

## Balancing Act – The Yankee Fork of the Salmon River

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Dan Smith: You know the fish story is one that runs, you know, it is ancient history, it is modern history, it's everything.

Joe Vacirca: Anadromous fish play a very important role in the Yankee Fork watershed.

Dan Smith: We have the history of how the native people used the fish here.

Evelyn Galloway: It goes back, way back historically. The tribes have been coming up to this area for hundreds of years to collect seasonal fish.

Dan Smith: The fact that the fish have to come a total of 900 miles all the way up this river to get to this river basin.

Billy Reed: I can remember, as a boy, catching salmon almost every day we went fishing.

Dan Smith: We have the Dredge Association that is very concerned with the historic landscape that we have here...

Kraig Wolford: Well, there's got to be room for everybody up on the Yankee Fork.

Dan Smith: ...cause what we have, we have so many diverse groups.

Jerry Meyers: I've been a fishing guide for 33 years and I'm always amazed by the incredible tenacity of these fish. They need to be given a chance and they'll do the rest on their own.

Dan Smith: It's an ongoing story. Fish and human interaction on the Yankee Fork are intertwined and they need to be intertwined. And it will continue in the future.

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Balancing Act - Yankee Fork of the Salmon River

Narrator: High in the Upper Salmon Basin of Idaho, winding through a rugged mountain region, lies the Yankee Fork of the Salmon River...

...a river that has historically been a major contributor in the production of anadromous and resident fish, including salmon, steelhead, and bull trout.

Joe Vacirca: So anadromous fish have a very important role in the Yankee Fork watershed in that as adults they travel to the Yankee Fork, they spawn and then they die. These carcasses decompose and add nutrients to the system which in turn create a food chain starting from aquatic bugs on up to small fish, on up to larger fish, and on up, to say, birds of prey.

...and we have been missing that component for quite a few years now.

Narrator: In 1875, William Norton made the first significant gold find on the Yankee Fork near Jordan Creek. Over the next 75 years, fortunes were made and lost; communities built and abandoned. The pursuit of the precious element continues to shape and re-shape the landscape.

Dan Smith: This is like a physical history book. This is where we can study what occurred, and what will continue to occur unless we learn something about it.

Narrator: In the 1940s and 50s, the Yankee Fork dredge dug up nearly seven miles of river, altering the course of the stream and changing its delicate ecosystems.

Dan Smith: Essentially the dredge would come and scoop up and turn the river upside down. Where the stuff at the very bottom of the riparian area is now on top and the stuff that was on top is now on the bottom.

Narrator: At the time, the 988-ton digging machine represented state-of-the-art engineering. With the U.S. coming out of a major depression and entering into World War II, the gold recovered by the Yankee Fork dredge helped fund the war effort and feed Idaho families.

Guide: Twenty-six loads of gravel fell in here down the chute when all through this and down the center of it is a large, about a six-inch water pipe.

Kraig Wolford: This is the only dredge in the Lower 48 that you can actually walk into, touch, feel, and get a sense of how a dredge operated.

Billy Reed: Right now, people that have never seen these kinds of operations can visualize what this dredge did.

Narrator: The dredge and tailings represent an important chapter in Idaho's history, a period of time that changed the natural characteristics of the river.

The lower section of the Yankee Fork is now too shallow, and lacks habitat diversity for fish. But it may also limit access for migrating salmon to the river's pristine upper reaches.

Evelyn Galloway: The fish returning to the area is very important to the Shoshone Bannock tribes. It is culturally and traditionally significant. It's part of their sustenance. It helps feed the people and for cultural reasons also for spiritual reasons, too.

Narrator: Today, the Shoshoni Bannock Tribe and Trout Unlimited are working with state and federal natural resource agencies to assess existing conditions and to evaluate opportunities for fish habitat improvements on the Yankee Fork.

Joe Vacirca: The dredge piles created somewhat of an entrenched channel, where hydrologic energy is consolidated and it took away a lot of the delicate habitat features that fish prefer to use for spawning and

rearing purposes. We would like to come in and investigate what is the potential to improve some of these attributes in some of these dredge reaches of the stream.

Narrator: Improving spawning and rearing habitat on the Yankee Fork will help improve salmon and steelhead runs, restoring cultural identity to the Shoshone Bannock.

Improved salmon and steelhead runs also mean big business for many surrounding communities.

Evelyn Galloway: It's going to help with the small towns around here because people are coming in. The tourists are coming in. I think it is going to be a win/win situation if the fish numbers do increase in the future.

Narrator: But balancing historical and business interests with the needs of the fish remains a key challenge.

Doug Fenn: It's just an incredible thing to have them come back. People are really curious about them. There is the business side, though, of course which means that when they have more salmon coming back, we have a salmon fishing season. And unfortunately for us that has negative impacts on our rafting season. The more salmon that are coming back right now there might be more restrictions on what we can do or when we can float the river. This is a hard thing for us to deal with, but we love having them come back. I love seeing them up here.

Narrator: The future of the Yankee Fork means so much to so many people, as well as wildlife, that any effort that could lead to a change in the physical, historical, or cultural characteristics in the valley requires a community-wide effort of collaboration and shared compromise. That's why a multi-agency, community-wide effort is now underway. The goal of the Yankee Fork tributary assessment is to provide scientific information about the watershed and identify projects that will improve the river's function for resident and anadromous fisheries. At the same time, the project aims to retain and make possible the enhancement of historical, cultural, wildlife, ecosystem, and tourism values all vital to the community.

Evelyn Galloway: I think we all have something in common. We just need to work together and respect one another's history and culture. I think it will work out.

Kraig Wolford: We are not only preserving history, but I think fish recovery is also an important part of the history of the Yankee Fork itself because the public did enjoy the salmon fishing up here before the dredge.

Dan Smith: It will be a long-standing effort. We will have to do some collaboration. We will have to do some compromising.

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