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Storm Drain Pollution Still an Issue on Bighill Creek



Above: The foam from pollution is evident on the surface of the Bighill Creek, for some distance downstream.

A few years ago, the topic of storm drain pollution on Bighill Creek was brought up. At the time, an article was published in the Cochrane Eagle and Stream Tender Magazine. I personally received assurance from the Town of Cochrane that the pollution incident was being investigated.

This fall, while walking the path system at the same time as large volumes of something foamy was being flushed into Bighill Creek, I stopped to take a few photos. The storm drain in question, does not come from a residential area, but rather from a commercial zone, so what is going on?

The residents of the Town of Cochrane face steep fines if they are caught dumping any chemicals down the storm drain, the same should be the case for any commercial activity that pollutes our nearby creek. Because the foam looked to me like soap suds, I suspect that may be what it is. But the volume of the pollutant was significant and it was present on the surface of the creek for some distance downstream of the inflow.

The fact that this was happening at the same time as the fall spawning period for trout on the Bighill Creek was especially disturbing. Newly deposited trout eggs are very vulnerable to any type of pollution. The contamination of the outer wall of the egg will prevent the eggs intake of oxygen from the water. The residual effects are yet unknown as well.

I personally, don't have the time to conduct investigations into such matters, so I am hoping that someone else is. This needs to stop. From what information that I have gathered so far, the pollution seems to be more evident after a long period of dry weather. This leads me to believe that the chemical accumulates over time in the storm drain, and then is flushed into the creek during a rain event, when there is enough volume of flow in the drain to clear it out.

Storm drains are designed for surface ground water run-off, not a convenient dumping drain for polluting chemicals. I think that ongoing education of this matter is necessary to make everyone aware. The environment often takes a "back seat" when it comes to important community issues.

This is too bad for the trout in Bighill Creek. This fall, during some of my spawning survey work, I noticed a definite decline in the number of trout spawning in the Bighill Creek system. I am not saying that this has anything to do with pollution events on the creek. However, what I am saying is that these trout have a tough enough life, trying to survive, with a lot of negative impacts, both natural and man-made.

Any additional impacts such as pollution of the Bighill Creek, will have long term consequences on our trout populations. So we should do something about it, before the creek becomes uninhabitable for wild trout.



Above: This fall I took this photo of the foam contaminated inflow on Bighill Creek. This has happened in years past and will continue to happen until the problem is resolved. The flow of Bighill Creek is too low to dilute any pollution like this. It is difficult to access the impact on the trout fishery when chemicals like enter the stream.



Fly Fishing The Spring Micro Caddis Hatches

It was the late Bill Griffiths that tipped me off about the fabulous spring caddis hatches on the lower Bow River. Both of us fished these a few times and for me it was a learning experience. I found out that you could fish really small dry fly imitations of the caddis fly River trout. Also, the no-hackle patterns are much more durable still, but you can reverse wrap the copper wire the dubbing to help keep the fly pattern together.

Bill only used a few wraps of hackle on his patterns. Due to the fact I didn't have any really small hackle for tying such micro patterns, I opted to go no hackle on some of my small caddis dries, and this seemed to work just fine. However, once I acquired some top quality capes, I did follow Bill's lead on tying micro caddis.

Back in the early to mid 1980's, there seem to be better spring caddis hatches, or at least the trout seem to be more cooperative. Maybe the trout are a little better educated nowadays. Rarely, do I see the pods of feeding trout that I use to, in the City of Calgary. It must be from more intense fly fishing pressure on the resident trout population. It is also true that I don't fly fish the lower Bow as much any more. Reports of great hatches downstream of Calgary are still common.



March Brown Wet Fly

Below: This chart shows the annual brook trout redd count on Millennium Creek for the past 10 years. You can see a slight dip in the spawning numbers for this fall, but over all the creek produces a consistently high amount of spawning activity for the Bighill Creek system.

The Caddis Dry Fly Pattern



The caddis dry fly pattern is a must for any fly fisher's fly box. It is the most common dry fly hatch of the season and even surpasses the May fly hatches on some streams. In the early spring, large caddis fly hatches will keep the trout coming to the surface in the early morning and late in the day. Every novice fly fisher should have a few size 14 caddis dry flies in their collections. For the novice fly tier, they are really easy to tie.

Creating Wild Trout Habitat and Conserving Water



Bighill Creek is only a short walk from my front door, so keeping an eye on how the creek is doing over time is easy done. One of the most rewarding things to watch is the slow but steady growth of the new native willow and tree plants that we have planted on the creek.

Willows and trees that were planted along the water's edge in 2014, are now growing out over the creek channel in some locations on the Bighill. Besides the newly created shade over the surface of the stream, I know that trout are finding cover below the canopy of new growth.

The streambed is also cleaning up on the lower end of the creek, before it enters the Bow River on its way to the City of Calgary. The cleaner bed material is a result of the reduction of silt loading from unstable stream banks that are now planted with native willows and trees.

The willows growing over the surface on both sides of the creek channel is constricting the flow in the stream. With reduced surface area in the creek there is less evaporation and a higher velocity of flow. This is good for the water and the trout that live below the surface.

2017 Fall Spawning Season – "Down-But Not Out"



Just like everything else in the natural world, there are highs and lows in wildlife numbers. Much of this is related to environmental conditions and also human influences. The same holds for trout numbers. We had a dry, hot summer this year, so I was expecting a possible drop in the fall spawning results for this year.

Low flow conditions in our area streams means that the trout are under stress from the loss in habitat created by the lack of water in the creek channels. Suffering a stressful open water season can reduce the reproductive development of the trout that reside in those waters. The fall spawning will be carried out by fewer ripe female trout, so the numbers of spawning trout will be down.

It is well known among fisheries managers that sometimes trout will skip a spawning season, because they don't have the ability to develop eggs in a single season or year. For some trout, like bull trout, this can be a common occurrence. Bull trout live in rather sterile mountain streams, so slow growing seasons for this variety of native trout occur. The result is that they will spawn every other year.

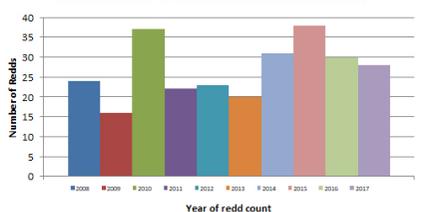
This year's spawning on the Bighill Creek system was down, when compared with other years. There was a substantial decline on the Upper Spring Creek tributary and Ranch House Spring Creek, especially on the later. Ranch House Spring Creek went from over 40 trout redds (egg nests) last year, down to 7 brook trout redds this year.

In the main channel of Bighill Creek, I noticed a dramatic decline in the number of spawning trout this fall. Both brook trout and brown trout numbers were down from previous years. The reduced number of brown trout redds was alarming to me. I didn't see that many mature, large brown trout spawning on the creek this season.

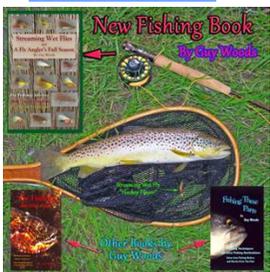
I am still very disappointed in the fishing regulation change that came to pass in the 2017 fishing regulations. In my opinion, there should be zero trout harvest in the Bighill Creek. After all, we are working very hard to bring this sport fishery back to life and having a harvest on the larger trout in the stream will do nothing but damage the fishery.

Regardless of obstacles like this, we will continue our work in a conservation based direction, on the Bighill Creek system.

Millennium Creek Brook Trout Redds



Stream Tender Store





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A Fly Fisher's Blood Worm Fly Patterns



The reason that they are called blood worms is because of the red haemoglobin that is revealed thru a transparent exoskeleton. The blood worm is actually a midge larva. Red is just one of its more common colors. The red can vary from bright red to claret, maroon or burgandy in color. For many fly fishers, this is the go to fly pattern on those days when all else seems to fail, or those fly fishers may just skip the rest, and tie it on their leaders as a starter fly, to begin the day with.

I know a few fly fishers that use this fly pattern consistently and catch trout and whitefish regularly. One fly fishing guide that I knew, promoted the blood worm. He would encourage all of his clientele to fish the pattern on the Bow River.

You can fish the blood worm in a standard chironomid pattern as well. On some emerging midges, they retain the red abdomen but have a dark color thorax. I have fished the blood worm chironomid in very small sizes on the Bow River and did well on some occasions. Hook sizes down to size 18 will work for large trout.

For novice fly tiers, the blood worm is a very easy tie. You can experiment with the vast number of variations available to the fly tier. I like to tie the pattern with a D-rib plastic body, using a red tying thread. This pattern works for me and a large number of fly fishers that buy the pattern from me annually.

The D-rib creates a very attractive segmented body when it is wrapped tightly around the hook shank. You can use midge tubing as well.

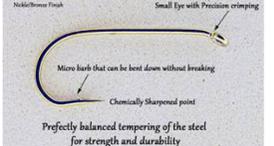


Above: These bright red color blood worm larva fly patterns were tied with D-rib, on a 3X fly hook. I bent the shank of the hook a bit to give the worms the appearance of movement, when fished.

Right: These blood worm pupa patterns are fished during the hatch. They can be tied in a variety of hook sizes.

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Stabilization of Eroding Stream Banks - By Planting Willows

The Bow Valley Riparian Recovery and Enhancement Program is into its fourth year and the 2018 season will be the fifth. Part of the riparian planting program involves planting willows on eroding stream banks, usually on the outside bends of meanders, oxbows or other steep slopes where the water has undermined the bank and created instability.

Bow Valley Habitat Development has been planting on such erosion sites before the present and ongoing BVR&E program was started, so we already knew of the benefits, over time. It does take time for the newly planted willows to take root and grow thick over unstable soil. The challenge is in getting the willow plants started. Once they have survived the first year, the following years of growth and survival are more likely. The biggest threat during that first year is flooding.

Over the years, I have noted that some willow stabilization sites grow quite slowly in the years following the first planting. I suspect that this can be directly attributed to the soil conditions and the amount of moisture that the plants get.

For those plants that grow slowly above the ground, there are probably very good root systems established below the ground, and this is the important part of bank stabilization. Even if some of the willows die off over the first few years, the root systems will stay in tacked for many years. This will help hold the slope soil in place.

It is very rewarding to watch the transformation of an eroding stream bank that has been planted. In the first few years, you wonder if the plants will hold on and survive. Usually, after the third year, you know if your time has been well spent. It most often is.

Once the toe erosion on a slope has been slowed down or stopped, the entire slope will be stabilized over time. The end result will be a slope with less gradient and lots of willow cover. Once the exposed soil is covered with foliage, it no longer deposits silt into the creek channel.

It is a very cost effective way of stabilizing eroding stream banks in a natural way. The end product provides good fish and wildlife habitat and it also improves the stream's water quality.



Above: This is a planted erosion site, two years after planting. The native willow plants are now well established with a network of root systems that are working to keep the unstable soil from sliding into the creek channel. The willows are varieties of *Salix*.



Above: This is the same site, three years after the first planting of native willows was completed. The willows are now starting to provide some cover over the surface of the water. The fourth and fifth year of growth will be dramatic at this site.

Stage One Willow Plant



Ranch House Spring Creek Brook Trout Spawning in 2017



It was a tough year for the brook trout that tried to spawn in Ranch House Spring Creek this fall. The water levels were down and the stream channel is widening, making it more difficult for brook trout to migrate upstream to spawn. At least the season was not a total right off and some trout did manage to lay their eggs. I noticed plenty of juvenile brook trout from last year's hatch, so that was nice to see.

The Ranch House Spring Creek is an important spawning tributary for the lower reach of the Bighill Creek. It also serves as a nursery habitat for juvenile brook trout and brown trout during their initial years of life.

Long Term Objectives for Riparian Planting Program

In riparian restoration programs you expect to make a real difference. You also need to have a stream or streams time. In cities and towns, plants that are that are obviously lacking native willows and trees along the stream banks. We have both of these things. I can only speak for myself and those partners and volunteers that have proven this commitment over the past five or so years.

For most things that we try to accomplish in our lives, we expect immediate results. When you are dealing with mother nature and willow and tree planting, you have to learn to be patient. The results will come, but they may not be obvious for at least five or six years. The "Bow Valley Riparian Recovery and Enhancement Program" was first started in 2014, so plants from that year will start to stand out on the landscape in a few more years. Most likely in 2019 and 2020, we will see a real difference.

A number of the volunteers are a little less than ideal. In cities and towns, plants that are chosen for parks and open spaces are often on the larger size to get an immediate effect, but our plants are just small cuttings with roots and small top development. This means that our native plants will take at a number of years of growth to be tall enough to really stand out.

One of the first things that I expect to notice, is the improved water quality and also the plants on the stream bank stabilization sites. Both of these things are already happening on the Bighill Creek, in Cochrane, Alberta. The water quality has definitely improved, with less silt on the streambed. The native plants that we planted on the bank erosion sites are really starting to cover the exposed soil and stabilize. This has allowed native grasses to also take root and grow. This is great to see.



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2017 Fall Trout Spawning Season on Bighill Creek Spawning Habitats - Closely Monitored

Another fall season of spawning is now complete on the Bighill Creek system. The trout eggs deposited in the gravel will now incubate into the winter months, with some hatching starting in January of 2018. Most of the trout eggs were deposited in the gravel of small feeder spring creeks, so the consistent flow of clean water will result in a higher hatch rate than the main stem spawning on the creek.

The spawning habitats on three different spring feeders for the Bighill Creek have been vital in the trout recovery program. For the past decade, consistent trout hatches on some of the feeder springs has helped maintain a growing trout population. Primarily for brook trout. This confirms the importance of small feeder spring creeks on any stream system. Even if they are producing a minimal volume of flow.

The benefits of small feeder springs for spawning brook trout can be attributed to the quality and temperature range of the ground fed water in the channel. With quality gravel available, this is all that brook trout require for reproduction. With spring feeder creeks of short distance, there is less chance of human impact, such as storm drain inflow or other silt loading from development that can destroy a spawning habitat.

For the two spring feeders that are within the town limits of Cochrane, there are annual maintenance requirements to keep the spring creeks accessible and working condition for spawning brook trout. Carrying out an annual maintenance program is a small price to pay for a yearly productive trout hatch on the system. For volunteers conducting annual maintenance, the reward is in seeing another successful hatch of trout every year.

There are some that suggest turning the annual spawning event into a public spectacle, but this would surely lead to the destruction of it. Also, trout need to be left alone during their reproductive process. Having a crowd of onlookers would disrupt the spawning cycle. The ongoing reporting by Stream Tender Magazine helps keep the people that are interested, informed of how things are developing over time. This should be enough.

Bow Valley Habitat Development also has produced video footage of spawning on all the streams in the program, so you can check this out on the video link on the cover page.



Above: A colourful brook trout holds in the spawning channel on Millennium Creek, while its mate has already fled to cover.



Above: This large male brook trout ignored the abundant stream of midge larva that was floating over its head. The trout was too focused on spawning

Fall Planting Fun on West Nose Creek, Calgary



Above: Taylor (front left), Emma (front right) and father John Schmidt are dressed for the weather of planting on a very cold fall day, on West Nose Creek. The team was part of the Evergreen/HSBC planting event on October 14th of this year. In a matter of a few hours, over 700 native willows and trees were planted, as part of the "Lincoln Your Creeks" program, organized by Evergreen. Despite the cold weather we all had fun keeping warm by working hard.

Salamanders - In Local Creeks and Lakes



Above: I am not an expert in salamanders, but I think that this one is a Tiger Salamander Larvae. The creature was photographed in nearby Harmony Lake. I encountered Long Toed Salamanders on Canmore Creek in 1997 and 1998, during a stream restoration program. It is always nice to see these unique members of the Amphibian Family. You can see a small shrimp in the bottom left corner of the photo. This is most likely what the salamander was feeding on, while searching around in the large gravel shallows of Harmony Lake.

Local Streams Like Bighill Creek are Wildlife Corridors

As is usually the case, I spend a lot of my spare time these days, walking the banks of local streams. Especially Bighill Creek, just a short distance from my house. This fall, there was a nice four point mule deer buck that moved into the area along the creek during the rut or mating season. The buck let me take a few photos while it was in the neighbourhood.

With the abundance of poplar trees and willows along the stream, there is enough wildlife habitat to support a small resident deer population, along with other native wildlife. This is nice, because residents of the community that utilize the path system are greeted on their walks thru this habitat by both birds, foraging animals and ungulates, such as mule deer. I have even encountered a few moose right in the Town of Cochrane.

What I like about having a healthy riparian habitat, besides the benefits to the local trout fishery, it also provides an ideal nesting habitat for song birds that were once abundant along the local streams. In the early spring, before the leaves cover the willows, I always find small nests constructed by song birds later on in the spring. This was once quite common to see.

There presently is a pretty big gap in riparian habitat thru part of the Town of Cochrane. It will eventually be filled with the native willows and tree plants that Bow Valley Habitat Development and other volunteer groups are now planting. Once this is accomplished, wildlife will easily move along the entire system, using the Bighill Creek as a completed wildlife corridor.

The section of riparian zone thru the Town of Cochrane may not be very wide at first, but over time, I expect this will widen. It will continue to need the community and partnership support required to plant and protect the natural eco-system that a riparian zone provides.

This past fall, I really enjoyed seeing large mule deer buck, mating right in the Town of Cochrane. It was the first time that I have ever experienced this sight. As did many whom walked the path system in the same area. The experience was a real treat.

I suspect that the buck was probably bred in its first year along the creek, because it didn't seem as afraid of humans as other wild mule deer are. Hopefully, the big deer will be around next year.



Classic Wet Flies - Memorable Patterns

When I was a kid, before I was gifted my first fly rod, I would still buy wet fly patterns from the local hardware store. These cherished gems were fished on a spin cast reel and rod, using monofilament line. The flies came with a snelled leader already attached, so a simple loop to loop knot was how you could attach the fly hooks to your line.

The flies were sometimes dressed with bait or they could be fished just as they looked. Trout and mountain whitefish were the target for a young angler, intent on providing a fish dinner. Those were care free days of great fun on the water. Either fishing solo or with a buddy.

I still get sentimental when I see some of those old style trout flies on display, in a book, magazine or hanging on my wall at home. For a few years, I had a small exhibition wet flies, some of the old classics, just for display purposes. This is something that I am glad I did, when pause to look at them from time to time. There are some fly fishers that still fish some of the old classics in modern times. Keeping the tradition alive.



Above: A few old classics that I tied years ago.

Remember The Black Knap ?



Above: The Black Knap Classic Wet Fly patterns like the Royal Coachman and the Black Knap were very popular in the 1950's and 1960's on the Bow River. Especially in the fall, during the mountain whitefish run in Cochrane.

The Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout - In The Yellowstone River



One of the prettiest cutthroat trout that I have ever caught was hooked on the Yellowstone River, back in the early 1990's. On that very memorable day, I hooked into 7 very large trout on a section of the river below the falls. It was early fall and the trout were just incredibly beautiful at that time of the year. The red slash below the jaw was a bright, fuchsia red and the sides of the trout was a golden olive color, similar to a brown trout.

This turned out to be an afternoon of trout fishing that I will never forget. Fortunately, I did manage to take a number of photos. One of the photos was used on the cover page of my second book titled "Fly Fishing and Other Stuff". I took just the head section of the fish in that photo. There is something special about a Yellowstone cutthroat trout, and it was a real privilege to have the opportunity to catch this Rocky Mountain native.

The Famous Frank Sawyer's Pheasant Tail Nymph

Recently, I watched some achieve film footage of the late Frank Sawyer, tying his original pheasant tail nymph fly pattern. I had read his book "Keeper of the Stream" and was fascinated by his interest and knowledge of being a river keeper in England. This was something that both of us had in common. Of course there was also the fly fishing side

of things. The pheasant tail nymph has been one of my favourite patterns over the years. The original pattern was tied with just male pheasant tail fibres, along with copper wire to help hold things together. This pattern is a great still water fly, it imitates May fly and damselfly nymphs.

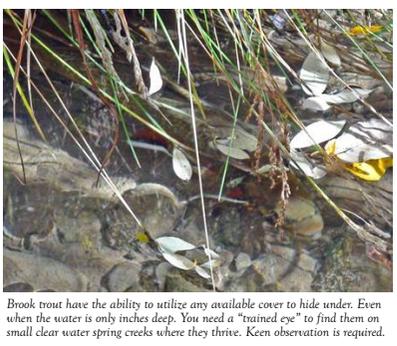
Right: This is what an original Sawyer's pheasant tail nymph looks like. Nowadays, many fly tiers will add a bead to the fly pattern, which works fine when trout are in the mood. Other colors of dubbing is also used as a substitute on the thorax of the fly in place of the original pheasant tail. This fly pattern is a must for your fly box, in a selection of different hook sizes.





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Can You Find The Brook Trout in this Photo?



Brook trout have the ability to utilize any available cover to hide under. Even when the water is only inches deep. You need a "trained eye" to find them on small clear water spring creeks where they thrive. Keep observation is required.

Local Brook Trout Population – Still Holding On

For years now, there has been a local brook trout population that has struggled to survive. In a time of habitat loss, an undependable supply of cold, clean quality water, it is a dangerous time for wild trout. Yet, the area brook trout always manages to find a small length of stream with all that they need to exist.

The streams that you find the brook trout in are usually quite small, with a cold and clean spring ground water supply that flows with consistency. This ability to survive in small water is a well known trait of the Eastern brook trout. Larger streams, like the Bow River, are usually occupied by either brown trout, bull trout or rainbow trout.

Brook trout seem to prefer living on the fringe, in habitats that no other variety of trout would endure. I have seen them occupy the smallest of spring creeks, sometimes only a trickle of flow.

Once, while riding a horse in the foothills, I spotted movement in a puddle of water where the trail crossed a drainage. Upon closer inspection, I noticed a small brook trout that was trapped in the small pool. I knew that there was a brook trout stream a ways down slope, so this explain where the brook trout came from.

During a rain, when there was water flowing down the drainage, the brook trout had migrated up the drainage and then been stranded when the flow subsided. This demonstrated to me how brook trout tend to explore new habitats when the urge prompts them to swim into the unknown.

There are a few small spring creeks that enter the Bow River in our area, which contain brook trout. Hopefully, these trout will survive the encroachment of human development in the area. Especially the impacts to the water and natural habitat that they need to survive.



Above: Brook trout, even at an early age, blend into the bottom cover of a small stream. Sometimes, only the eyes will give away their position, as they hold motionless on the bottom.

Left: The Hares Ear Wet Fly
The late Bill Griffiths and I watched fellow fly fisher, Dave Christianson, catch a few nice rainbow trout, while fishing a size 16 Hares Ear wet fly, on the Bow River. Both Bill and I agreed that the Hares ear most likely represented a diving caddis adult, laying its eggs after diving to the bottom of the river channel. This is just one of the occasions when a wet fly pattern can still be a deadly choice for the fly fisher. The wing on this pattern is tied with secondary pheasant tail wing sections and the hackle is Grey partridge.



Riparian Stream Bank Planting and Water Quality

This Fall, on one of my daily walks along the Bighill Creek, I stopped to look at the water from one of the path bridges on the creek. As I gazed down onto the flowing water, I noticed a movement that stood out from the waving flow of pond weed on the creek's streambed. It was a large fish.

The big trout was feeding on something behind a large boulder in the stream and by chance I happen to catch it's movement from directly above. It turned out to be a huge brown trout that was moving around feeding, in only a foot of water, amongst the large sheath pond weed on the creek bed. After fumbling to get my camera out of it's case, I did manage to get a few photos of the trout before it moved upstream and out of sight. Because it was spawning time for brown trout on the Bighill creek, I suspect the trout was on the move that morning and I just happen to be lucky enough to spot it below the path bridge.

The brown trout was approximately 17 or 18 inches in length and it had a very large head for its size. Probably a male I thought. The fact that the water in the Bighill Creek was running so clear that morning, it was easy to see this trout and I wondered where it had made it's home for the summer months.

The Bighill Creek is flowing a lot cleaner these days, when compared to a decade or so in the past. I suspect that part of the reason for this has to do with the riparian planting that has been completed on the creek in recent years. Especially on eroding stream banks that were allowing large volumes of soil to be washed into the creek channel annually.

When you see a large trout in clear water on Bighill Creek, you can definitely consider the stream to be on the healthy side of its overall recovery from year's past. Hopefully, this trend will continue into the future.



Above: This is the photo of the large brown trout that I saw from the path bridge that morning this past fall. You can see how large the head is on this fish. The trout could easily disappear into pockets of the large sheath pond weed that covered the bottom of the creek bed. It is very important that the water flows clear during the fall spawning period on the creek, to help in a successful egg hatch over the winter months.

Off Season Memories - A Fly Fisher's Winter Thoughts

We got an early taste of winter this fall, when the first weeks of November dropped well below freezing and the ice started to skirt the stream banks. I didn't get out to fly fish that much this spring, summer or fall, but that is just the way it goes these days. Having the opportunity to carry out riparian plantings along some area streams was enough to keep me content.

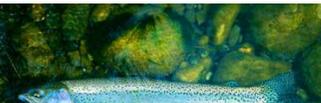
With the recent news of the whirling disease outbreak still on my mind, I have had plenty of time to think about how good the trout fishery has been to me and others over the years. Thoughts about where this latest threat to our sport fishery is going and what may be the end result are also repetitive in my mind.

Now that the snow and ice have locked in our local trout streams, some of my spare time will be directed at some fly tying and other indoor hobbies that are related to fly fishing. Just to keep the interest up and start to build up some excitement about next year's possibilities.

Sorting thru some old fly fishing photos always brings back some pleasant memories of great fishing on local waters. I have a pretty extensive library of slide photos that I rarely go through anymore, so this is a good way to fill in some free time. I can scan some of these pictures to a digital file, so that they are easily accessible for future use.

Today, I found some old photos of rainbow trout that I had caught and released on the Bow River, during the spring spawning run, up from the Bearspaw Dam. Memories of beautiful clean rainbow trout that averaged anywhere from 17 inches up to 23 inches were the norm back then. I wonder if or when the fishery will ever be the same as it was up until the millennium. Hopefully, someone else can enjoy the great spring fly fishing that a number of us had and did back then.

I have always tried to be optimistic and look at the promise that future fly fishing holds for us, but these days, this is difficult.



Left: This old slide photo shows a nice clean spring caught rainbow trout. The trout was caught and released in the Town of Cochrane back in the late 1990's. Trout catches like this one are rare these days, now that the jumpstarting stream has declined in numbers. Not a great thought for an old local fly fisher.

Right Photo:

This photo shows a mature brown trout lying in a freshly excavated redd or egg nest. Its mate is probably in the same nearby cover, out of sight. When they are not disturbed by observer's like me, they will lay the fertilized eggs in the depression of gravel and fan fresh gravel over top of the eggs.

I suspect that the trout in this photo is a large male, due to its color and the shape of its head. Males have a hooked lower jaw which is easy to spot on these large trout.



West Nose Creek Water Quality is an Issue - But There is Hope

Right Photo:

West Nose Creek flows pretty dirty during the spring and summer months. Similar to what you can see in this photo. The willows in the photo are from our riparian planting program and this may be the key to improving water quality on the stream.

The dirty water is caused by cattle grazing upstream, stream bank erosion and storm drain inflow. Recent construction, from new housing development, creates a problem with what ends up in the storm drains and then the creek.

The riparian planting will help improve the water quality in the stream, but other issues should also be addressed to improve the water quality that enters West Nose Creek.



Above you can see the new willow plants along the stream bank on West Nose Creek, in Calgary. On some days the creek looks like a mud puddle.

Bighill Creek's Winter Flows - Running Clear and Clean

We didn't get as much fall rain and early snow as I was hoping for, but we did get enough to insure decent flows in the Bighill Creek this fall. This past year has been a dry one and the creek was flowing really low at times. This can make life a little difficult for the trout population.

Trout need cover and depth to hold in and the later is in short supply when the water levels are low. Fortunately, there were a number of beaver dams on the creek where trout could retreat to. Beaver dams insure good depth for pool habitats.

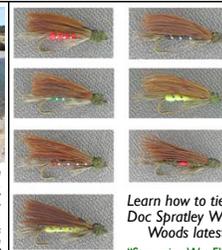
Finding deep water habitats is especially important for trout when the water is flowing clear and clean for extended periods of the open water season. The clean water in Bighill Creek will be very beneficial during the fall and winter months, when there are trout eggs incubating in the spawning redds or nests.



Above: Just before the ice covered the Bighill Creek this late fall, the water was running clear and clean. This riffle shows how the stream looks on a stretch of good gradient, with a fast current flowing over boulders on the stream bed.



Above: This is what the Bow River in Cochrane looks like during low spring flows, early in the day. Fly fishing for spring rainbow trout was once a rewarding pastime under these conditions, but not so much anymore. The decline in rainbow trout populations has become quite evident these days. Both fisheries management and Environmental impacts are suspected by some fly fishers as the bottom root cause.



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