

Take fishing to the X-Stream in Tensleep Creek

Tensleep Creek tumbles down the west slope of the Bighorn Mountains through one of the more spectacular canyons in the state. Its steep gradient, relatively large volume of water and proximity to a state highway made it a prime candidate for a hydroelectric generating facility in the early 1980s. Had it been built, the project would have diverted water high on the mountain, run it through a pipe to a powerhouse at the lower end of the canyon and produced electricity. It also could have affected flows in about six miles of one of the most productive trout streams in the state. Regional economics stalled the project by the early 1990s, and the power plant was never built.

The Fishery

Over the centuries, the relatively steep slope of the stream scoured most of the small bed material in the channel to points downstream, leaving an impressive array of large rocks and huge boulders. Below the many mini-waterfalls and plunges lie deep, dark pools inhabited by large numbers of rainbow trout. You'll find some brown trout in the mix, too.

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department

quit stocking the stream years ago when studies showed the fishery could sustain itself entirely with wild-spawned fish (more than 3,000 trout per mile).

Except in places where the highway crosses over the stream, it's a stiff hike down to the water, but once you get there you'll typically enjoy some of the finest fishing in the state with little chance of encountering another angler the entire day.

The deep pools and swift water make fly fishing a challenge in places, but bead head nymphs are effective, as are spinners. The statewide angling limit of six fish, only one of which may be more than 20 inches long, applies to the entire instream flow segment.

How to Get There

From the town of Tensleep, go approximately 10 miles east on Highway 16 to the forest boundary. When the weather permits (most of the summer and fall), turn off at the exit to the Game and Fish's Tensleep Trout Hatchery and take the old (mostly paved) highway to where it rejoins the modern highway. There is little traffic on this road and many places to park for the short walk down to the stream.

The Instream Flow

Permit Number: 4 I.F.

Priority Date: July 2, 1987

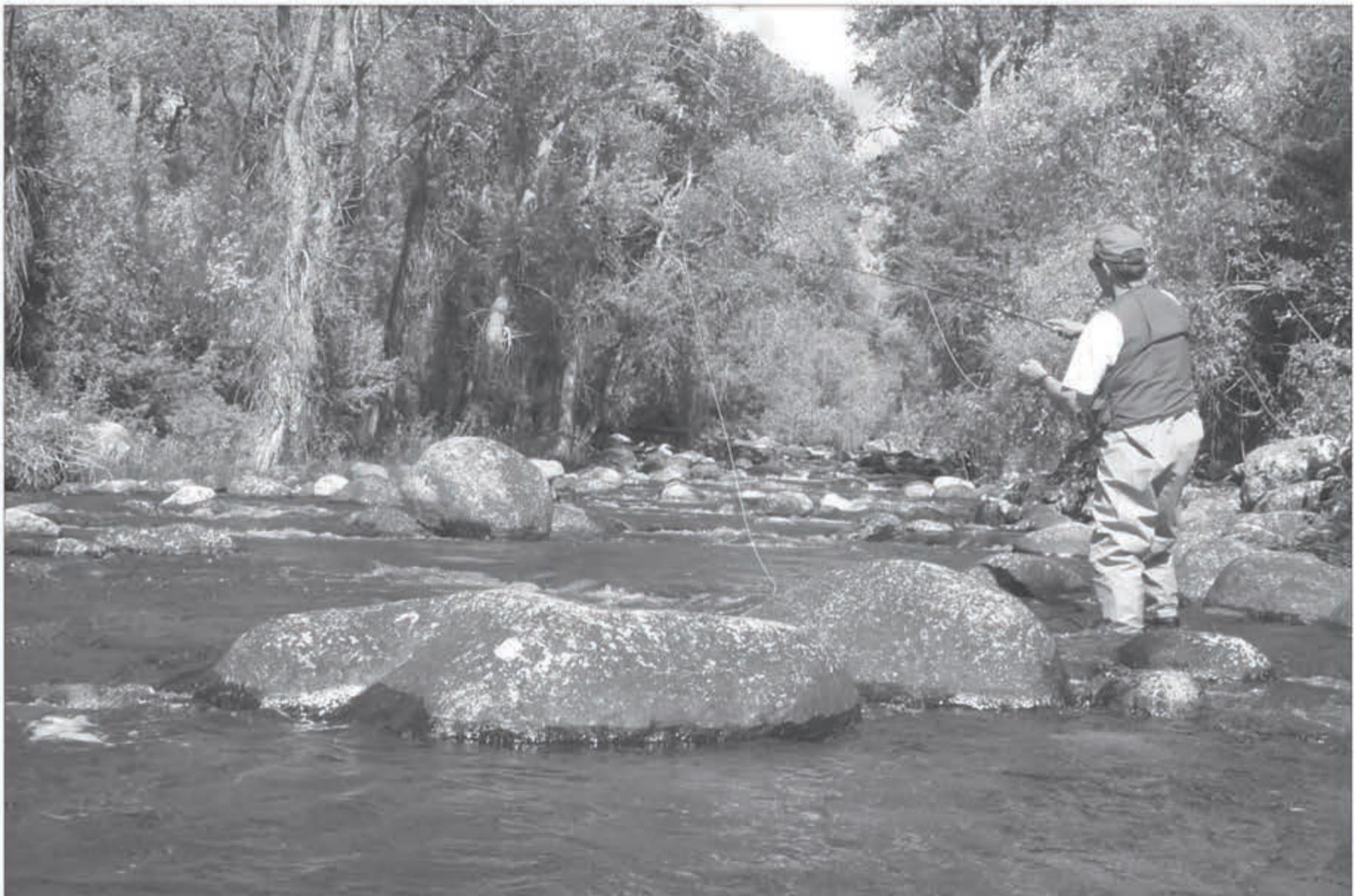
Quantity: 22 cubic feet per second on a year-round basis.

Location and length: The instream flow segment is 7.9 miles long and is located about 10 miles east of Tensleep.

Landownership: The entire segment is located on lands administered by the U.S. Forest Service.

Rationale: The primary purpose of the filing was to maintain adequate base flows for trout spawning in the spring and fall, to survive the rigors of ice formation in the winter and maintain existing growth rates in the summer. Channel maintenance and flushing flows that would maintain long-term habitat by cleaning riffles scour the deep pools and keep the stream banks from encroaching (narrowing) were not filed for. The state engineer has ruled that flows for these habitat needs are not allowed by the instream flow law.

Status of the filing: A public hearing was held in Tensleep on September 7, 1989. The State Engineer approved the water right on January 13, 1991. The Board of Control has not adjudicated the water right. The company that proposed the hydroelectric project requested that the State Engineer administer its project water right as junior to the instream flow use, which meant the company would let the instream flow request remain in the river before taking water for power generation at all times of year.



Tensleep Creek offers some great rainbow and brown trout fishing, and the scenery can't be beat.

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>