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2 October 2006

Dan Jewell
Area Manager
Montana Area Office
U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
2900 4th Avenue N.
Billings, MT 59101

Dear Mr. Jewell:

Montana Trout Unlimited strongly urges the BOR to resist demands from some interests in Wyoming to drop outflows from Yellowtail Dam on the Bighorn River below 1,500 cubic-feet-second, the agreed-upon minimum BOR has established with the State of Montana. This minimum flow, at best, only meets the short-term biological needs of the river's aquatic community. Anything less significantly reduces critical wetted-channel, which is important for insect production as well as for spawning, rearing and foraging habitat for wild trout. For years biologists for Montana's Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks have calculated population estimates for rainbow and brown trout on the Bighorn River, using statistically rigorous methods. Their data clearly indicate a relationship between flows less than 1,500 cfs and reductions in trout abundance in the river.

Montana Trout Unlimited represents 3,500 conservation-minded anglers. A significant portion of our membership fishes the Bighorn. Along with TU members and other anglers from other states, we contribute significantly to the estimated \$30 million a year anglers on this river generate for Montana's economy. This economic contribution is compelling reason for maintaining streamflows below Yellowtail Dam at no less than 1,500 cfs during summer and fall.

Besides the impact reducing flows will have to the river's fisheries, there are other reasons why flows should not be reduced to the 1,000 cfs as requested by a handful of interests in Wyoming:

- Montana's fisheries and economy should not have to suffer because of Wyoming's profligate use of water in the Bighorn River basin. Wyoming, by compact, already controls 80 percent of the water the Bighorn watershed yields. Within Wyoming's portion of the Wind River-Bighorn basins, there are 33

storage reservoirs with capacities exceeding 500 acre-feet. The two largest, the Boysen and Buffalo Bill projects, are federal facilities. The total capacity of all storage facilities within this basin in Wyoming exceeds 3 million acre-feet. Further, according to Wyoming's state water plan, the annual conveyance efficiencies for irrigation in this region ranges between 25-39 percent, indicating that if Wyoming made only modest investments in water conservation it could increase the probability that Bighorn Reservoir would have a higher pool to meet the demands of those now insisting that Montana's Bighorn fishery be compromised. It is clear to us that if Wyoming interests want a higher late-season pool in Bighorn Reservoir, then they hold the key to that occurring. Water conservation upstream, and retention of modest late-season conservation pools in Wyoming reservoirs, would probably more than meet the needs of interests who want more water in Bighorn Reservoir in late season.

- The Crow Tribe's interests in Montana need also be accommodated in decisions affecting Bighorn Reservoir. One product of the State of Montana's negotiated compact with the tribe – and a principal objective of Montana Trout Unlimited's role in development of that accord -- was agreement that the interests of the tribe in the fishery of the Bighorn River, as well as agricultural and residential uses downstream, should be foremost considerations in water management at the federal facility. The current demand of some people in Wyoming to reduce the outflow at Yellowtail Dam seriously compromises the interests of both the State of Montana and the Crow Tribe.

We urge the BOR to follow the advice of Senator Baucus and other Montanans by not caving in to the demands of special interests in Wyoming who want to manage Bighorn Reservoir this fall and in the future at the expense of one of the nation's premiere trout fisheries.

Sincerely,

Bruce Farling
Executive Director

cc. Sen. Baucus
Sen. Burns
Rep. Rehberg
Gov. Schweitzer
Montana FWP
Magic City Fly Fishers