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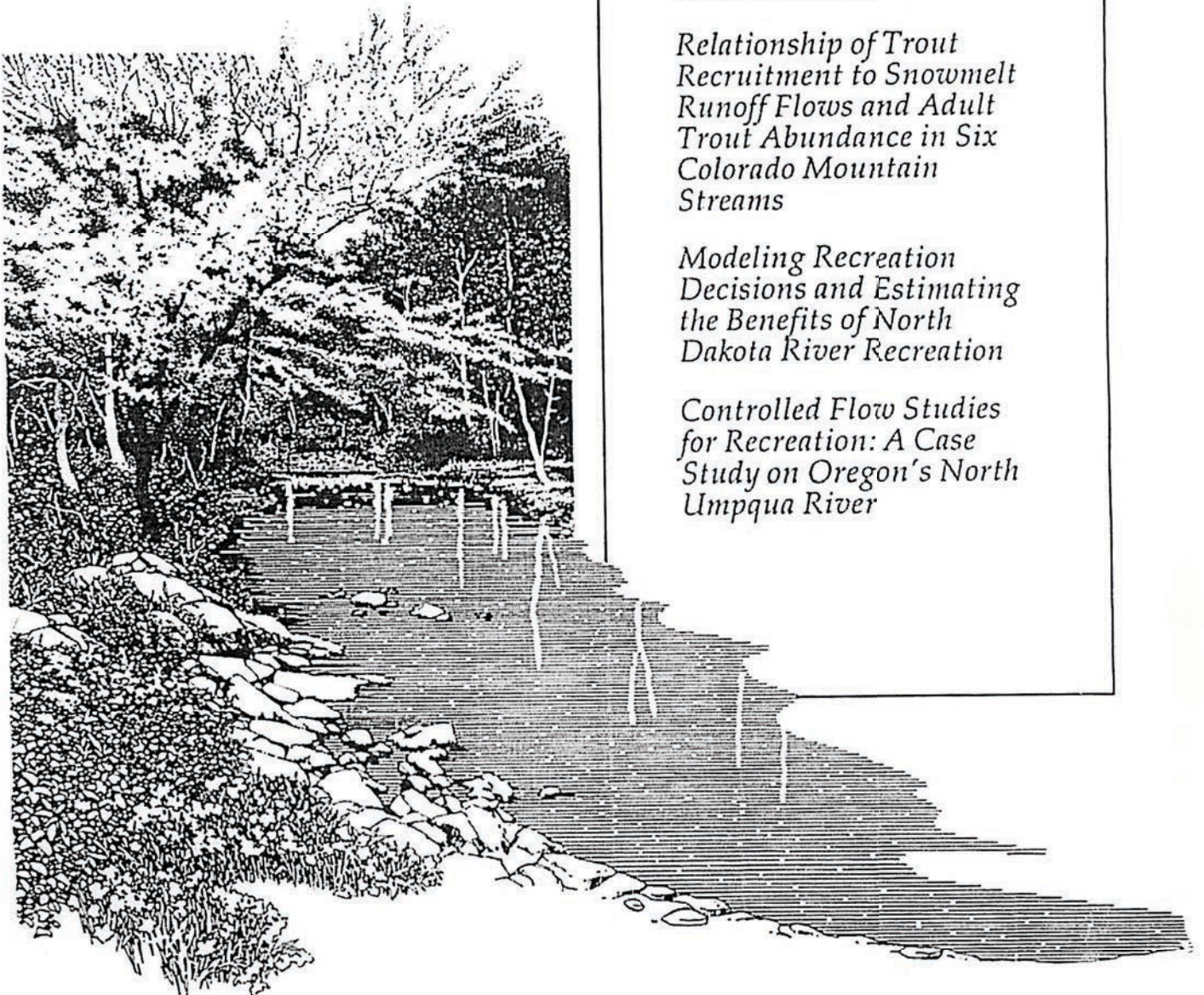
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The Instream Flow Council: History and Promise

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As long ago as the sixth century when the Romans recodified ancient Greek law in the Institutes of Justinian and the accompanying Digest, people have recognized that flowing waters provide important benefits for and are the property of all citizens. Since those early days of civilization, however, population growth and industrial development have necessarily resulted in gradual erosion of both the quality and quantity of water flowing in many of the rivers and streams of the world.

Many of these uses of rivers were needed to support the development of society and achieve the comfortable standard of living we enjoy today. However, growth has its price and even the great rivers had limits to how much pollution they could attenuate and water they could give up without affecting the organisms that lived in them, and the benefits of citizens who relied upon them.

Water quality became an issue in North America in the 1950s and 1960s and eventually led to more effective laws to improve water quality. However, it was not until the late 1960s that water quantity in streams became a widely recognized concern. The 1970s saw a rapid evolution of aquatic habitat assessment methodologies that has continued to the present. Unlike water quality assessment, though, disagreement often arose between affected interests as to the best methods for particular situations and even how to interpret the results of some studies.

Fishery managers recognized this challenge and began sporadic efforts to provide direction. As the science became recognized as its own multidisciplinary field, these efforts became more broad-based leading to the first major instream flow conference in

Boise, Idaho, from May 3 - 6, 1976. The Symposium and Specialty Conference on Instream Flow Needs was presented by the Western Division of the American Fisheries Society and Power Division of the American Society of Civil Engineers (Orsborn and Allman 1976). This conference provided the first nationwide forum where instream flow scientists from diverse disciplines sought solutions to the technical, legal, and social problems associated with increasing competition for limited streamflows.

One of the most important events of the past two decades regarding the instream flow conundrum was the establishment of the Fort Collins, Colorado-based Cooperative Instream Flow Service Group (CISFG) within the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 1976. Establishment of this service was a critically important step in the advancement of the science. The CISFG was instrumental in developing what has become the most widely used instream flow method to date and bringing some measure of standardization to the science. The group also provided essential training and technical support to thousands of individuals who have helped secure instream flow protection for countless waters around the world. Unfortunately, the shift of this group to the U.S. Geological Survey in 1998 has resulted in gradual erosion of financial and political support and the unsettling prospect that this crucial leadership service may diminish in the coming years.

Several important projects have been undertaken to identify and describe instream flow methods that are available to scientists (Wesche and Rechar 1980; Morhardt 1986). These studies solidly documented the various instream flow methods and described

their general characteristics. However, the studies lacked the authority to establish generally accepted practices for conducting instream flow studies or interpreting study results.

As methodological advancements and the knowledge of instream flow processes evolved in the face of increasingly contentious water allocation issues, several other conferences were held to share ideas and perspectives. Primary among these have been conferences sponsored by Trout Unlimited at Jackson Hole, Wyoming, in 1989 (Van Gytenbeek 1989) and 1993; Park City, Utah, in 1995; and Copper Mountain, Colorado, in 1998.

The science of instream flow has grown from a fairly simple concept of "minimum flows" to the broader understanding that aquatic resources are defined by form and function that are maintained by hydrologic processes. Understanding these physical processes and integrating that knowledge with continuously better awareness of biological needs continues to challenge the ability of fishery scientists and water managers to develop technical and political tools to effectively deal with today's complex instream flow issues.

Against this backdrop, state and provincial fish and wildlife management agencies are often caught in the cross fire of competing interests. Though these agencies are legally charged with managing public trust aquatic resources like fisheries and water, they are continuously challenged to resolve the controversy of how much water is enough for a given stream reach. In spite of advances in the science of instream flow, agency effectiveness has frequently been compromised because (1) they often did not have adequately trained staff or adequate budgets, (2) there remains a lack of standard protocols for conducting instream flow studies and interpreting results, (3) they lacked adequate internal policies and procedures for protecting instream flows, and (4) state laws were historically written to promote out-of-stream water development. Their role was complicated further by a political arena that too often denied them effective instream flow laws and usually favored competing special interests. Although some states have enacted water laws to provide or improve processes for protecting streamflows for aquatic resources, the legal mechanisms and needs assessment methods are still very diverse.

To assess the scope of this problem and seek potential solutions, the National Instream Flow Program Assessment (NIFPA) project was initiated in 1993. The NIFPA project was initiated with funding from the Fish and Wildlife Service Office of Federal Aid and brought together the instream flow coordinators of fish and wildlife agencies from every state in the United States. Representatives from these agencies met in 1995 and 1996 to assess the weaknesses, strengths, and challenges of each state's instream flow program. The NIFPA project produced a detailed assessment of each state's instream flow program as well as a series of acclaimed video tapes that define the role of the Public Trust Doctrine in the management of fish, water and wildlife resources (Osborne and Buck 1997). One of its more important accomplishments was the decision to form a new professional organization known as the Instream Flow Council (IFC).

Following that motion at the 1996 NIFPA meeting, a nine-member steering committee comprised of state fish and wildlife agency instream flow coordinators from all parts of the country was formed to incorporate the needs and interests of potential members. These individuals surveyed potential members, held meetings, and exchanged ideas for the next two years to develop an organizational structure that would strengthen their individual and collective role as trustees of public trust aquatic resources and help them better manage aquatic ecosystems.

The nationwide survey and gatherings of this group showed a great deal of common need. Potential members' greatest needs were to (1) develop a mechanism to facilitate more active networking and technical assistance among members, (2) identify nationally and regionally appropriate stewardship strategies, (3) provide agency support and opportunities for conflict resolution, and (4) obtain assistance with program or project review and evaluation. They perceived a pressing need to establish an organization made up of professional fishery resource managers who are committed to the protection and improvement of stream fishery values, responsible for making fishery and water management recommendations that reflect the public interest, dedicated to the acceptance and advancement of instream flow methodologies, and concerned about effective use of public water resources for multiple uses.

The steering committee subsequently drafted a set of bylaws and charter that established the IFC as a nonprofit professional organization to represent the interests of state and provincial fish and wildlife management agencies in the United States and Canada. The mission of the organization is to improve the effectiveness of state and provincial instream flow programs for restoring, maintaining and enhancing aquatic ecosystems. The IFC vision is that each stream and river will have instream flows that provide or maintain ecological functions and processes similar to or better than those exhibited in their natural or unaltered state.

Provisions were made for a (voting) Governing Council and a (nonvoting) General Council. Governing Council members are the appointed instream flow representatives of state and provincial fish and wildlife management agencies. The General Council consists of individual and institutional members. Membership on the General Council is open to any individual or institution that desires to help state and provincial fish and wildlife management agencies effectively administer their instream flow programs.

The first organizational meeting of the

Instream Flow Council was held in Denver, Colorado, on March 17-19, 1998. The meeting was attended by 27 charter Governing Council members as well as several invited speakers. Membership has since grown to 35 state and 3 provincial members. The IFC has subsequently charted a course to meet the expressed needs of its members. Opportunities for increased networking have been established and a biannual newsletter has been initiated. In addition, efforts have been started to develop nationally and regionally appropriate methodological standards and procedures to help members and nonmembers more effectively manage aquatic ecosystems.

The challenges faced by state and provincial instream flow managers have never been greater; but, by drawing on the experiences of other members in the Instream Flow Council and other nationally recognized instream flow authorities, the prospect of more successes for stream fisheries have never been greater. For more information about the Instream Flow Council, contact: Tom Annear, President, Instream Flow Council, 5400 Bishop Boulevard, Cheyenne, WY 82002.

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