

November 2011 Update

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## Spawning Update!

### Bighill Creek Spawning!

The spawning season on the Bighill Creek starts in the final week of September and generally wraps up by the mid point of October. However, there are still a few large brown trout that find their way upstream from the Bow River, to spawn in the final weeks of October.

The last fish that I observed spawning this season, were a small group of large brown trout that were spawning in the third week of the month of October, on the lower reach of the creek. By that time, a number of beaver dams had been constructed across the stream channel, which prevented these trout from migrating further upstream to more suitable spawning grounds.

Earlier in the autumn and late summer, measures had been taken to make sure that the primary run of spawning trout, had access to known spawning habitats on the lower area of Bighill Creek. These measures involved the removal of old beaver dams that had been created over the past few years and they were no longer in use.

The new beaver dams that were built in the early fall, will provide good wintering habitat for the resident trout in the stream, especially the new juvenile trout from this past spring's hatch on the stream! Beaver dams are safe habitat for young trout!

This year's spawning run and activity was up slightly from last year, with good numbers of both brown trout and brook trout redds being excavated at key locations. If there are no events upstream of the egg nests that might cause turbidity in the water and smother the eggs in silt, we can expect a reasonably good hatch rate for both species.

In the past, water quality impacts have been the primary reason for the loss of egg survival in the Bighill Creek. Presently, there is still cattle being grazed along the creek, upstream of the spawning areas and this activity creates major silt loading into the stream channel.

Outside of influences that we have no control over, taking care of the lower reach of the Bighill Creek will still produce some positive results in attempting to maintain the fishery on the creek.

The restoration and fish habitat enhancement work that has been completed on the Millennium Creek, will at least insure that there is a reliable trout hatch for the Bighill Creek, every year, into the future. This annual recruitment of new generations of trout from the Millennium Creek spawning areas, will also enhance the population of any new fish that result from a successful Bighill Creek spawning and hatch!

**Right Photo:**

*This is a photo of a large brown trout that is migrating up the Bighill Creek to a suitable spawning habitat!*

**Right Photo:**

*This is a photo of a pod of spawning brook trout at one of the key spawning habitats located along the stream!*



“ Bighill Creek is quickly becoming a major spawning tributary to the Bow River on this reach! ”



### Bighill Creek's Status as a Spawning Tributary!

In the 1990's, RL&L Environmental documented the only known spawning area of brown trout, between the Ghost Dam and Bearsaw Dam, on this reach of the Bow River! The trout were actually spawning right in the river channel on the upper reach, below the Ghost Dam!

Before that time, the only other known trout spawning habitat on this reach of the Bow River, was the Jumpingpound Creek, which was utilized by spawning rainbow trout, in the spring of the year!

With recent developments on the Bighill Creek, in particular, the brown trout spawning activity that has been documented on the lower reach of the BHC in 2009, we can now consider this small tributary to the Bow River, a major spawning habitat.

Furthermore, it has also been observed and noted that brown trout migrate upstream in the Bighill Creek, from the mouth of the Bow River. This makes the Bighill Creek the only known spawning tributary to the Bow River, on this reach of the middle Bow River!

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