

# Rock Creek is a wild fishery

In the late 1800s, tie drives were one of the main ways to transport ties to railroad construction sites in Wyoming and other Western states. In many situations, tie hacks (men who cut and crafted the ties) worked in the mountains where they harvested trees and stacked large numbers of finished ties adjacent to streams. They often built small impoundments that they piled the ties on, and then blew out the dam with dynamite to send a surge of water and ties downstream to collection sites. This business was an important step in the settlement of Wyoming, but it came at the price of scoured-out stream channels and greatly impacted trout habitat. Rock Creek was one of many streams that experienced tie drives, and if you look closely, you can still see evidence of that activity by the relative lack of large pools and boulders in this fast-running stream near Arlington.

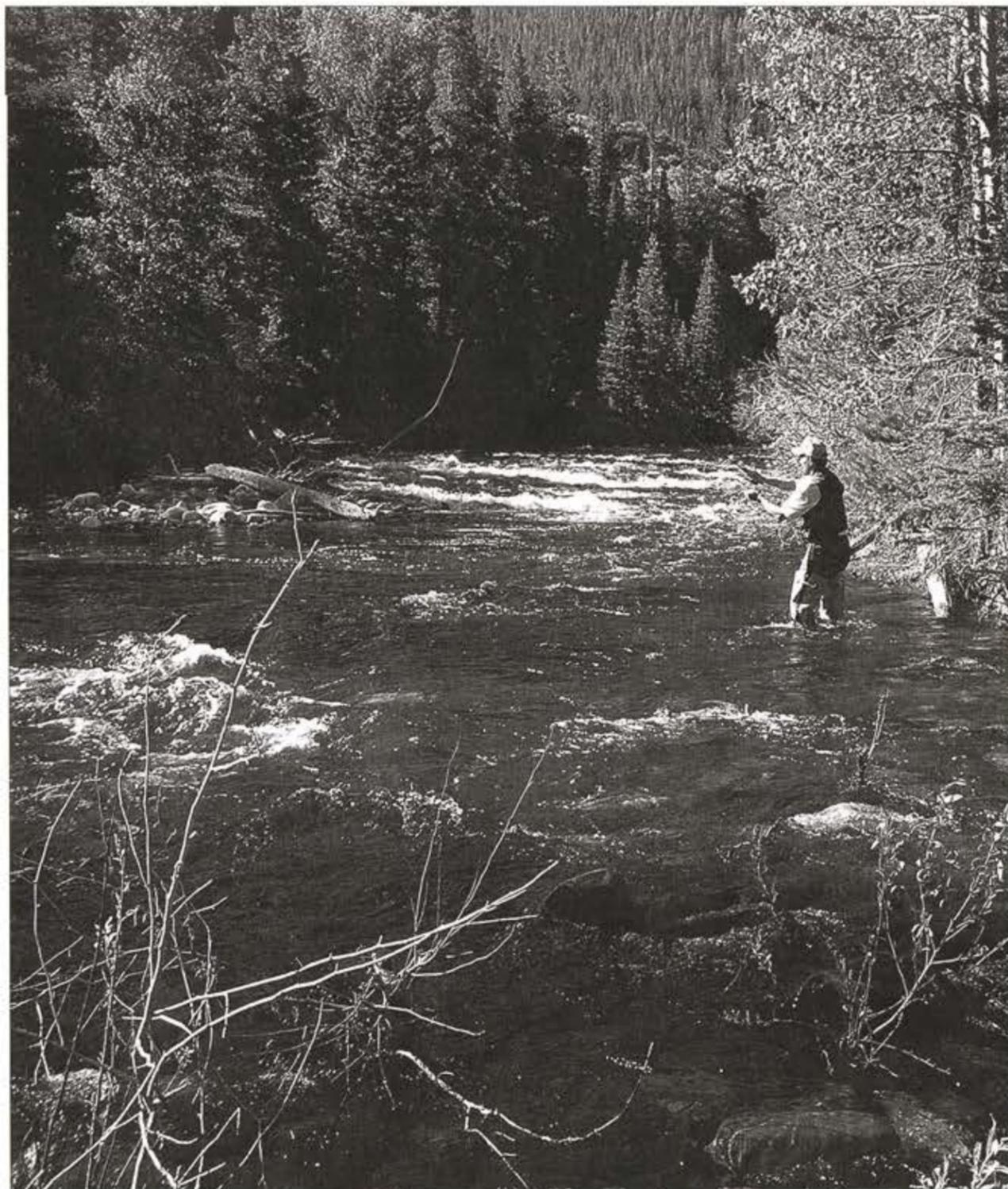
## The Fishery

The fishery within the instream flow water segment changes somewhat over its length. Rainbow trout dominate throughout the lower end of the segment, though a few brown trout can be found there, too. The relative lack of deep pools in combination with fast flow keeps most of the trout here from getting

very big. The majority of rainbows are less than 12 inches long, though the ardent angler can occasionally encounter fish 16 inches and bigger. Further upstream, brook trout become part of the mix. The entire length of stream within the instream flow segment is managed as a wild fishery, which means all of the fish found here were born and raised in Rock Creek or its tributaries.

## How to get there

If you've ever driven across Wyoming on Interstate 80, you've crossed right over this stream at the town of Arlington, which is found between Laramie and Rawlins. To get to the instream flow segment, turn off the interstate at the Arlington exit. About 100 yards south of the interstate, turn right (west) on a gravel road and then take the next left (about ¼ mile). This good dirt road passes up the canyon until it dead-ends at the Rock Creek trailhead. This trail parallels the stream all the way up to Sand Lake and is a popular place for day hikers and anglers. There are numerous places to jump down to the stream and check out the fishing. Normal statewide fishing regulations apply to the stream.



Rock Creek is managed as a wild fishery, which means the rainbow and brook trout found here were also born here. *Photo by Tom Annear*

## The Instream Flow

**Permit Number:** Temporary Filing 33. A permanent water right permit number will be assigned if and when the state engineer approves this water right.

**Priority Date:** June 16, 2006.

**Status of the filing:** This water right application was the 100th application submitted for an instream flow water right by the Game and Fish Commission. The Water Development Commission has completed the statutorily required report on the feasibility of the filing. The required public hearing has not yet been held, nor has one been scheduled at this time. As a consequence, even though this proposed instream flow water right has a priority date, the state engineer has not issued the actual water right.

**Quantity:** Based on a site-specific study by Game and Fish biologists, variable flows were recommended from October through April that approximate the existing natural flow. A flow of 60 cubic feet per second (cfs) was recommended for May and June. A flow of 21 cfs was recommended from July through Sept.

**Location and length:** The instream flow segment extends approximately 3.9 miles downstream from the mouth of Elk Creek to the downstream boundary of the state school section in Section 25, Township 19 North, Range 79 West.

**Land ownership:** The segment is located primarily on lands administered by the U.S. Forest Service, however the segment passes through a state school section at its lower end.

**Rationale:** This is a popular fishery with good public access. The primary fishery management purpose for filing this water right was to protect adequate amounts of water during different times of the year to maintain the existing excellent trout fishery. To achieve this purpose, adequate flows are needed to maintain spawning habitat for rainbow trout in the spring. Adequate flows are needed in late summer to maintain habitat for adult and juvenile fish in the stream. Studies have shown that the reduction or modification of winter flows can have very negative effects on all life stages of trout, so flow recommendations between October and April were designed to maintain existing natural stream flows during this period. As with the majority of instream flow filings, this action won't change anything about how the stream flows. It'll just make sure that enough water continues to flow downstream so future generations of anglers and river enthusiasts can experience the same level of enjoyment on this small stretch of stream that folks do today.

**Related details:** A study done by the Wyoming Water Development Commission indicated the average monthly flow in May and June is 232 and 466 cfs respectively. Average monthly flow in July is 115 cfs and in August flow is about 28 cfs. September flows approximate 20 cfs in most years. This filing does not protect channel maintenance flow levels that are necessary to sustain long-term physical habitat characteristics, nor are recommendations adequate to flush sediment from the gravel. At present, natural high flows serve this function, but the interpretation of the state's instream flow law does not afford the ability to legally protect the amount of water needed for this purpose.