

Get wild on the Wood River

Gold and silver drew some of the first European Americans to the Wood River in the late 1800s. By 1895 the boom was in full swing, and the new community of Kirwin boasted more than 200 people and nearly 40 buildings.

Kirwin was located along the stream high up in the drainage (9,000 feet above sea level), and life there was always a tough business. The grade of ore was never very good, winters were extremely harsh and just getting there was a challenge.

By 1907 just 10 years after the first ore was hauled out by mule, folks decided they'd had enough and shut everything down. Hunting and fishing became the next commercial venture when privately owned lands around the former town were purchased, and a dude ranch started up in the 1930s.

Ultimately, the U.S. Forest Service acquired most of the area where Kirwin had been and restored the town to public domain.

It's a full day's trip via four-wheel-drive to reach Kirwin today, but some of the original structures still stand. A visit today offers a great opportunity to experience Wyoming history and get in some outstanding angling.

The Fishery

The Wood River is typical of many streams flowing off the Absaroka Mountain Range. The Absarokas are young mountains of volcanic origin, resulting in streams that

are on a fairly steep gradient, which means water velocity is high, stream bottom materials are relatively large, the number of pools is somewhat low, stream turbidity is high following measurable precipitation and overall trout productivity is relatively low.

However, the stream provides important habitat for native Yellowstone cutthroat trout. The average trout in this segment runs about 9 or 10 inches long, but there are some larger fish in deeper pools. In terms of numbers, the most abundant trout are less than 6 inches long—a reflection of the fact that this segment plays a critical role providing spawning and rearing habitat.

Mountain whitefish are also found in this stream segment, and non-native brook trout are found on occasion, too.

How to get there

From Meeteetse, take Wyoming Highway 290 about 7 miles west of town. Take the Wood River Road to the southwest where the highway splits.

Stay on this road another 18 miles or so until you reach the U.S. Forest Service Wood River campground.

For best action, consider using woolly worms or other streamers in about a size 8 to 12. Spinning gear also works with any of the usual trout spinners like Blue Fox, Mepps or Panther Martins.

The creel limit here is six fish, only two of which may be cutthroat trout, and only one fish (total) may be longer than 16 inches.

The Instream Flow

Permit Number: T.F. 32

Priority Date: Jan. 21, 2005

Status of the filing: As noted by the letters T. F. in front of the permit number, this is a temporary filing that has not yet been assigned a permanent permit number. A public hearing was held in Meeteetse on Nov. 30, 2006. The state engineer has not yet approved the water right, and the Board of Control cannot adjudicate the water right until it has been approved.

Quantity: Natural unaltered flows from Oct. 1 to April 30, natural flows up to 22 cfs from May 1 to June 30, and natural flows up to 18 cfs from July 1 to Sept. 30. Additional water might be provided from storage in a dam to supplement natural low flows is not needed to maintain this existing fishery.

Location and length: The 3.8 mile long instream flow segment is approximately 25 road miles west of Meeteetse. The segment begins at the Wood River's confluence with the Middle Fork of the Wood River and extends upstream to the Forest Service boundary just downstream from the mouth of Jojo Creek.

Land ownership: The entire segment of the instream flow filing is located on lands administered by the U.S. Forest Service.

Rationale: Protecting what's left of habitat for native fish like Yellowstone cutthroat trout is a high priority for the Game and Fish. Habitat protection for any fish species begins with making sure there's enough water so the other physical parts of fish habitat—the rocks, riffles and pools—can function to sustain a species over time. Protecting water with instream flow rights is identified in the Water Management Section's five-year plan as one of the key factors for selecting streams where instream flow water rights are needed. Our filing here was designed to protect existing habitat for all life stages of trout including habitat for spawning, rearing, adults, and over-winter survival.

Other factors: This water right does not include enough water for flushing flows or channel maintenance flows, which research has shown may be needed to maintain long-term habitat characteristics and ecological function.



Yellowstone cutthroat, mountain whitefish and brook trout have replaced gold and silver as the treasure that lures people to the Wood River. The town of Kirwin once stood near the instream flow section, but it faded away in the early 20th Century. Photo by Andrew Annear

To get more information about instream flow, visit the Wyoming Game and Fish Department's Web site at <http://gf.state.wy.us/fish/instreamflow>