



## Fall/Winter Newsletter

2017

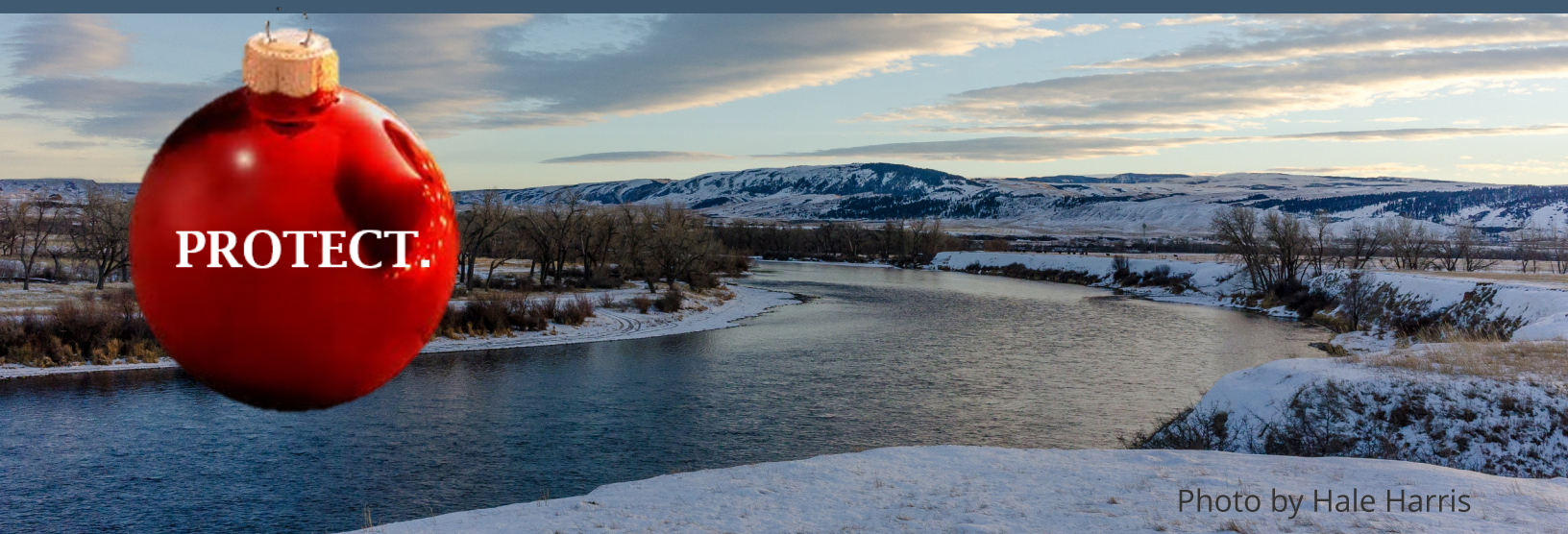


Photo by Hale Harris

### Alliance Advocates for Fair Water Management

By: Anne Marie Emery, Executive Director

For the last year, the Alliance has put water management and river flows at the top of its list of priorities for the Bighorn River. River flows - and the timing, duration and magnitude of those flows - not only shape the contours of the river and its in-stream habitat, but also affect insect hatches, fish populations and angler access to the river. Flows are truly the life line to all biological processes that make the Bighorn river such a prolific, productive tail water fishery - and for this reason the Alliance is dedicating all of its efforts into management meetings and forums that will aid in influencing dam management changes that consider the health of the downstream river and its famed blue-ribbon trout fishery.

This month, as we pay tribute to the 50th anniversary of the Yellowtail Dam, it is our responsibility as stewards of the river to revisit policy, review criteria and implement changes to dam management practices that are no longer relevant or sustainable to the health of the Bighorn River. The time has come for the federal government to view the Bighorn River not as a "by product of dam construction" but as an important economic resource to the state of Montana.

In fact, the Bighorn River has ballooned in its economic contribution over the years. The latest economic report of the River showed the Bighorn contributing over \$100 million annually to the Montana economy - making it the second most profitable river in the entire state, and the first in its region. Furthermore, 95% of this sum comes from the wild trout fishery, or the upper 30 miles - suggesting that cold water and wild trout are what drive this profit.

Overly conservative dam management practices negatively affect these numbers. This year, as the Bighorn experienced a full season of record high flow releases, local businesses noted a decline in sales and visits of up to 40% - especially amongst the local, do it yourself anglers. *Continued on Page 3*

#### Current River Stats

- ▶ River Flows - 3,700 cfs
- ▶ Reservoir Level - 94.8%





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## Board of Directors

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	Barry Yontz Lock Haven, PA

## Staff

Anne Marie Emery  
Executive Director

## Upcoming Events

April 21  
Bighorn River  
Cleanup

June 22  
Bighorn Carp  
Tournament

# Making a Difference

## Message from the President

2017 was an important year for the Bighorn River Alliance. From an organizational standpoint we **significantly** strengthened and expanded our Board of Directors with the additions of Mike Stabolepszy, Mike Parnell, Don Jackson, Tom Hansen, and Bob Dickens. The impressive backgrounds, assets and skills these gentlemen bring to the board are invaluable and I want to thank each of them for their commitment and am confident that their addition will make our organization stronger.

We have accomplished a lot this year and have a number of initiatives currently underway that we will be discussing going forward. None of this would be possible without the support of our exceptional staff, board and general membership. I want to take this opportunity to extend my sincere gratitude to everyone who has contributed both operationally and financially. We **ARE** making a difference and have a very exciting year ahead of us. Please continue to support the Alliance and make sure you take part in the End of Year Bighorn Raffle which is part of this newsletter, or consider making a year end gift to support this river that is important to us all. Thank you again to everyone.



Rick Gehweiler  
Board President  
Bighorn River Alliance

## End Of Season Raffle

The Bighorn Alliance is excited to offer you the opportunity to win some great raffle prizes with the "End of Season Bighorn Raffle!" Simply return a year end gift, or a donation of \$30 in the provided envelope and you will be entered to win one of the following great prizes.

**2 Days Guided Fishing/ 2 Nights Lodging with Bighorn Angler**

**Scott E2 9ft. 4wt. Rod**

**Yeti Hopper Flip & 26 oz. Rambler**

**Patagonia Atom Sling Pack and Hat**

**YETI®**



## Join the Bighorn Wild Trout Society

The Bighorn River Alliance invites you to be a part of the "Wild Trout Society" - a group of dedicated Bighorn anglers who are committed to donating \$1000.00 or more annually to the work of the Alliance to help sustain organizational growth and staff expansion. Members of the society are given a one time Patagonia Wild Trout Society vest and are invited to exclusive events and opportunities. Special thank you to Yvon Chouinard, Dan O'Brien and Craig Matthews for being special guests at our last function and to all members who believe in the Alliance and invest in our success.





# The River

*Continued from page 1*

The fact that 2017 was a record water year for the Bighorn is inarguable. Some state that Mother Nature signed the orders, and overly conservative water storage management practices delivered the impact to the river. Some say that BOR did the best they could considering their inability to forecast precipitation and runoff timing and are grateful that the outcome was not worse. We say that extreme high water, sometimes extreme low water years happen, and if they act as isolated incidents the river will recover. However, outside of the historic 2017 water year, data shows that since 2008 the Bighorn has consistently (with the exception of 2012 & 2013) experienced the pressure of high flows. When high flow or low flow events become the norm as opposed to the exception below a dam- we have a water management problem. When a decade goes by without changes being made to address or correct overly conservative water management protocols, we have an environmental injustice and a political issue.

Last month the Alliance and other downstream stakeholders including ranchers, irrigators and landowners participated in the Bureau of Reclamations bi-annual issues group meeting where our concerns were addressed after months of meetings, letters and public concern. It was proposed at this forum (by the Bureau of Reclamation) to

form a technical committee to review operating criteria that would closely examine water management of Yellowtail Dam and compare to earlier years to determine if current policy is in fact, overly conservative of lake water levels. This committee which includes the BOR, the Alliance, MFWP and other entities would create transparent communications and data sharing amongst all stakeholders to devise solutions to current dam operating criteria within a practical time frame.

As a not for profit organization serving as the voice of the Bighorn River wild trout fishery, we commend BOR for taking steps to address our concerns, but remain adamantly determined to continue applying pressure on out-dated criteria that fail to acknowledge the importance and value of the Bighorn. This immensely challenging task will remain our number one research priority for 2018.

Conservation, at its heart is really about problem solving. You may have to invent a technique or employ a new strategy to solve, or sometimes to merely identify the issue. In the case of the Bighorn, the problem has been identified, and it is up to us to push forward with effective strategies.

If we take care of the flows, the river will take care of itself.

-Anne Marie

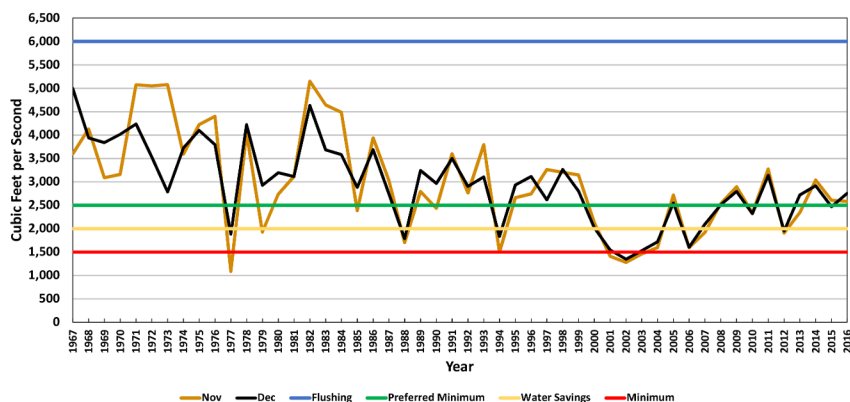
## Winter Flow and the Fishery -Mike Ruggles, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

How will the higher current fall and upcoming winter flows in the Bighorn River in Montana affect the Bighorn Wild Trout fishery in 2018? Through historic comparisons and a review of the recommended winter flows we can speculate a positive outcome. This year, winter flows on the Bighorn will likely be higher than in the most recent past. Flows are expected to be near 3,500 cfs most of the winter, with potential for adjustment depending on reservoir storage and snow pack leading up to March 1st.

To evaluate the potential uniqueness of these coming higher January through February flows, a plot of average monthly discharges recorded at the St. X USGS gauging station was created using data from the fall of 1967 to winter of 2017 (Figure 1). For reference, recommended flows were included as straight lines in the graph. The BOR measured flushing flow of 6,000 cfs was also included. Flushing flows initialize gravel mobilization and have potential to scour redds, vegetation, and aquatic insects. The data in the chart clearly indicates average monthly winter flows historically and frequently exceeded 2,500 cfs and very often were near 3,500 cfs.

In conclusion, the strong winter flows can support and improve both brown and rainbow trout populations and adult size. Much of the rest of the story also depends on how the spring and summer releases come.

### Average Monthly Flows St. X Bighorn River



**Figure 1: Average Monthly Flows Bighorn River 1967- 2017 water years.**

# In Gratitude

Patagonia  
Adipose Boatworks  
Wild Idea Buffalo  
SIMMS  
YETI  
Sage  
Hatch  
Orvis  
Yellowdog  
Far Bank  
Oakley  
TFO  
Black Sheep Lanyards  
Owl Creek Flies  
DeYoung Studio  
Emily Palmer Art  
Don DeRoeck Wildlife Carvings  
Andrea Larko Art  
Bighorn River Lodge  
Bighorn Angler  
Bighorn Trout Shop  
Cottonwood Camp  
Forresters River Resort  
Absaroka Cabins  
Yellowstone Fly Goods  
East Rosebud  
First Interstate Bank  
Derek & Janell DeYoung  
Mark Harbaugh  
Zach Dalton  
Nick English  
Barry & Jann Yontz  
Mike Parnell  
Steve Galletta  
Dee Rolph  
Craig Matthews  
Yvon & Malinda Chouinard  
Dan O'Brien  
John & Debbie Sindland  
Matt Clawson  
Michael Mathis  
Zoe Opie  
Dell Despain  
Don & Peggy Yarbrough  
Rick & Cheryl Gehweiler  
Steve & JJ Hilbers  
Roger Hile  
Rick Law  
Josh McGraw  
Jake Drees



Kaci with her first wild trout

## Tenkara with the Crow Tribe

It is important to the Alliance, working within the Crow Tribal reservation boundaries, to connect local Crow Youth to the positive forms of recreation their local waters provide. Through support from our membership and Patagonia, we have been able to teach over 20 youth about Tenkara fishing and conservation since we implemented the program in 2016. This year, thanks to our supporters, each participant got to walk away with their own rod to continue using and share. We would like to thank all of our program supporters including Patagonia, Temple Fork Outfitters, the Bighorn Club and the Crow Tribe for making substantial contributions to make this event a special one for our local tribal friends and children.

## Congratulations!



### 2017 Carp Tournament Winners



### Mike Ward & Justin Waayenberg

What a Carp Tourney finish this year! Two teams (Cottonwood Camp & Adipose Boatworks) came off the lake tied for number of Carp landed (11) AND tied for largest Carp caught (23 inches!). The tie in both categories resulted in a "cast off" competition to determine the winner with team Adipose remaining victorious for another year! Congrats to Mike and Justin and thank you to all the participants this year.

### Adipose Boat Raffle Winner



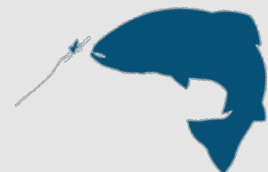
### Sarah Barclay

Congrats to Bighorn Alliance member Sarah Barclay from Breckenridge, CO for winning the 2017 Alliance Adipose Drift Boat! Since 2016 the Alliance, in partnership with Adipose Boatworks has provided members a chance to win a new boat in a unique raffle limited to 150 ticket sales. This years boat raffle will open in April, and give you a chance to walk away with a new river ride. Thank you to Adipose Boatworks for supporting our work.

Save the Date!

Bighorn Carp Tournament

June 22nd, 2018



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