



# Currently

A publication of Idaho's only conservation group dedicated exclusively to protecting Idaho's rivers

Vol. 19 No. 3

## Water grab threatens Boise River flows Fish, wildlife & water quality at stake in court case

By Kevin Lewis, Conservation Director

In a shameless attempt to grab water from the Boise River, Treasure Valley irrigation districts are asking a state court to transfer water rights now held by the federal government to protect fish and the river's ecological health to irrigation uses.

If the districts are successful, fish and wildlife could suffer from lack of water during the late fall, winter and early spring. Additionally, reduced winter fisheries flows could mean that there is not enough water in the river to meet federal and state water quality standards.

Outside of the summer irrigation season, the Boise River already receives barely enough water to protect fish, wildlife and riparian vegetation.

But in a Snake River Basin Adjudication (SRBA) water rights case, several



IRU board member John Heimer talks about river ecology along the Boise River. Heimer gave his talk as part of IRU's Boise River Lecture Series. Photo by Kevin Lewis

Treasure Valley irrigation districts claim that the water stored to provide ecological flows should go to canal companies rather than to fish and wildlife. Fourteen districts have filed an objection to the

Bureau of Reclamation's water right dedicated to protecting fish habitat on the Boise River.

"The Boise River is the ecological lifeblood of the Treasure Valley and is central to the quality of life that makes Boise and the Valley such an attractive place for humans to live and do business," said Bill Sedivy, executive director for Idaho Rivers United. "In-stream winter flows are critical to protecting the fish and wildlife that make the Boise so special all year long.

"Certainly, this water grab is as big a threat to the health of the Boise River as the proposed cyanide-based gold mining operation in the headwaters near Atlanta," Sedivy added.

Out of the nearly one million acre-feet of water stored in the three upstream Boise River reservoirs (Lucky Peak, Arrowrock

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## First salmon drives home loss from dams

By Amanda Peacher, Salmon Program Coordinator

It's 4:50 a.m. and I'm perched on a rock at the South Fork Salmon River, fishing pole in hand.

Your best chance to catch a salmon, says Dave, is to be the first line in the hole. It seems crazy to be stumbling around in the dark just to secure a fishing spot, but I trust Dave. He works for Idaho Fish and Game and has been salmon fishing with his daughter, Madeleine, for years.

We hear that few people have caught fish lately, but a couple of us are trying our luck anyhow. Fishing opens at 5:37, and at 5:39 a.m. we start casting, with barely enough light to see our lines.

I'm not really expecting any of us to catch anything right away, but by 5:50 Madeleine has a bite. Dave scrambles for the net. "It's a jack, it's a jack!" he says. Madeleine is just 19, but she's caught eight or nine salmon over the

years. That's pretty good in Idaho, where salmon seasons have been limited and fish are few.

Like a true fisherman's daughter, Madeleine lands a feisty jack chinook with ease. Dave's grin is huge. "That's my girl, Madeleine, that's my girl!" he repeats.

Excited now, we all return to our spots and resume casting.

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# Business support for rivers is strong

By Bill Sedivy, Executive Director

It's been nearly 30 years since the first of three hydropower developers proposed destroying Idaho's beautiful North Fork of the Payette River with dams. But thanks to the hard work of the boating community, conservationists and organizations like the Idaho Whitewater Association, Friends of the Payette and later, Idaho Rivers United, the North Fork is still flowing free between Cascade Reservoir and Banks.

With everything that goes on here at IRU World Headquarters, I confess that I hadn't given much thought to the approach of this historic anniversary in 2008.

Then, last spring, my friend John Sterling called to say that the Conservation Alliance (John is the executive director of the Alliance) and Keen Footwear had organized a 1,000 mile bike ride from Portland to the Outdoor Retailer Show in Salt Lake. The Alliance, a coalition of dozens of conservation-minded companies, hoped to raise awareness of important conservation issues around the nation and encourage other companies in the outdoor industry to support the work of groups like IRU.

As part of the ride, John said that Keen also was shooting a documentary film highlighting current conservation work funded by the Alliance and some of the Alliance's success stories. He asked if IRU would support the ride, and the making of the film.

Of course, was my prompt reply. Afterall, IRU's predecessor organization — the Friends of the Payette — received the very first Conservation Alliance grant back in 1988.

Now, imagine for a moment, not being able to kayak, canoe or raft the Payette River. Imagine Jacob's Ladder, or the lower five, with no water running over those ledges and rocks. Imagine low flows on the Main and water backed up in the Cabarton reach.

It could have turned out that way. But the Alliance grant helped give local activists like Rob Lesser, Roger Rosentreter, Scott Montgomery, Mark Anderson, Wendy Wilson and scores of others the tools they needed to defeat a series of Payette dam proposals.

The Alliance grant and support from companies like Patagonia also helped spawn a statewide river conservation movement by giving birth to Idaho Rivers United in 1990.

Today, outdoor industry support (along with support from other conservation-minded companies like United Water) continues to be central to IRU's ability to protect and restore the rivers of Idaho.

Our biggest outdoor industry contributors still include companies like Patagonia; river outfitters like ROW Adventures, Oars & Dorries, Mackay Wilderness River Trips, Yellow Jacket River Trips and Costa Rica Rios; and manufacturers like AIRE Corp. and Outcast of Meridian and Northwest River Supplies of Moscow.

Retailers like Idaho River Sports in Boise and Backwoods Mountain Sports in Ketchum donate money, merchandise, rental equipment, venues for events and even their employees — to assist with event set up and logistics.

We receive important support on many levels from the Middle Fork Lodge and Lost River Outfitters of Ketchum, and scores of other outdoor businesses contribute mightily to our annual Auction for the Rivers, to be held November 17 this year in Boise.

So, thank you again to all of IRU's Business Partners — companies big and small. Without your support, Idaho's rivers wouldn't be as healthy as they are today.

(For more information on IRU's Business Partner Program, contact Jessica Hixson at 208-343-7481, or visit our web site — [www.idahorivers.org](http://www.idahorivers.org).)



Alan Hamilton of AIRE on the N. F. Payette.

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*Our mission is to protect and restore the rivers of Idaho.*

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# Idaho Power refuses water quality data request

IRU Staff Report

Idaho Power Company has refused to release critical water quality data to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and other interested organizations as part of its ongoing effort to obtain a new operating license for the Hells Canyon Complex of dams.

For years, Hells Canyon operations have violated water quality standards — impacting the health of the fish, insects and wildlife that live in the Snake River corridor and are the ecological cornerstones of the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area.



A commercial raft guide rows her boat through Wild Sheep Rapid in Hells Canyon. Photo courtesy of Mackay Wilderness River Trips.

During the back and forth debate over standards, Idaho Power has refused to release temperature modeling data obtained by the company and requested by the EPA and others. This data is essential in determining the impacts of the dams on salmon and other aquatic life and is necessary for examining possible solutions to the problem.

Idaho Power has claimed their data is proprietary and “too complex” to be released to the agencies and general public.

In order to obtain a new operating license, the company must first obtain water quality certification (called 401 permits) from the states of Idaho and Oregon.

The biggest unresolved issue in the 401 processes is how Idaho Power plans to meet existing water temperature standards below the dams. Instead of focusing on meeting these standards, Idaho Power is asking regulators to change the standard and allow the discharge of warmer water during the fall — spawning time for federally protected species of fall Chinook salmon.

Idaho Power has argued that warmer discharges are better for endangered salmon and, therefore, the standard should be relaxed. IRU disagrees, as do officials from Oregon and federal agencies.

“Idaho Power is using a public trust resource — our water — to fuel its Hells Canyon power plants,” said IRU Conservation Director Kevin Lewis. “If their use of our water impacts water quality below the dams, and the fisheries that depend on high water quality, the public and public agencies have a right to examine all relevant data.”

IRU will continue to oppose any effort to weaken water quality standards in Hells Canyon and elsewhere. We will also work to ensure that a new license for operations is not issued until water quality certification is achieved.

The Hells Canyon relicensing process has been ongoing for nearly a decade. For additional information please contact Kevin Lewis at 208.343.7481 or [kevin@idahorivers.org](mailto:kevin@idahorivers.org).

## Atlanta Gold Mine application stalled

The Atlanta Gold Company continues to struggle financially, delaying movement on the company’s proposed cyanide-based gold mine proposal in the Boise River headwaters near Atlanta.

So far the mining company has been unable to complete the necessary environmental analysis for their permit application. The U. S. Forest Service has re-assigned their staff to more pressing needs, while waiting for Atlanta Gold to raise necessary funding to continue.

Atlanta Gold’s application to construct the mine will be on hold until the company can pull together the funding to complete the required environmental analysis.

## Uranium Mine proposed near Yankee Fork

Rising uranium prices have created a flurry of activity across the west. Recently, an application was filed to drill 13 test bores near the town of Stanley.

While the preliminary test drilling will have little impact to the environment, the effects of full-blown uranium mining in the headwaters of the Salmon River could be disastrous. IRU continues to monitor this proposal.

## Hearing held on Salmon River mine

In July, the Idaho Department of Lands held a public hearing on a proposal to lease public trust lands along the Salmon River between Riggins and Lucile for a gold mine operation. The hearing was well attended, and almost all citizens who testified were vigorously opposed to the gold mine. Concerns include environmental degradation and possible impacts to the recreational benefits provided by this section of river.

The Idaho Land Board is expected to make a decision on the proposal during its October meeting. Thanks to all IRU members who testified or submitted comments.

# First salmon drives home loss from dams — from page 1

I'm about to reel in another too-short cast when I feel a tug on my line.. Another snag, I think, and reel in a bit more. The snag tugs back. Then, seeing a silver flash in the river I realize:

"I've got one! I've got one!"

I have no idea how to land a salmon, so Madeleine dashes to my side to shout directions:

"Get your rod pointed upstream—no, no upstream, not downstream, reel in a little... not too much!"

From the corner of my eye I see Dave flying around on the bank, grabbing the net. I reel in a little more and get a look at my fish — it's big! And it's fighting. My rod bends, my arms ache, and I wonder if this is one of those sports where it takes hours to land your fish.

But Dave's ready with the net. I follow his instructions to land it, and in one swift movement he scoops up my salmon.

"It's a female. She's a big one!" says Dave. We all clamber in a circle and look at her. She's a beautiful hatchery fish—spotted and luminescent and just a little scarred from her long journey.

Everyone is patting me on the back, yelling "Good job!" But I can't stop looking at her—my first salmon! She's twice as big as any fish I've ever landed. She's traveled through eight major dams and reservoirs, to the ocean and back, over 1400 miles. And I caught her! What a salmon! What a river!

I start to hike up the bank to punch my salmon tag, which I'd accidentally left in the car. But my legs are wobbly, so I stop halfway up to sit. The canyon is beautiful and wild, the river murmuring and clear. I am blessed to be here, to catch this miraculous fish, to live in Idaho. I realize that my experience—so personal and meaningful to me—is not unique. . . and shouldn't be.

People have been fishing for salmon in Idaho for centuries. But since there are so few salmon today, anglers are confined to



IRU Salmon Program Coordinator Amanda Peacher lands her first hatchery salmon on the South Fork Salmon.

a tiny stretches of river to fish for hatchery-bred salmon. We should be able to fish for salmon on over 1,000 river miles in Idaho!

I'm suddenly aware of all we have lost to the lower Snake River dams.

Before today, I had a deep appreciation for Idaho's salmon because of their importance to ecosystems that I love. I've been fighting for salmon because of the immense natural loss that extinction would bring.

Now I feel the tug of an angler's line at my spirit, and realize what a cultural loss salmon extinction would bring, as well. Sitting high above the river, tears come to my eyes.

How did we let it get this bad?

Someday I'd like to take my grandchildren salmon fishing — and tell them the story of how I caught my first salmon, on my first day of salmon fishing, when I was 25.

I feel certain that we will — we must — convince Congress that the lower Snake

## Stanley Council passes pro-salmon resolution

In June, the Stanley City Council unanimously passed a resolution in support of salmon recovery efforts and the Salmon Economic Analysis and Planning Act (SEAPA).

The resolution states support for efforts to address the impacts of the Snake River dams on salmon, as long as all affected communities are kept whole.

"We pledge to communicate and act in all available venues to support the recovery of wild Idaho salmon, essential to the economic well-being of our community and the values of our citizens," wrote the council.

dams need to come down to restore wild salmon to Idaho. It's the right thing to do — for Idaho's natural and our cultural heritage.

That will take time and a lot of hard work. But it will happen. For now, I hike back to the river to cheer on my fishing mates on a glorious morning.

# It's been a great ride, Bert... Thank you!

After working for six years as IRU's Native Fish Program Director, Bert Bowler is leaving the organization to hang out his own shingle.

An Idaho native, Bert joined the Idaho Rivers United staff on Sept. 18, 2001, following a 30-year career with the Idaho Department of Fish & Game. In addition to directing our salmon campaign and other native fish program work, Bert served as IRU's water conservation guru and liaison with Idaho's arid gardening and native plant community.

"Idaho Rivers United has been so, so lucky to have someone as dedicated and knowledgeable as Bert Bowler on our staff," Executive Director Bill Sedivy said. "He brought tremendous energy and passion to the job, along with tremendous credibility and tremendous working knowledge."

"We're going to miss him around the office, for sure," Sedivy added, "but I take great comfort in knowing that we'll be able to continue to work with Bert and have access to his expertise on a consulting basis."



Bert packed up his belongings at IRU in early August and opened an office in downtown Boise with his wife, Susan Whaley. Bert plans to do independent education, outreach and advocacy work on the salmon issue throughout the Northwest as an independent advocate. He calls his new venture Snake River Salmon Solutions. Bert can be reached at [bbowler@snakeriversalmonolutions.org](mailto:bbowler@snakeriversalmonolutions.org).

Amanda Peacher, IRU's outreach coordinator from late 2005 through 2006, has been named IRU's new Salmon Program Coordinator. She will direct IRU's Idaho salmon campaign work in cooperation with our allies at the Save Our Wild

Salmon Coalition (SOS), a nationwide coalition of conservation, fishing and taxpayer groups advocating the removal of four low-value, high-cost dams on the lower Snake River as the best way to save Idaho's imperiled salmon stocks.

IRU was a founding member of SOS and Executive Director Bill Sedivy now serves as president of the SOS board of directors.

## Craig, Sali push anti-salmon legislation

Idaho Senator Larry Craig inserted language into a Senate bill in July that if passed, could impede salmon recovery efforts. The provision, added to an Interior Department appropriations bill, instructs the Bureau of Reclamation to carry out the 2005 Upper Snake salmon plan, called a Biological Opinion or "BiOp."

IRU and partner groups challenged the 2005 BiOp in court and won. If Senator Craig's language remains in the bill, it could give federal agencies the authority to implement an illegal and insufficient salmon plan. IRU is working with partner organizations like the Save Our Wild Salmon Coalition and American Rivers to rid the spending bill of the anti-salmon language in conference.

Also in July, Rep. Bill Sali, Idaho's 1st District Congressman, introduced an anti-salmon resolution in the House of Representatives. Sali asked Congress to pass the resolution as a statement of

opposition to lower Snake River dam removal.

While the resolution has little chance of passing, it's disappointing to see one of Idaho's elected officials devoting energy to defending the outdated and costly lower Snake dams.

IRU is communicating with Sali's staff and constituents in our efforts to educate him about the benefits of lower Snake dam removal.

## Water grab threatens Boise River flows

from page 1

and Anderson Ranch) only 152,000 acre-feet of water is dedicated to flows for fish and river health under the Bureau of Reclamation water right. That's the equivalent of a year-round in-stream flow of just 210 cubic feet per second.

And 85 percent of the water from the three Boise River reservoirs is already dedicated to irrigation and other uses. But irrigation districts are saying they want more.

Although the State of Idaho and Department of Water Resources support the current water right allocations, the irrigation districts continue to actively pursue their objection in the SRBA court. A hearing date has been set for October 16.

Fortunately, the City of Boise has recognized the potential threat to the river and has filed to intervene in the case. The

city will ask the court to support of the current flow regime for fish and wildlife. IRU is working with officials from Boise and is working to educate the leaders of other Treasure Valley cities about the case and how it threatens river health.

If you live in the Treasure Valley, you can help. Visit our website at [www.idahorivers.org](http://www.idahorivers.org) to see the list of irrigation districts involved in the case. If you live within one of these districts, you can help protect the Boise River by asking your district to withdraw from the case.

One of 15 original irrigation districts that filed the case has already decided to withdraw. Kudos to the South Boise Water Company for recognizing the needs of the Boise River.

# Member's autobiography benefits IRU

IRU Staff Report

If you've had the pleasure of meeting IRU member Bob Finkbine, no matter how brief your encounter, chances are that you'll never forget him.

A history teacher by trade and a river rat and wilderness explorer by choice, Bob is one of those guys with more stories to tell than there are campfires to tell them at. So last fall — just in case anyone has managed to miss spending time around a fire with him — Bob wrote about his life of river running and other adventures in a self-published autobiography: *Inescapable Journey: The Life of a River Man*.

Filled with plenty of humor and reflections from many nights spent in the wild, Bob's book has touched those who know him, and has entertained many who don't.

"...I choose to share my stories because they tell of my



Bob Finkbine

haphazard journey into old age and toward a bonding with the land," says Bob, who at age 75 joined IRU for our 2006 fundraising river trip to Costa Rica.

Inspired by IRU's efforts to protect Idaho's rivers, Bob chose to donate all proceeds from his book (collected voluntarily from friends, family members and acquaintances — the book has no set price)

to IRU. He's not even recouping printing costs.

Bob's friends have responded. Since the book rolled off the presses last fall, donations-in-lieu of payment for books have come to IRU from Arizona to Connecticut, and from France to Alaska. So far, Bob's book has raised more than \$3,000 for IRU and has brought more than 60 new members into the fold.

Copies of *Inescapable Journey* are still available. If you want one, just send Bob a note at robertatwell1034@msn.com. When you receive your book, just send IRU a check for whatever amount you're inspired to give.

The IRU staff would like to thank Bob for his creativity, generosity and the inspiration he provides.

## Support IRU through workplace giving

Many employers conduct annual giving campaigns in the fall, allowing their employees to make charitable contributions through payroll deduction.

If you are a federal employee, workplace giving is easy through the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC). During your office's next fund drive, please designate Idaho Rivers United as your beneficiary. Our CFC number is 22174.

Employees of non-federal agencies and companies can write in Idaho Rivers United on your United Way or other pledge form.

If you would like to have a workplace giving campaign at your place of business, call Community Choices in Giving at 208/336-1033.

## IDAHO RIVERS UNITED upcoming EVENTS

mark your calendar!

### Saturday, September 15 River Sweep

Join IRU members and local volunteers to help clean up the Boise River. For information or to lend a hand, please call Amanda at 343-7481.

### Tuesday, September 25 Boise River Lecture Series

Back by popular demand... this popular series returns to the Garden City Library. Program details developing.

### Friday, October 5th Fundraising Breakfast for the Rivers in McCall

Join IRU staff, board of directors and prospective members for a catered breakfast before your workday begins!

Hosted at the Hunt Lodge in McCall from 7:30 am to 8:30 a.m. RSVP to Jessica Hixson at 208/343-7481.

### November 17th 13th Annual Auction for the Rivers!

Don't miss this exciting, pre-holiday event at the Boise Depot. This is our greatest opportunity of the year to make a difference for Idaho's rivers with a wide variety of auction items including gear, river trips in Idaho and Costa Rica and vacation home rentals in Mexico.

Come and join the fun! Beer, wine and appetizers provided.

### March 29 - April 5, 2008 Annual Costa Rica Rios trip

Join IRU and our friends at Costa Rica Rios for a great week of kayaking, canoeing and rafting on the wonderful rivers of Costa Rica.

Price: \$1,500 in advance, \$1,599 after November 17.

For more information, call Jessica at 208/343-7481.



# Business Partners support IRU

Idaho Rivers United appreciates the companies that support our work via Outfitter Pass-Through, in-kind gifts and direct donations. Please contact Jessica at 800/343-7481 or [jessica@idahorivers.org](mailto:jessica@idahorivers.org) to learn more about the benefits of participating in our Business Partner Program.

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Ann and Doug Christensen  
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### Spring Chinook Steward

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(or more)

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### Others who have made a five year pledge

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