinedale, turn right on Runway Lane and follow the signs through the gravel operation to the parking lot. Drivers are asked to please drive slowly through the gravel pit area being respectful to those working at the site. Walking access is available throughout this segment.

To visit the New Fork River Crossing, go 11 miles west on Wyoming Route 351 from its intersection with U.S. Highway 191. A quarter mile after crossing the New Fork River, turn right onto Sublette County Road 136 (Paradise Road) and head north. In about a mile on your right (east) you'll come to Lander Wagon Road and the New Fork River Crossing.

For more information on the New Fork Crossing historic site, visit: pinedaleonline.com/news/2010/09/Agreementspavetheway.htm.

For information about this and other instream flow segments in the state, visit WGFD's website at: wgfd.wyo.gov/InstreamFlow.