From: Jeff Buszmann [mailto:jmark@epbillings.com]
Sent: Friday, January 14, 2011 5:09 PM
To: Holwegner, Paula
Subject: Comments

First let me say thank you for making the issue of lake levels and river flows more open and public. In the past, the process was seen as closed, mysterious, rigid, bizarre, and static. Giving the various parties a voice and an opportunity to add input goes a long way. Please continue the good efforts and work to refine this process so good and logical decisions get made.

"He who shouts loudest gets heard"

It is obvious that many groups have a stake in this issue. No one group should rule nor should any be left out completely. However, it seems that lake interests on the southern end of the lake have been shouting loudest and getting heard more than any other. And before you write the rest of this letter off, please hear me out. The Bighorn River is one of Montana's greatest assets. It was recently featured in the book Fifty Places to FlyFish Before You Die. The economic impact is huge, and it lies in one of the poorest counties in the U.S. The number of people that use the river and the lake during the summer has to be 50 to 100 times the usage on the south end. It also seems the interests of the Dam operators, the fishing economy, the adjacent landowners, taxpayers and more are all aligned together. The only party missing from the "mutual interest" group are the folks on the south end of the lake. It would only make sense that their interests be compromised more than everyone else. If this was a business, the south end would be sold off or closed.

"Come on in, the water's fine"

I would personally like to invite Dan Jewell and the other decision makers to float and fish the river with me twice during the next year. The first trip should be at a reasonable flow, 2,500 to 3,000. We will be able to float fish AND wade fish easily and safely. If the day is really nice, the river might be busy but there is plenty of room. On any given day you might see folks from Billings, Denver, Los Angeles, or even London. The next time we'll float should be in June, when the river is near its peak, say 8,000 or above. You will soon notice that fewer boats are on the water, because of guide trips being canceled and non-guided fisherman not feeling safe on the water. We will NOT get out to wade fish, too dangerous. Can we stop and eat lunch, if we can find a spot! The fishing will ok but don't bother getting out of the boat. Even when you do hook a fish, pulling over to take a picture of it will be dangerous and we'll have to play the fish to beyond exhaustion before we can land it safely. Floating with me or anyone during these two very different flows will really open your eyes and let you see the consequences first hand. Higher flows for a short period to simulate runoff and push algae and silt down the river is ok, but the last 3 years were way too much.

"The 2008 Disaster"

It is my hope that with your new plan in place, never again will the 2008 Disaster be repeated. If you've forgotten, let me remind you. In the spring of 2008 flows were low at 1900 or so. We had a wet and late spring. The lake levels were getting lower each day while the Memorial Day weekend came closer and were already below minimum launch at Horseshoe bend. A huge snowstorm hits adding to significant snow pack in the basin. Meanwhile, brown trout fry were living in the few side channels that still had water. The rainbow trout were beginning their spawn as well. The BOR decides in order to fill the lake for Memorial Day weekend, flows need to be cut to 1,500 and were. Fisherman were outraged and confused. Our May was cold and runoff was late, anyone with a brain could see that the lake would fill easily, just a tad later than usual. Side channels dried up, the brown trout fry died. Spawning rainbows were lucky to escape and the spawn was interrupted. In days the weather turned and lake began to fill, FAST. In a few short weeks the river goes to more than 9,000. The dropping of flows was beyond idiotic, and can only be explained by the BOR catering to south lake interests. By the way, Memorial Day weekend was cold, rainy and completely void of activity at Horseshoe Bend. Promise me that the BOR has learned from their mistakes and will not repeat them.

"Good to the last Drop"

During the meeting on January 4th, Mr. Dueberstein stated that it would take every drop of water they have to keep flows at 2,500 year round. In all but the driest years, this assumption is FALSE. The simulations I've run would add more than 30 feet to the reservoir if flows were kept at 2,500. In all the calculations presented, they use lake level as the end goal. This is a fundamental problem because the system was designed to have a fluctuating lake. I think you should turn your formula around and solve for constant flow (in line with most stakeholder's interests) and widen your operating window for lake levels. The graphic we were provided that outlines Bighorn Lake Allocations set by congress shows all the uses within the Active Conservation window. It appears in order to satisfy Horseshoe Bend you have not operated in that window since 2005. And don't tell me that you need the water for waterfowl hunting on the south end of the lake, that's bunk! I hope you will make 2,500 the absolute minimum flow, and remove any other descriptions such as "normal" "optimal" or "target".

Misc.

I question Dan Jewell's ability to perform. When a public meeting is held to meet the stakeholders and address them, it is very odd that the fishing guides and farmers show up in more than a hooded sweatshirt. His demeanor and personal appearance show a lack of professionalism that seems to permeate to his job. He sent out a memo regarding this meeting saying there would be a 30-60 minute presentation and then a Q&A session. When we arrived, it turned into a 4 hour presentation with no questions or comments. If he was a politician, he'd be voted out, if a CEO, fired. I just hope if he stays around he can lead the decision makers to a better place. Horseshoe Bend is another thing, the boat launch has a limited life span. Unless you plan on building the dam higher, managing to please boaters on the south end will only drive you nuts.

Specifics

- Prevent river flows from going below 2,500 in all but drought years.
- Prevent river flows from skyrocketing above 4,500.
- When dropping flows, drop them slow enough to prevent erosion.
- Move the target date to launch a boat at Horseshoe bend to June 20th.

I also support the letter written by Doug Haacke on behalf of Friends of the Bighorn River and Trout Unlimited. We look forward to seeing your next draft soon.

Jeff Buszmann

Flyfishing Guide and Ft. Smith Landowner

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