

INSTREAM FLOW RESTORATION IN THE BLACKFOOT RIVER DRAINAGE^{AFS}

Ron Pierce
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
3201 Spurgin Road, Missoula, MT 59804
bigfish@blackfoot.net

Since 1988, the Blackfoot River drainage has been the site of a private lands cooperative wild trout restoration initiative, focusing on the recovery of imperiled native fish. In 2002, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks identified habitat restoration opportunities on 94 percent (83 of 88) of inventoried streams, including 33 streams (38%) with potential for fisheries-related irrigation improvement such as instream flow enhancement. Tools to maintain and enhance instream flows in the Blackfoot are 1) a basin closure to new water right appropriations, 2) drought planning tools - the FWP Murphy water right and the Blackfoot Emergency Drought Response (BEDR) Plan, and 3) the aforementioned restoration program. The restoration program provides a long-term mechanism for increasing instream flows. On private lands, instream flow problems often overlap with other agricultural-related habitat problems ranging from degradation of riparian areas to non-point pollution of entire stream

reaches. Within this context, the Blackfoot restoration program attempts to address multiple limiting factors. Like all elements of the restoration program, enhancing instream flows relies largely on voluntary cooperation of private landowners. Meeting landowner and instream flow objectives remain critical to our long-term success. Technical aspects of enhancing instream flow as well the social considerations of three instream flow case studies outline the successes and challenges of instream flow enhancement. These case studies further illustrate methods of conflict resolution regarding strongly held utilitarian views of water-use held by many water-users and the role watershed groups can play regarding local social issues.