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(Fish and Wildlife)



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October 21, 1992

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Mr. Gordon W. "Jeff" Fassett
State Engineer
Herchler Building, Fourth Floor East
Cheyenne, Wyoming 82002

Working Copy

Dear Jeff,

I'm writing to you on behalf of the Jackson Hole Chapter of Trout Unlimited and the Wyoming Council of Trout Unlimited to seek your insight into a situation you are quite familiar with, namely the supplementation of winter flows in the Snake River.

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The acquisition of 33,000 acre-feet of storage in Palisades Reservoir and the transfer of that storage into Jackson Lake was a very positive step to offset the dewatering impacts of the Bureau of Reclamation's operation of Jackson Lake Dam. Although the ability of Wyoming to access all of that 33,000 acre-feet is still apparently an item of dispute between your office, the BuRec and the Idaho folks, we are confident that your dogged persistence will pay off in the end.

Our principal concern at this point is the lack of clear direction among the agency resource managers on exactly what the actual winter flow regime will be. The BuRec line is that outflow from Jackson Lake Dam will at least equal inflow or 100 cfs, whichever is greater, and that they will try to maintain releases at 280 cfs. The WGFD's John Kiefling tells me that flows will be at least 280 cfs as well.

Our problem is that the 280 cfs figure comes from the WGFD January 1989 Snake River Instream Flow Report, which calls a 280 cfs adequate to meet maintenance flows near the dam (p.11, par.4), and goes on to state that a release of 700 cfs is necessary to maintain a base flow equal to historic average monthly flows or the natural inflow to the reservoir, although even a 700 cfs release is insufficient to meet recommended maintenance flows for the Snake River to Palisades Reservoir (p. 13, par. 3 & 4).

Our question is this: is the 33,000 a-f for supplementing Snake River winter flows to better approximate recommended maintenance levels, or merely for supplementing the BuRec releases to achieve a 280 cfs minimum below the dam? If the latter is true, then we feel the resource has been poorly served by all of our efforts; if the former is true, then why are the agencies not in agreement over maintaining higher releases using Wyoming's storage? Please provide us with some clarification on this, if you can. In the meantime, we are going to be conducting our own monitoring of flows in the mainstem Snake in Teton County to find out what we are actually getting for our money.



Mr. Gordon W. "Jeff" Fassett

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We have yet another question regarding the 33,000 a-f of storage. If this storage translates into water available to enhance Snake River trout, what is the read from Wyoming's instream flow law in getting an instream flow right for these flows? We feel that this is a logical step in our efforts to provide lasting protection for the Snake River cutthroat population, especially given the WGFD Instream Flow Report finding that "the fishery is limited by natural winter flows." We would appreciate knowing your interpretation of the opportunities to obtain an instream flow right for the 33,000 a-f, and the process by which this can be achieved.

In closing, I want you to know that Trout Unlimited is entirely supportive of your efforts to help the Snake River fishery, and we stand ready to assist in this process in any way you may deem appropriate. Whether it be through writing letters, contacting elected officials or any other action, you may rely upon us to help out in whatever way we can. Thanks for your help in sorting this issue out for us.

Sincerely,



John M. Zelazny
Executive Director

cc: Governor Mike Sullivan
Francis Petera, WGFD
John Keys III, BuRec ✓
Dennis Underwood, BuRec
John Turner, USFWS