

March, 2007

Edited by Martha Crawley

From the President's Corner

Jeanne says: "Remind everyone that the annual meeting will be the last Saturday in June, June 30th this year. We will try to have it in the same place as last year at the Howlin' Wolf down on the highway. The official meeting announcement will be sent out sometime in May, so watch for that. Two topics to be discussed will be wind turbines and grazing. The 4-year moratorium on grazing will be over. If you are not able to attend, be sure to inform your proxy holder of your wishes regarding these two subjects. Hope to see a good turnout again this year."

Memo from Martha:

Dave and I have had a busy winter here in North Bend. Also, we've had wild weather like many other parts of the country, and during the monster windstorm we had about a week before Christmas (I'm told it was Hanukkah Eve), we were without power for 6 days. An experience we're not eager to repeat! I'm all for roughing it, as long as it doesn't extend to me...

Thought for the day:

"Don't part with your illusions. When they are gone you may still exist, but you have ceased to live." Mark Twain

Ranch Recipes

This recipe came from my mother-in-law, Bernadine Crawley, an excellent cook who generously shared her recipes, and taught me a huge amount. I miss her. This is a simple recipe that I guarantee will be an instant favorite.

Prairie Schooner Shrimp Wreck

1 - 4 ½ oz. can shrimp

1 c. grated medium or mild cheddar (anything sharper overpowers the taste of the shrimp)

1 small raw onion, chopped fine

1 c. mayonnaise

Worcestershire sauce to taste

Garlic salt to taste

Shred shrimp with fingers. Mix in other ingredients and chill. Serve with Ritz crackers.

Fishing With Mike Wells

MRR Fishing – Winter/Spring 2007

Normal

"Do you normally fish the runs that long?" Dave Crawley asked. "I've been told to move on if you don't start catching fish fairly soon, but you seem to really hang out in each hole." Dave is a recently retired airline pilot who had previous incarnations as a doctor, and, as he cryptically says, he's "been to law school." Just don't ask him for how long. Having had so many low stress occupations, he's looking to add some thrills to his golden years & appears to be considering the

extreme sport of flyfishing as a suitable diversion. I mulled over the question & subsequent statement. I don't remember my exact response but if I were more quick witted it would have been something 'fishosophical' like "I normally don't do anything normal while fishing".

'Normal' is why I started & continue fishing. Unfortunately for most of us our 'normal' lives are such that we need to cultivate other interests/activities to make the day-to-day routines palatable. I once read "routine work & drudgery are an invention of civilization, degrading to the human spirit". I fish because it is an activity that while maintaining the comfort of some continuity also encompasses regular change & always lifts my spirit. It is the 'normal' of this natural balance in an increasingly abnormal, un-natural world that I seek.

We had split up to give ourselves some alone time with the natural wonders of Montana. Methodically fishing the drop pool & tail out below a rock spillway I realized that I had made every cast in the run many times without turning any fish. Self-consciously I began to debate the options: reel up & move on (maybe I had abused the hospitality of this stretch); change flies & repeat (maybe I was using the wrong stuff); fish the same rig one more time through to make it an even six, eight or ten (maybe I'm being lazy). As I began to reel up Dave ambled down the top of the bank & plopped on a rock that provided a great vantage point & stated that he was just going to watch me awhile. The look of anticipation & expectation in his eyes froze me momentarily, so rather than inconvenience him with a move downstream, I stepped back up to the head of the drop pool with new resolve.

Trying to find drifts I had not yet run my flies through would prove difficult unless I got a bit more daring. I cast right to the base of the largest rock in the spillway & let the split shot guide me along the margins of the submerged rocks below. Feeling the tick, tick, tick of the split shot was reassuring yet created a bit of anxiety. You know that you can only play with split shot & rocks for so long before you get hung up & lose some of your stuff. Duplicating the first cast, I waited for the message up the line from the split shot to indicate its initial movement but nothing happened. I flipped the line forward to free the miniature weights & a mammoth Brown Trout shot out of the pool struggling to get every one of his twenty-four to thirty inches into the atmosphere & off my tiny hook! As the fish re-entered the river I glanced up at Dave fleetingly & almost broke out laughing. He sat stunned & wide eyed, his jaw on his chest, his mouth a gaping hole as he coughed out the word 'WOW' repeatedly. The kype-jawed Brown resurfaced & somehow bellied up over some rocks in the spillway into the next pool. I followed like an obedient owner walking his dog on a fifty-foot leash. I needed a choker collar or something because this dog was obviously in charge. As I got parallel to him, gained some control & worked him to within ten feet of the bank he slowly turned back into the current & took off back downstream. I danced & dodged among the rocks, spring seeps, greasy grass & logjams eager to bring this second largest trout of my life to the net. Thirty yards down past the original point of impact I got parallel again, with the initial adrenaline rush & giddiness wearing off I slowly wound up the leash with increased determination. The behemoth was two or three steps away when he nonchalantly turned his head up & to the left, rolled over my leader & took my tippet, split shot & flies back home to the depths of the Madison as a souvenir. My mementos from the encounter were jelly legs, a twisted gut & visions of what could have been.

After regaining some control of my motor skills, Dave & I walked out; our dazed conversation regularly punctuated with "Wow that was a big one", heads bobbing in agreement & eyes glazed over.

Since I started writing these fishing articles for the newsletter I've gained a reputation as sort of a fishing expert. As an expert I should be able to impart all the knowledge necessary for others to improve their fishing success & inspire them to enjoy the sport as much or more than I do. Here's my problem, I'm just a guy who fishes a lot, fishes our stretch of the Madison a lot & is willing to talk/write about it. It is an absolute fact that what I share with folks may (or may not) improve their fishing experience. I'm just a fisherman like any other that holds the omnipresent,

optimistic, hope that every cast will produce a fish. Therefore it is obvious that I'm no expert!

In an effort to reduce overexposure & give others the opportunity to have their thoughts & stories heard I would enjoy accepting submissions from other Ranch members for inclusion in future Madison River Ranch Newsletters. Please be sure the main subject is fishing & preferably fishing in our neighborhood. Thanks.

Mike Wells

mikewells52@hotmail.com

Hoolan's Report

My communication with Bill and Sandra Hoolan has been on the fly. Sandra says they've been literally unpacking and repacking for trips in the parking lot of the Bozeman airport! (Now there's an image for you -- 30 below zero, blowing a gale, clothes flying away, toiletries spilling out and skittering across the frozen parking lot... but I digress.) So anyway, unfortunately they didn't have time to do their "on the scene" report. If I'd thought in time, I'd have tried to talk Jeanne and Jack Hardy into doing their old spot, now that they're in Ennis during the winter. But since I didn't, we'll have to limp along without.

From Our Neighbors:

Wild Trout Management and Whirling Disease – by Gene Welch

Part 2

(for Part 1 see your last newsletter, or email me and I'll send it to you)

The history and current research on whirling disease (WD) in major western Montana rivers was also a meeting topic. MRR members may be interested in the status of that problem, so a summary of information presented follows, emphasizing the Madison. Incidentally, Dick Vincent came out of retirement to lead the WD research effort for the State.

Whirling disease in salmonids is caused by a protozoan, called *Myxobolus cerebralis*, for which a small (tubificid) aquatic worm is a reservoir. While the disease was first identified in the Madison in 1991, researchers believe it was probably there in the mid to late 1980s. The disease was detected in most other major rivers (e.g., Bitterroot, Blackfoot, Clark Fork, Missouri, Rock Creek, Yellowstone) by the late 1990s. Presence of the disease has not always resulted in population declines in rainbows, the most susceptible species. For example, despite the presence of infection in the Missouri for 10 years, a discernible reduction in population abundance has not occurred; rainbows over 17 inches have remained at 2,000-2,500/mile and over 10 inches at 3,000/mile. Not so in the Madison where the population of 1-2 year old rainbows declined from ~3,000-5,000/mile to ~500/mile after 1991. These data are from their long-term Pine Butte sampling section upstream from Lyons Bridge. The good news, however, is that the population recovered to over 3,000/mile in 1999. The researchers believe is due to adaptive resistance to the disease and the fish solved their own problem. Brown trout populations have not shown an effect in any river; in some they have increased in response to fewer rainbows, but usually their populations have remained stable. Even with exposure to high rates of added spores, Madison rainbows in 2004 had low infection rates, compared to earlier. One reason the fish adapted may be that the Madison, with the imposed flow controls, is a rather cushy environment. Mean flow in the Madison since the mid 1990s has been 1,364 cfs with a low and high of 993 and 1,835, respectively. Infection rates are reduced in the Madison as flow increases – a dilution effect on the infectious organisms. Fish may have more difficulty developing resistance in more rigorous environments. Drought has imposed an additional stress on fish in most rivers. However, there is some speculation that 20 years of managing for wild trout may have allowed the genetic diversity to partly account for the surprisingly fast adaptive

resistance of Madison rainbows to WD. Streams in Colorado with WD-caused population declines have not recovered.

So fisheries personnel are optimistic about the future of rainbows coping with WD. However, they are concerned about cutthroat, which are also susceptible. Pelican Creek, a famous cutthroat stream in Yellowstone Park, had a 99% decline due to WD, although vulnerability varies with strain. Surprisingly, angler success in major rivers has generally not declined despite population declines. Angler days in major rivers have continued to increase, with the Madison (no surprise, huh?) and Missouri leading the way. The most effective transfer mechanism is considered to be illegal planting. Nevertheless, the advice is to dry boots and equipment well before fishing other waters.

There is more to the story of good fishing, however, than no planted fish and recovery from WD. While not noted at the meeting, new regulations of catch and release, slot limits and flies only to retain large fish in the population were also extremely important, especially in view of the incredible pressure these rivers are now receiving. If you doubt the value of those regulations in preserving good fishing and believe we should be able to kill five or so good-sized trout per day in the Madison, and still have good fishing, you might want to do some math. For example, assume about 3,000 trout greater than 12 inches per mile, so about 6,000 from the Three-dollar Bridge to the Bend. That may be reasonable given the population size at the Pine Butte stretch and serves as an example. With 120 days of fishing from June through September, removing only 5 fish per day per fisherman, by an average of ten fishermen per day, would completely deplete the stock. Of course, those fish would be replaced with new recruits that would have increased survival, but the average size of the population would decrease, because three years are needed to reach 14 inches even in the very productive Madison!

So no-kill of wild fish, aided by the very low mortality with fly-fishing (see August 2004 newsletter) is providing the excellent fishing. We can all think of the value of each one of those trout we catch and take our hats off to a clever fisheries biologist who 30 years ago conducted an experiment on the Madison that made a fisherman's life a lot happier. Fishers should still be careful handling fish – 50% of the rainbows captured during censuses showed evidence of hooking. Take time to pinch down the barb – release is quicker and much easier on the fish.

Gene Welch

4228 201st Ave. NE
Sammamish, WA 98074

425 898 7371

xThanks to Mike Wells and Gene Welch for their excellent contributions. As always, please send or email me any questions, or anything you think would be of interest to your neighbors, whether it's family news, recipes, reports from the ranch, stuff for sale, letters to the editor, etc. I really enjoy hearing from you!

Martha Crawley

12712 471st Ave. S.E.

North Bend, WA 98045

Email: marthacrawley@comcast.net

Phone: (425) 831-7982