Response and thoughts on the, Montana Area Office of the Bureau of Reclamation's draft for the Bighorn Lake Operating Criteria Evaluation Study and Report

From:
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By introduction, we have been in business since 1985; our operation consists of a retail fly shop, lodging facility and fly fishing guide service on the Bighorn River below Yellowtail Dam. Through the years we have seen many different conditions affecting lake levels and flow levels for this system and granted we are well aware that it is subject to the whims of "Mother Nature" it is also a fact that with a reservoir controlled system, by definition, measures can be taken to alleviate extremes one way or the other.
In studying this report and observing the results from the last few years of new management policies in place we have a few questions for the BOR and the NPS.

-First and foremost. Why is the recommended minimum flow of 2500 cfs now considered the "OPTIMUM FISHERY FLOW", the minimum flow of 2000 cfs now considered the "STANDARD FISHERY FLOW" and the absolute minimum flow of 1500 cfs now the "MINIMUM FISHERY FLOW"?

-Why does there continue to be such an emphasis on reaching and maintaining higher lake levels in order to facilitate a minimal use recreation site (Horse Shoe Bend) to the detriment of the other much higher use recreational sites (Black Canyon camp ground, Ok-A- Bey marina and the trout fishery below Yellowtail Dam?

-Why is there such an emphasis on filling the lake by Memorial Day weekend when historically there is little or no use due to weather conditions and air temperatures?

-Why has the NPS put so much time and money into Horse Shoe Bend recreation area when, by their own admission, this area will be unusable in the near future due to siltation?

-Why would the NPS, knowing that this region is prone to drought conditions, spend tens of thousands of dollars to extend the boat ramps at Barry's Landing and Ok-A-Bey marina and haul in tons of sand to create a swimming beach at the Ok-A-Bey area then change their policies and now insist upon lake levels that not only flood these areas but also flood the Black Canyon camp ground which has historically had much more recreational use than Barry's Landing and Horse Shoe Bend facilities combined?

We think it is time for the BOR, NPS and "The Friends of Bighorn Lake" be honest with themselves, even if there are perfect conditions and perfect lake levels, the Horse Shoe Bend Recreation Area would never be a big destination site. The past three years are proof of this. With the improvements to the camping facilities, boat ramp and picnic area there are still only a few local residents that actually utilize the area. There is no draw nationally to the area and it has added very little to the local economy, as some would like to have you believe. Add to the fact that the life expectancy of the boat ramp is being shortened even more by high lake levels, dumping more tax dollars and user fee dollars into the area can be likened to buying deck furniture for the Titanic after it has struck the iceberg. There is no denying the economic dynamics that already exist with the other areas on the Bighorn system, so why is this not more heavily considered when the different agencies are formulating there operation plans?