

A River Almost Runs Through

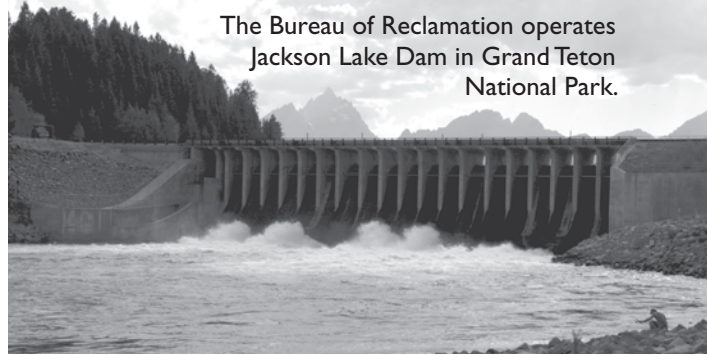
The Snake makes one stop in Wyoming.

By Franz J. Camenzind, *Executive Director*

The Snake River has its origins in the secluded southern region of Yellowstone National Park, nearly 8,500 feet above and 1,040 miles from its confluence with the Columbia River in Washington. In Wyoming, its flow is interrupted by one dam – Jackson Lake Dam in Grand Teton National Park.

Jackson Lake, a natural lake that originally covered about 17,100 acres, grew to more than 25,500 acres with the reconstruction of the current 65-foot-tall dam between 1987-89. The first two attempts to dam the lake's outlet with log structures – first by private irrigators in 1905 and again by the Reclamation Service in 1906 – failed. The first concrete dam with its earthen dike was completed in 1916. The Reclamation Service was renamed the Bureau of Reclamation in 1923 and remains in charge of Jackson Lake Dam, despite the 1950 expansion of Grand Teton National Park to encompass the entire lake and dam facility.

A 1956 “memorandum of understanding” between the bureau and the park states that the bureau “...retains complete and exclusive control of the flow and utilization of water in the reservoir... but will fully consider maintaining a constant level from June through September.” With 94 percent of the controlled water allocated to Idaho irrigation districts, little remains for use in Jackson Hole. However, the bureau, the park and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department have come to agreements on water



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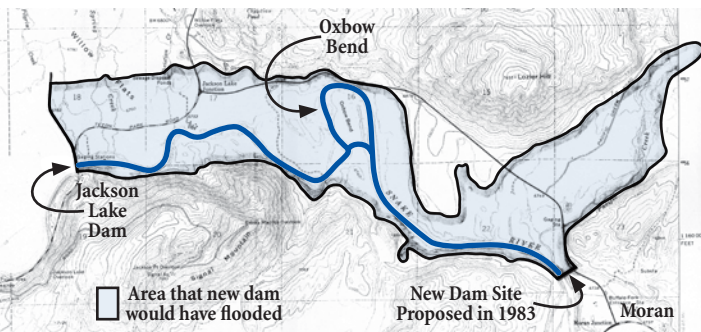
flow strategies to benefit local fisheries and recreational floaters and still meet the demands of downstream users.

More recent interests in the Snake's waters have centered on the installation of a hydropower plant at the dam to generate power for local use. First proposed in the 1980s, the idea has never gotten very far. Although it might seem logical to go green with local power sources, the precedent set by such industrialization of the park would be unacceptable. The Federal Energy Regulatory Agency denied early requests, citing federal laws prohibiting construction of hydroelectric facilities in national parks. In addition, the 1956 memorandum requires the bureau to consult with the park before developing anything at the dam.

As the West continues to grow – creating more demand for water, energy and recreational opportunities – we can count on more proposals for more “creative” uses of Jackson Hole's water. Proposals for diversions on tributaries of the Snake are likely. The mandate of the National Park Service continues to provide some protection to our free-flowing water resources, but the additional protection of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and an informed and passionate community of water protectionists might just carry us through this century. ♦

SNAKE RIVER SNIPPETS

- ♦ In 1983, the Bureau of Reclamation proposed to build a new dam on the Snake River at its confluence with Pacific Creek that would have drowned Oxbow Bend in Grand Teton National Park. Spirited efforts by locals, spurred on by the Conservation Alliance, saved this scenic section.
 - ♦ In 1973, 24,300 people enjoyed recreating in the Snake River Canyon. By 2006, the number grew to 145,560.*
 - ♦ The Snake hosts 13 native and 9 non-native fish species, 5 amphibian species, 7 reptile species and 2 native mollusk species.**
- *Bridger-Teton National Forest **Wyoming Game & Fish Department



Reviving a River Trapped by Levees

Thanks to the efforts of the Army Corps of Engineers, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Teton County Commissioners led by Bill Paddleford and many others, the on-again, off-again Snake River Rehabilitation effort will soon be on again.

This project to restore some of the dynamics and life back to the portion of the Snake River now trapped between levees will include: stabilizing in-stream islands to encourage willow growth and enhance moose and other wildlife habitat; remov-

ing some of the riverbed cobble, which provides virtually no fish habitat because of its instability, and constructing culverts to allow controlled rewatering of riparian areas behind the levees currently deprived of periodic flooding.

The rehabilitation should begin next year, contingent upon obtaining a \$500,000 appropriations request being brought to Congress with the aid of U.S. Sen. John Barrasso. If all goes well, the project will continue into 2028, covering the river

from Grand Teton National Park's southern boundary to the end of the levees at South Park. Although these efforts will never duplicate nature's wild river action, it is hoped that by stabilizing islands within the river and rewatering areas behind the levees we can have both protection from flooding and a more vibrant and wildlife-sustaining river corridor.

For a look at the history of the Snake River levees, please visit www.jhalliance.org/Library/Reports/levee.pdf. ♦