



Stream Tender Magazine



The Big Flood Hit Bighill Creek on June 21st, 2019–It had Been Years Since The Last One Like It!



Four inches of rain, over night, made the stream banks of Bighill Creek overflow on the following morning. The landscape was already pretty green from all of the combined spring rains, so having a blow-out on the creek was not a big surprise. Huge volumes of surface run-off scoured the creek bottom and put our willow and tree planting efforts to the test.

The good news is that our spring planting and previous plantings all stood up to the torrent of flow washing over the banks of the creek. All of the beaver dams along the lower reaches of the creek were blown wide open during the flood event.

I have been asked many times about the impacts to the trout fishery on the creek, post flood, but my answer is always the same: the flood will do nothing but good for the creek and its resident trout population. There will be plenty of new spawning habitat come this fall. Both brook trout and brown trout will utilize this new spawning gravel this fall. Every fall, trout spawn in the main channel of Bighill Creek, in Cochrane.



Post Flood Willow and Tree Growth Will Be Fast!



Above: The planted willows and trees at this site were bent in a downstream direction directly after the flood water's receded. Some of the willows and trees will remain altered by this flood event and continue to grow, pointing in a downstream direction. The bottom line here is that the plants will continue to grow and provide excellent habitat for both fish and wildlife into the future years. The stream's recovery is well underway and the new plantings are making it all happen a lot faster than if left to do it alone, thru a long period of time, in the natural process.

The Indispensable Brown Trout - How and Why It Thrives In Local Streams!

There are a number of area streams where no other variety of wild trout would survive, except for the indispensable brown trout. It is a trout that can tolerate higher water temperatures, turbid water conditions and it can find habitat to live, where other trout would struggle to survive. Brook trout are a close second place in survivability, but the brook needs real cold water to thrive.

If there is a population of minnows and coarse fish in a stream, and they are reproducing in the water's that they live in, there is a good chance that brown trout would also survive in the same water's. During the fall and winter months, many of our local flow streams are a lot clearer than during the spring and summer months. This means that all fall spawning trout will have a better chance at reproduction if available spawning gravel and habitat is present.

This is where both brook trout and brown trout have an edge over other spring spawning trout such as cutthroat trout and rainbow trout. In the spring, during these other trout's spawning time, the waters in most local streams is flowing high and dirty for much of

the spring. A time when both rainbow trout and cutthroat trout normally lay their eggs down in the gravel of some streams where they spawn.

This is all related to environmental influences in trout reproduction. It is also why wild rainbow trout and cutthroat trout are so threatened in our modern times. Making brown trout the immediate replacement sport fish on many area small streams that experience poor riparian health and water conditions. Even though the stream's conditions are questionable, brown trout still seem to amaze most of us.

Personally, I have spent many years fly fishing various small streams for brown trout. I learn a long time ago that if the water is a little dirty, there will still be hungry brown trout ready to be enticed by my trout fly. On some small creeks that extend further east from the east slopes, the brown trout's range is extended into the prairies. West Nose Creek, in the City of Calgary is a good example of this. Also, on the lower reach of Nose Creek, which is really surprising. The water quality on the lower reach of Nose Creek is presently terrible.

Until our wild rainbow trout and cutthroat trout fisheries are in a state of rebound, the brown trout has an important role to play in maintaining area wild trout populations. I would like to see more protection to protect wild brown trout numbers on local small creeks. We are now living in a time when harvesting trout from nearby small trout streams is very poor fisheries management. It is almost impossible to maintain healthy or recovering brown trout populations, when you have a permissible harvest of those wild trout.

Now is a good time to show some real concern in the direction we manage our wild trout fisheries. It is relatively simple when compared to climate change and the course we choose to deal with global weather, but it is a great place to start. Taking care of true survivors like brown trout populations and the habitat that they live in seems to be simple in my own mind. You can start by showing some interest in the beginning and everything else will slowly fall in place as we move to make some positive change. Having a two trout harvest on mature adult brown trout on some local trout streams is ridiculous.

Abundance Of Juvenile Brown Trout Coming Out Of Bighill Creek!



If you read the Red Catkins article on the bottom left side of this page, you know that I caught and released a juvenile brown trout on my first outing to fly fish the Bow River. I did manage to get back down to the river on the following day and this time I did get a photo of another small brown trout.

Man, those small trout are really hard to catch these days. Despite using a really sharp small trout fly pattern, the tiny trout were not connecting with the point of the hook. Finally, I did make contact and take this photo. The trout was most likely hatched on the Bighill Creek in 2018 and it was still pretty small. Most of the brown trout that I catch, that are really small, tend to be in the Bow River, not far from the Bighill Creek.

It is really important to have a spawning tributary that is still feeding small trout into the Bow River every year. It is still too early to assess the rainbow trout hatch from last year, but I am still working on it. The river itself seems to be a very unfriendly place for wild trout these days. One can only speculate the reasons for this, but I know that I am not seeing the insect activity on the river that there once was. Without a good invertebrate population, there is no food for trout of any size.

The best thing to do at this point in time is to wait until a very smart fisheries biologist figures out why the state of the fishery is so poor in this reach of the Bow River. I don't want a speculative answer, but I would appreciate some good hard science to back up whatever cause is given! Knowing the trend these days, it may take some time for this to happen.

In the meantime, I think that it is very important to take care of some of the local tributary streams, to insure this our wild reproducing trout populations can sustain themselves thru this tough time that our fisheries is going thru. My next investigation is to fish the Jumpingpound Creek and see if the juvenile rainbow trout population is holding its own. So far this summer, I have not seen any juvenile rainbow trout from last year's hatch, so I am a little concerned.

Everything seems to be a little late this year, so the juvenile rainbows may not have migrated out of the JP Creek yet. I will give them a few more weeks before I get really worried, but in the meantime, I can continue to fish the river for further signs of them. Last year, it took a while for me to catch my first juvenile rainbow trout on the river, so this may be the case again this year. We'll see!

There are a few more reaches of the river that I would like to check out for small rainbows. Hopefully, I have some good news to report, later on. I may have some more to add in this issue — yet!



Red Catkins On Bow River Willow Plant

Recently, while fly fishing the banks of the Bow River, in Cochrane, I noticed this willow with red color catkins in mid-July. The heavy rains during this month and in June may have something to do with the usual plant behaviour that I have noticed this season. It is almost like we are transforming into a rain forest around here lately. Some of the willows are shedding seeds well into the early and middle part of the summer. Spotting the red catkins is a new one for me. It could be the lush growth that caused this.

In any case, it was nice to see some added color on the river banks as I tried to catch a trout. The fly fishing was to check and see if there were any small trout present in the river this year. I did manage to capture and release one small brown trout, but it would hold still for a photo, before it darted back into its cover of slightly murky water on the river that day.

I plan on trying again soon. It is my suspicion that the river is in a very bad state, from a fisheries perspective, right now. The Bow River around Cochrane is almost totally void of trout. You have to fish really hard to find any of the few that live in the river these days. At least I can enjoy the lush growth and dream of better days, when there were lots of small trout to catch and release in this river!

West Nose Creek Swell Its Banks



Above: This photo was taken in June, as the water levels in West Nose Creek are starting to go down after the flood on the 21st of June. The planted willows and trees in this reach are all submerged under the high flows. You can see by the bend down grass that the water levels were pretty high during the flood. Post Flood inspections showed that our plantings from this spring are now doing pretty good. This site will change dramatically in the next 10 years of growth.

Post Flood Growth On West Nose Creek is Good

West Nose Creek, in the City of Calgary is starting to show some results from our first plantings. This creek will probably benefit the most from our riparian recovery plantings. Most of the stream banks along this creek were near void of any good native willow and tree cover. Now, like what is shown in the photo below, there are new willows and trees starting to gain some height along the planting sites. Growth is slow on some reaches that have been planted, while other sites show faster results.

After this year's growing season, big results in overall growth are expected. Over the years, trout numbers will increase as the amount of available habitat increases along the creek. The new plants will create the needed habitat. New spawning habitat is also part of the expected transformation of this trout stream. We have a ways to go yet, but I am confident we shall see huge benefits to this stream as our riparian planting work progresses. We are headed in the right direction on this small creek.



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Young Plants Thrive - After Lots of Rain



Above: I pushed down the dead grass that was wrapped around the stem of this newly planted willow, just to take a photo. The dead grass was remnants of the floods that occurred on Bighill Creek this June and July. We have had lots of rain this spring and summer, so our plants having been doing very well and growing fast. If this continues, the plants will be advanced enough to stand a good chance of survival for the winter months.

The branches on newly planted willows need to be thick enough to maintain the frigid sub-zero temperatures over the winter, and develop new buds by next spring. The first winter for our new native willows, and trees is the first big hurdle in survival for the plants. Many will also fall victim to rodent damage or foliage damage from insects. There are a lot of negatives in a new plant's survival over the first few years.

Buffalo Berries Add Color To The Riparian Zone Along Bighill Creek

Every summer, starting in July, the Buffalo Berry shrubs that grow in the foothills and mountains, start to color up the forest canopy with their bright red and orange color berries. Bears lover to feed heavily on this particular berry bush, so if you see them growing thick along mountain/foothills streams, be mindful that bears may be close by.

On the Bighill Creek, in the Town of Cochrane, you will find these berry shrubs growing along the path system that travels the lower reach of Bighill Creek. It is nice to see the added color of Buffalo berries standing out in the thick brush. Occasionally, a bear is also found wandering thru this area, but I have yet to see the tell tale signs of their presence during the Buffalo berry crop, on the pathway.



Huge Fat Brook Trout Keep A Fly Fisher Searching For More



The flash of deep orange from the depths still results in a great amount of excitement in this experienced angler's mind. It happens rarely while fly fishing a small creek with large brook trout in the late summer and early autumn. By that time some of the older male brook trout have developed their courting color for the fall spawning season. I know that the giants are in there, but hooking one on a trout fly does not happen that often.

Large brook trout such as the one shown above are top predators in their home waters, often feeding on other small trout and coarse fish such as suckers and minnows of various types. This can mean one big meal at a time and long spells with no feeding activity. A perfect time to present an attractor trout fly, such as the streaming wet flies that I like to use on small water. This usually does the job on larger trout or those that respond to reaction strikes using a streamer or wet fly attractor.

If I am lucky enough to catch and land a football with magnificent color, in the late summer, I will take a quick photo and release it back into the creek. It is common practice for me to release all of my catch safely, but letting a huge male brook trout free is especially important. These large giants need to continue their blood line and keep reproducing for the future.

These days, it is all about conservation, when it comes to sport fishing. You cannot kill wild trout. If you do, you are endangering the future of the trout streams that you enjoy to fish. Most fly fishers know this, because conservation plays such a heavy roll in their sport and some of us have already seen the results of poor fisheries management. Besides, these trout look a lot nicer when they are alive and thriving. They are like a beacon of hope, when captured. They are proof that the trout stream that you are fish in is actually pretty healthy.

The quest for large trout is not the primary reason that I like to fish small creeks for wild trout. Catching a giant is a rare enough occurrence that expecting it to happen on every outing soon fades from your expectations. That is why the surprise of hooking into one sometimes just adds that extra element of surprise and excitement, when it does happen. In the meantime, the small more cooperative brook trout will most definitely keep you busy enough.

I have a few small 7.5 foot fly rods that are favourites for small creek fly fishing. The medium fast rods seem to be best when chucking heavily wetted streaming wet flies down under the heavy cover of willows and undercut stream banks. It is usually in areas with lots of good cover habitat that you will find the really big ones! There are also plenty of snags found as well.



Above: Streaming wet flies such as the "Hockey Player" are great fly patterns for large brook trout. The barbell eyes provide the heavy weight that you need to sink the fly down to where the big trout are holding. This pattern has proven itself time and time again on small stream water.

Look closely in the photo to the left to see what fly pattern was used to catch the giant brook trout, for a hint. I like to use either a six or eight round fluorocarbon leader or tippet to fish my weighted streaming wet flies. The leader sinks faster and is less visible to the trout. A dry fly line is all you need to fish this pattern on a small creek, with heavy cover, such as willows.

2019 Post Flood Growth

Most of the willows and trees that we plant are planted close to the water's edge. When the willows or trees are about 3 years into their growth, they can grow out and over the surface of the stream, providing great cover for trout. After the 2019 flood events on local trout streams, the willows and trees growing along the water's edge were bent down in a downstream direction, but they still provided good cover.

The nice thing about past shoreline plantings, is that they are starting to stand out and do the job they were intended to do. We start with small plants, this is why it takes a few years to notice the benefits to the riparian zone where they are planted. The photo to the right shows how the plants from a few years ago are now creating habitat.

The last few years all of our planting efforts are starting to show the first big results. I personally noticed more nesting birds along the creeks, where they utilize the willows for perching or nesting. There is a dramatic increase in the amount of fish habitat created by the new willow plants, so this is also exciting to see.

The water levels are still flowing quite high as of mid-July, so it will be a while before we can see how the flood has improved the streambed and how much new spawning habitat is now available.

Planted Eroding Stream Banks Beginning To Heal



Above: Native willows were planted on this bank stabilization site, starting in 2014. There is now a kind of native growth helping to hold the stream bank together, next to the water's edge. Over time, the top part of the collapsing stream bank will adjust to a new slope and grow in with either native grasses or willows. The photo was taken in the early spring, just as things were starting to green up along the creeks. Bank stabilization projects take a number of years to complete, when you choose to use native willow and tree plants to get the job done. However, after a number of years, the new growth will conquer all and leave the eroding stream bank covered with natural growth on the slope.



Above: A snapshot of a small section of stream channel where our riparian plantings are now starting to make a huge difference in the riparian zone. This is how it all starts. Over time, the new plants will completely shelter the stream channel and influence improvement of water quality and fish and wildlife habitat. You can already see how the habitat is improving on a small scale. I expect that when the water levels drop, later on in the summer, we will see a clean streambed as well.

My First Larger Trout - Caught On The Middle Bow River Recently



It took a while to catch a trout over four inches in length this past few days, but I finally did it! The area of the Bow River where I caught this beast was right in the Town of Cochrane. This year, you have to fish hard to catch a trout and when you do, it is most commonly under six inches and very hard to catch on even a small trout fly. All of the small trout that I have caught are brown trout, not tiny rainbows yet!

The Bow River is still flowing pretty high yet and when the levels go down, we may see more trout in the river. If more rainbows come downstream from the Jumpingpound Creek, after their first year in the spawning tributary locally known as the JP Creek. This annual migration is a common occurrence on this reach of the Bow River, usually happening in July every year.

One really surprising event that happened on the Bow River the day I caught the brown trout shown above, I scared a river otter out of the bushes along the river, as I walked the stream banks. This is my first encounter with a river otter ever! I have heard reports of their presence in recent years, starting with sightings on the upper Bow River, near Canmore, but reports of local sightings are rare.

I suspect that the otter was a loner, migrating up or down the river, because it was on its own. River otters often travel in small groups or pairs. The one that I spooked out of the bush, was in the water in a flash. As a matter of fact, it didn't even leave me with a good glimpse of the animal. I inspected its bed in the bushes and could see that the animal is rather large in size.

October Caddis Nymph



Above: The October or Great Late Summer Sedge nymph is a very effective fly pattern for the late season hatches.

On still water, the Great Late Summer Sedge or Oncomocoecus is one of the more popular giant sedge hatches of the season. On flow streams and rivers, the October Caddis or Dicosmoecus is the fly pattern you need to have on hand. These related large sedge hatches are looked forward to, by many an experienced and not so experienced fly fishers, every year.

The fly pattern I use for fishing with the stripping retrieve or floated in the surface film as an emerger. I have even had good luck fishing this pattern on a dead drift, with a strike indicator. Expect some very aggressive takes on this pattern. Large trout really like to eat the large nymphs and adults of this big meal. The hatch starts in late August, here on the Bow River.

More Buffalo Berries With The Heavy Rains in 2019

I have never seen so many Buffalo Berries along Bighill Creek this year! The last growth we are experiencing is very unusual but I like it. Most likely all berry crops are going to be good this year, which is good not only for bears, but all of the other wildlife that depends on this source of late season forage. It may be too early to predict, but the abundant food in the riparian zone this late summer and into the early fall may mean more bear activity this year, so do be careful if you are casting a line on the many small foothills and mountain streams, or if you are just out hiking close to a creek. Canmore will be an especially busy area for bears this fall. When I worked on some small streams in the Town of Canmore from 1997 to 2002, there were lots of bears eating Buffalo berries along those creeks in the fall of the year.



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Silver Stripped Sedge



The Iron Range

Lower Park

July 2010

Planted Willows Enhance Pool Habitat



Above: All of the willows around the pool habitat in the foreground were planted and they are now starting to demonstrate how they will create cover for any fish in the pool, around the pool's perimeter. The snowberry shrub and the poplars in the background were all existing, when the pool edge was first planted. Now the willows are growing out over the water's surface. This lush riparian growth will only get better over time. You can see that the July flows in this photo are very high and all of this added water will also enhance trout habitat all along the small stream.

New Trout Have Plenty of Habitat



The new generation of trout that hatched on the Big Hill Creek system will have plenty of new habitat to occupy, in post flood high flows on BH Creek. When the flood hit, all of the beaver dams were blown out and this will allow easy passage for juvenile trout, when the water levels start to drop over the summer. The newly flushed creeks will have plenty of invertebrates for young trout to feed on as well.

The Big Hill Creek has been flowing rather low for the past few years. We really needed a ground water table recharge and higher flows to enhance the trout populations. This year's precipitation should do the job. As of July 17th, the BH Creek is still flowing high and clearing up a bit. The trout have had almost a month of free passage up the system and as the water flows go down, more tiny trout will migrate up the Big Hill and find their own small piece of habitat to occupy.

I also expect that a lot of trout that are moving up the Bow River to find habitat for the summer post run-off, will wonder into the mouth of the Big Hill Creek and start their journey upstream. It is theories like this that I enjoy investigating during the late summer and early fall months. I do expect a rather good spawning season on the BH Creek as a result of all of the new gravel cleaned during the high flows this spring and summer.

I have fished the BH Creek since I was a young lad and who knows what may come over time. Maybe we will see the trout populations go away up or maybe they will collapse in the near future, we just don't know what is going to happen these days, with the sport fishery in our area. All we can do is roll up our sleeves and help out with the wild trout recovery, by taking measures to enhance it. Planting native willows and trees is a good start!

Big Hill Creek Riparian Zone Grows In Size In 2019



Above: The photo above shows how the grass that once was cut right up to the bushes on the left, is now being cut further out on the lawn, leaving very nice natural asset for BH Creek. It will also reduce the amount of fuel and manpower costs for cutting the grass many times during the summer months. Hopefully, there will be no more herbicide spraying on these natural areas in the future, as well!

Above: This close up of the new growth that is being allowed, shows new poplar trees suckering up on the newly added space. The added trees will be a more area in the riparian zone. This will increase the size of the riparian habitat substantially. The Town of Cochrane is adding more natural riparian habitat along Big Hill Creek. This is great news for the stream's naturalization over time. This will also mean more space for wildlife.

Volunteer Willow And Tree Planting - How It Works



Keep the planting simple and relatively easy to carry out and the students will dig it! Not with shovels, but with enthusiasm! The whole idea behind this method of planting a rooted and leafed cutting is speed and efficiency, without the laborious task of digging near a creek. To do this, all you need to do is punch a hole in the ground, plant, add some soil and water.

Over the year's, I have learned that making the task of planting a native willow or tree needs to be kept simple and efficient. If your volunteers can plant many native plants, successfully, in an hour, they will leave the planting sight with a gratifying sense of accomplishment. This is how it is done.

First off, you need to carry out your planting in close proximity to the water's edge, preferably in the capillary fringe, where the ground is constantly moist from the stream's flow. Then you part the grass with your hands and punch a hole, to the proper depth. I have built my own hole punches that have a foot peg welded perpendicular to the steel shaft, at the proper depth for each plant.

The proper depth is called the transition point, where the roots on the cutting end and the terrestrial part of the plant, with the leaves is planted above ground. If you operate the hole punch like a shovel, using your foot to penetrate the point into the ground, it is very easy to do.

The next step is to place the grown cutting into the hole and fill the space around the rooted stem with a soil mix. By moving the cutting from side to side, in the hole, this will help you fill the hole with the soil. I use a special mix of 20 parts peat moss, to one part composted soil. The compost, which I obtain annually from the Town of Cochrane, is very hot with nutrient, so you need to be careful about how much you use.

Once the soil is to the top of the hole, add some water to flush and settle the soil down the hole. Then add some more soil if necessary. Add more water and then lightly tamp the soil around the plant. You can then recover the base of the plant with the dead grass that you paired to punch the hole. The dead grass will shade the base of the plant and help keep it moist.

If you instruct the volunteers to go slow and steady, the speed will come with time. The most important thing to do is to make sure that all of the steps are followed and the plants has a better chance at survival. I usually like to follow thru the entire planting site to inspect the plants and make sure all of the steps are followed.

Before all planting events begin, I always go thru a brief safety talk, prior to planting, to make sure that the tools are handled safely and nobody gets too close to the water's edge. One of the things I like to tell the volunteers at the start: Never turn your back on the creek or you may end up wet. Also, watch your step along the stream banks!



Blue Herons hanging Out On The Creek



Blue Herons are a common sight on local trout streams. They are excellent fishers with a normally low tolerance for human activity in their feeding area, but the one shown above and below is the first one that I have encountered that was not shy, even when I was on the opposite side of the Nose Creek, in the City of Airdrie, Alberta.



The riparian zone along our trout streams is also prime nesting habitat for a variety of birds. Both song birds and waterfowl utilize the riparian zone for a nesting habitat. Shrubs like the Snowberry are ideal cover for a bird nest, as the photo on the left and right show.

Left: Starling eggs that are commonly found in Snowberry shrubs.

Right: These duck eggs were found this spring along the banks of the Big Hill Creek, also hidden in Snowberry shrubs.

It is good to see more riparian zone along the creek, in the Glenbow Park area of Cochrane, and this year's change in direction will benefit the creek for years to come.



Plenty Of Good Fish Habitat On The Way - Including Overhead Cover !

It is now the sixth year of our riparian planting program and the results are growing annually, meaning new native willows and trees. There is a definite enjoyment in watching how the plants are coming every year and how the stream banks are transforming with the new growth.

The flooding this year has made an interesting but beneficial change to how the riparian plants are growing these days. Post flood, most of the willows along the water's edge are bent over in a downstream direction, but they are already providing excellent overhead cover and habitat for resident stream trout.

Due to the flood, there are more willows growing out and across the creeks, right at the surface of the stream's water level. This has meant more living willow

plants either on the surface or just under in some areas. The downed willows have more than doubled the amount of shoreline fish habitat.

In the photo below, you can see how the willows on the outside of this slow meander in the creek channel, are draped down and out from the stream bank, but they are still growing good. This will affect how the willows grow in future years. The results should be more fish habitat and better flow constriction in the stream.

A cleaner streambed from the flow constriction and increase in velocity, will continue to happen in the years to come. I have noticed better stream bank stability along Big Hill Creek in the Town of Cochrane, over the past few years and cleaner flowing water.



Small Nymphs Are The Best!

More Willows Suckering Up From Root Growth Recently



Above: The new plants popping out of the ground in the foreground of this photo are most likely suckering from the clump of native willow in the background. The clump has been heavily grazed upon by beavers and this may have encouraged the new growth suckers to break the ground.

In the last few years I have noticed more new willow and tree plants popping up out of the dead grass in the spring time growing season. Most of these I suspect are a result from traveling roots creating new shoots in the vicinity of the mother plant. They may also be a result of seed growth, being so close to some mature willow plants. In any case, the new growth is a great sign of things to come.

Each year I learn more about our native willow plants and this is very interesting to me. The new growth is encouraged along by some beaver activity along the streams where volunteers plant every spring.

This new natural growth is confirmation that our willow and tree planting is exponential and will result in lots more native plants from the natural reproduction process that is now happening on the creeks.



Above: This is a close-up of the new willow plants breaking thru the dead grass this spring. If you look closely you can see and count four new plants. The beavers will love the extra forage that will be added to the landscape over the next few years. The beavers won't let the plants get too high off the ground.

Tight Cover For Bighill Creek's Stream Bank

The growth of the plantings along Bighill Creek has been really slow on some reaches, but the end result is starting to show, right along the water's edge. Because the native willow and tree cuttings were planted right along the water, the new growth is growing out and over the main stream channel. This was the intended goal of this planting program, make sure that our plantings provided the best habitat benefit after planting.

I suspect the root systems are well established into the stream bank and they are the key to stream bank stability. The tops of the plants may appear stunted, but the root systems reach far into the soil. It is important to get photos of these plants at this stage in their growth, because once the plants start to mature, they will entirely hide the channels surface from easy view and a good photo of the creek.



Indian Paint Brush Glows Red



Above: While fly fishing the Bow River in Cochrane, I couldn't help but notice the beautiful Indian Paint Brush growing along the banks of the river. It was a lightly overcast day and the flowers seem to glow a brilliant red as I walked the edge of the still high river, in search of trout. This is all part of the experience for a fly fisher of trout and a regular visitor of flowing waters.

Grass Hopper Season Is Underway

It usually starts in July and carries on into the fall. I am talking about what fly fisher's affectionately refer to as the "Hopper Season". This is normally when the grass hoppers are most active and also when trout find them on the surface of a river or stream. The terrestrials are usually caught in a gust of wind and are blown onto the water's surface, or they overshoot a jump, too close to the water's edge. The trout will then take the bugs with explosive rises or deliberate sips.

There are a wide variety of different types of hoppers to choose from, but pretty much all of them are eaten by trout, with or without relief. Rangeland grass hoppers prefer dry and hot conditions to enhance their activities, but the patterns can be fished early in the morning as well.

The Bow River has always been a really great hopper river, with many trout caught and released on hopper imitations, every year. It is good fun to slap a hopper dry fly on the surface all day and you can even add a dropper nymph to a floatable pattern.

West Nose Creek Plantings – Still Growing In Numbers



Above: The willows shown are ones that were planted in 2014, on West Nose Creek. The growth has been really slow, but over time, the new willows will enrich the soil with more organics and enhance growth. In the mean time, the new plants will continue to grow and spread root systems. You have to be patient with this type of native willow and tree planting. It can take years to see the major benefits of your efforts to restore a riparian zone. I have learned this over the years and know that future growth will make up for the lack of immediate results.



Above: This two striped grasshopper is probably the least liked hopper that trout feed on, but it grows to giant size along the Bow River. We use to call this hopper the "Diamond back" due to the diamond shaped stripes on the back of bug. This particular variety also bites if you present your finger to one.

Buggering Around With Brook Trout - Fly Fishing The Woolly-Bugger That Is!

Brook trout are great fun to catch and they are very plentiful in some small creeks, usually with lots of beaver dams to fish on. For the novice fly fisher, there may be some timely consideration of what fly pattern to use to catch a trout. If there are brook trout in the creek and you don't know exactly what to use on your fly leader, an old standby may be the answer. This is when the good old "Woolly Bugger" comes into play. It has been one of the most celebrated trout flies in our area for many years.

Brook trout are voracious eaters and they don't mind biting into a fuzzy fly with an undulating marabou feather tail. A small bead head or cone head is often used to get the fly pattern down to the right depth. Tungsten beads are the best! Color has always been the key to catching trout on a bugger pattern, so you better have a selection of the right color patterns. Black, brown, white or olive green are the most common choices, but don't rule out some other color patterns. A short or long stripping retrieve is the best way to present the fly.



2020 Bow Valley Riparian Recovery and Enhancement Program

We are up to 71,914 native willow and tree plants planted since 2014, when the program was first initiated. That is a lot of plants and partnership support for this particular BVR&E program, and it continues next season. When I say we, I mean all of the volunteers that have contributed their time and energy into riparian plantings.

Next year, we should have another program organized to start in the early spring. As is usual, plantings will be carried out on all three creeks in the program: Bighill Creek, West Nose Creek and Nose Creek. Now that we have many thousands of growing plants along the creeks, it is even more interesting to start each season out, planting in areas that we have already planted in. This allows us to continue to watch our past plantings are growing.

Bighill Creek is especially important to me, because it is the creek that has shown the best results so far. The water is flowing a lot cleaner these days and most of the once silt-laden streambed is now covered in cobble and gravel. The very high amount of rain that we have had this year has also recharged the ground water table and springs with lots of water. This added storage should provide good volumes of flow for the rest of the season.

Right now, trout are already migrating up from the Bow River to replenish the populations in the streams. With the high flows this summer, there is a lot more habitat for the trout to take cover in. More aquatic invertebrates (insects) as well!

There should be a few rainbows to migrate up the Bighill Creek in the high flows, but the hatch on the PJ Creek last year may not have been successful. However, there were rainbow trout from a 2017 hatch present on the Bow River last year, so some of these may have moved up the creek. It will be fun doing some fly fishing to assess the situation, when the water levels in the creek go down a bit more. For a small community with a river and two major creeks running thru town, we have a pretty good amount of fisheries issues that need attention. So far, things are looking pretty good. It is very hard to make sure that our community streams are in better than normal condition, so constant attention is required to make sure that the water in the creeks is adequate for trout and their spawning events, as well as proper storm drain engineering. So far, things are looking pretty good.

The native willow and tree planting helps the streams and also brings well needed attention from other agencies and NGOs that seem to be interested in the same things as we are. This year's addition of green space that was added to the Bighill Creek and its riparian zone was a real boost to our cause. Already, new poplar trees are suckering up thru the once well trimmed grass, in Glenbow Park.

This was really good news for all those that appreciate the natural spaces that we can populate in the future. The residents will benefit as well! I look forward to the 2020 planting season, to add even more plants!