



BOW RIVER TROUT FOUNDATION

Calgary, Alberta

The Impact of Water Management Policy and Proposed Mitigation Initiatives on the Bow River Basin Fishery.

Submitted to The Honorable, Shannon Phillips,
Minister, Alberta Environment & Parks.

September 13, 2017

Our organization, Bow River Trout Foundation was formed in the spring of 2016 when the Calgary River Users Alliance (CRUA) recognized the need for the fishing community to have a place in the discussion with the City of Calgary regarding improving access to the Bow River. It was subsequently registered as a not-for profit Alberta Society by a group of like-minded individuals acting as the founding board. Bow River Trout hopes to ensure that the fishing community at large is considered with improving access to the Bow River both within and outside the city of Calgary, as well as contributing to the enhancement of the fishing policy in the Bow River Basin. Our commitment is based on the following core values within the Bow River Sub Basin:

- To promote and support the responsible use and enhancement of the fishery.
- To commit to the maintenance and improvement of access for the fishing community.
- To support the sustainability and enhancement of responsible fishery regulations and water management through sound conservation practices.
- To promote, foster and educate the public about the sport fishing opportunities available.
- To advocate for and support improvements to aquatic and riparian habitat that benefit the Bow River ecosystem.
- To engage and inform the membership and public on the Foundations initiatives, programming and projects.
- To cooperate with all levels of government, organizations or stakeholders whose objectives are similar in whole or part with the objectives of the Bow River Trout Foundation.

This brings us to the water management model for the Bow River Basin and the impact on fishery. 2017 has been a pivotal year for the Bow River fishery with expectations that above average snow pack would result in adequate water flows to sustain a viable fishery. Unfortunately, extremely low precipitation and high summer temperatures have resulted in a very tenuous position for the fishery that we feel needs to be addressed by the Government of Alberta before any changes are made to the water management. Recent proposals for dams on both the Bow and Elbow River to enhance flood and drought protection in and downstream of Calgary have precipitated a need for further discussion on the management and protection of the Bow River fishery.



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The Bow River Basin is recognized around the world for its beauty, recreational opportunities and as a centre for business, agriculture and industrial development. The Bow River flows out of Banff National Park and is joined by a number of tributaries through the foothills before reaching Calgary. The Elbow River joins the Bow River in Calgary as does the Highwood river just south of Calgary before traversing the Prairies and joining the Oldman River to form the South Saskatchewan River which ultimately joins the North Saskatchewan river and flows into Hudson's Bay.

The water that flows through Bow River Basin has been the lifeline for agricultural development by way of three irrigation districts developed in the early twentieth century. A series of dams have been constructed upstream of Calgary that generate hydroelectric power and assist with water supply demands throughout the year. The water management model allows for capture of water during spring runoff and rains with release during the low flow summer months when agricultural demands are high. Equally important is that the impact of flooding to metropolitan areas can be eased by the current water management model. In 2005 and again in 2013 a combination of spring runoff and high rainfall resulted in catastrophic flooding in Calgary and other municipalities on the Bow river and its tributaries. The Alberta Government commissioned a number of studies and advisory groups to develop a strategy to reduce the impact of flooding on Albertans and the local economy.

A 2015 report ⁽¹⁾ generated by Alberta Environment & Parks has suggested that of the two proposals for a dam on the Elbow River, the Springbank Off-Stream Reservoir (SR1) had less impact on social, economic and environmental issues than the alternative of McLean Creek Dam. (MC1). The Springbank project is currently under a federal Environmental Impact Assessment Study. In August 2017, a report from the Bow River Project ⁽²⁾ made recommendations to the Minister, Alberta Environment & Parks that would give short-term improvements to flood and drought management for the Bow River Basin with a long-term proposal for a new dam on the Bow River at either the Morley Indian Reserve or at the Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park.

What is disturbing from both the Elbow and Bow River proposed flood and drought initiatives is a total disregard for the importance of recreational activities and specifically fishing in the Bow River Basin. Environmental and ecological considerations were limited to endangered and species at risk. The scope of the advisory committees was limited to potential operational and infrastructure flood and drought mitigation opportunities. Appointment to the advisory committees were limited to primary stakeholders, that is, government, municipalities, first nations, industry (TransAlta), the irrigation districts and the Bow River Basin Council. Working groups appointed to contribute to the advisory committees was expanded to include environmental, economic or infrastructure expertise, but not recreation stakeholders.

President: Peter Crowe-Swords, Treasurer: Jason Villeneuve, Secretary: Ben Rogers
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The Bow River is considered a “*Blue Ribbon Trout Stream*” and is recognized around the world as one of the best destinations for providing an opportunity to catch a “Once in a Lifetime” Brown or Rainbow Trout. The Bow River Basin is home to three native sports fish, the endangered Bull Trout and West-Slope Cutthroat Trout and Rocky Mountain White Fish as well as self-sustaining populations of Brown Trout and Rainbow Trout introduced into the river in the last century. Within and downstream of Calgary the sports fishery consists of predominately Brown Trout, Rainbow Trout and Rocky Mountain White Fish. The fishery relies on a constant supply of cold water throughout the year, consequently the water management model currently in use and planned for the future will impact the fishery’s viability. Unfortunately, 2017 has been a challenging year for local and visiting anglers. Low river flows coupled with high daytime temperatures had a negative impact on the fishery. There has been an alarming number of days when fluctuations in river flows have been extreme, resulting in an enormous amount of frustration on the part of anglers. There have been times when visiting anglers have packed up their bags and left Calgary.

The importance of recreation fishing to the local economy is demonstrated in a report submitted by Calgary River Users’ Alliance to the City of Calgary as a part of the River Access Strategy ⁽³⁾. The survey compiled the data from Statistics Canada on fishing related activities. A total of 56,519 (23.5%) license holders lived in the Eastern Slopes Zone 1(ES1) that encompasses Calgary and the south-west portion of Alberta. The report goes into more specific survey data collected on the Bow River and says *“These data support our belief that in excess of 12,000 anglers fish the Bow River on average 14.8 days a year. This accounts for more than 177,600 fishing days per year contributing more than \$24,500,000 to the local economy”*. Supplemental information was submitted to administrative committees within the River Access Strategy (4). The document projected what economic contribution the recreational fishing community would make to the City of Calgary by 2024. A conservative estimate was \$33,129,013. Calgary City Council recognized the importance of recreational fishing to the local economy and approved a \$7.6 million budget to enhance and add new river access sites to the Bow river. The importance of recreational fishing has also been recognized by the Province. Alberta Environment & Parks is undertaking a review of river access on the Bow River downstream of Calgary. Once the review is complete river access will be improved across the region. But equally important, these developments emphasize the importance of recreational fishing within the Bow River Basin.

A review of the report; “Advice to Government on Water Management in the Bow River Basin ⁽²⁾ indicate that the short-term recommendation could mitigate water shortage within the Bow River Basin under drought conditions such as experienced in 2017. But what is the long-term impact of new dams within the Bow River Basin on the sports fishery? These questions have not been addressed in any of the referenced documents and need to be answered before any dams are built.



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In closing, Bow River Trout Foundation is appreciative of the importance of flood mitigation to the citizens and businesses of Calgary. But at what cost to the social makeup of our citizens? A report was presented to the City of Calgary in support of the River Access Strategy entitled “The Need for a River Recreation Management Plan” ⁽⁵⁾. The report documents the importance of recreation activity that has been well documented in research papers, government surveys and city development plans. As the dynamics of a population change there is a need to revise recreation delivery models to meet the changing needs of the population. Alberta is no exception. The Bow River Trout Foundation would encourage the province to develop a Bow River Recreational Management Plan that would guide the delivery of programs and protect the interests of recreational river users. It would also offer an interface with any infrastructure development project that may impact river users.

The Bow River is not only the lifeblood to Alberta’s agriculture, bordering inhabitants and business development, but also a thriving recreational fishery that contributes substantially to the local economy. Bow River Trout Foundation would like to encourage Alberta Environment & Parks to engage with the fishing community to develop a plan that would sustain the Bow River fishery for future generations.

Yours sincerely,
Peter Crowe-Swords
President

1. Recommendation on the Elbow River Major Infrastructure Projects. Alberta Environment & Parks, October 2015.
<https://bowrivertrout.files.wordpress.com/2017/04/recommendationsreport-elbowriver-oct2015.pdf>
2. A report generated out of the Bow River Water Management Project presented to Alberta Environment & Parks Minister Sharon Philips. August, 2017.
<https://bowrivertrout.files.wordpress.com/2017/04/advicewatermanagementbowriver-may17-2017.pdf>
3. The Economic Importance of Recreational River Use to the City of Calgary. CRUA, 2016.
<https://bowrivertrout.files.wordpress.com/2016/06/crua-economic-position-statement-to-city-of-calgary-revise-19-may-2016-1.pdf>
4. Response to Calgary City Council for Supplemental Economic Forecast of the Importance of Recreational Fishing to the City of Calgary. Bow River Trout Foundation, February 2017. <https://bowrivertrout.files.wordpress.com/2017/04/brt-bow-river-fishery-economics-forecast-04feb2017.pdf>
5. The Need for a River Recreation Management Plan. CRUA, 2016.
<https://bowrivertrout.files.wordpress.com/2016/06/crua-economic-position-statement-to-city-of-calgary-revise-19-may-2016-1.pdf>