

December 1984

HENRY'S LAKE FOUNDATION, INC.

NEWSLETTER

HELLO FRIENDS AND FOUNDATION MEMBERS:

Another season has ended at Henry's Lake, and a cover of ice hides the promise of things to come. The 1984 season saw progress in many key areas at the lake, but much remains to be done to preserve and enhance the fishery. First, a brief update of 1984 events: the rotary screens (which the Foundation donated \$5,000 for in 1983) were set on the Targhee Creek irrigation laterals. The Foundation's Trustees at the 1984 annual meeting voted to spend \$2,500 for further enhancement projects, and Secretary-Treasurer Mike Glenn says the check is signed and he is waiting direction from Idaho Department of Fish and Game fish manager Steve Elle on when and where to donate the money to the department. The Trustees also decided to hold some funds in reserve for 1985, if needed, to address the drawdown issue that President John O'Neall speaks about later. Trustee Tom Morris informed the annual meeting that the Foundation is a tax exempt corporation, and all donations are tax deductible (this was retroactive to 1982).

Fishing in 1984 at Henry's Lake was great for numbers but depressed for trophy fish. Dave Cole (Idaho Department of Fish and Game aide at Henry's Lake in 1983-84) says the catch rate in 1984 was 1.7 fish per hour compared to 1.2 fish per hour in 1983 (up 34 percent). Angler effort increased from 96,000 hours in 1983 to 163,000 hours in 1984 (an increase of 70 percent). Total catch (including fish released) was up from 122,000 fish in 1983 to 276,000 fish in 1984 (a 127-percent gain). Unfortunately, the fighting cutthroat-rainbow hybrid composed less than 5 percent of the catch in 1984, which former Henry's Lake researcher Bob Rohrer says was directly related to less than optimum stocking during 1979 through 1981. Numbers of hybrid in the catch should increase in 1985 and 1986 due to good plants in 1982 and 1983 according to Rohrer. Also, in the late summer and fall of 1985, anglers should see increased numbers of large (18 inches and up) cutthroat as the heavier stocking of 1981 yields results.

Fishery manager Steve Elle and biologist Bob Rohrer will provide more information for the next newsletter on issues vital to the future of Henry's Lake, including the hybrid program, proposed future enhancement projects, and the pending Henry's Lake Dam Repair work for 1985. Stay tuned.

Mike Glenn wishes to remind you that 1984 memberships are due for those who have not yet paid. We need the support of all interested parties to maintain this good fishery. Your involvement with the Foundation says that you are willing to put something into a resource that is so valuable and so unique. Send donations to:

Mike Glenn, Secretary-Treasurer  
Henry's Lake Foundation, Inc.  
227 University Drive  
Twin Falls, Idaho 83301

Remember your donations are tax deductible and are important to the future of the fisheries. Thanks.

WORDS FROM THE PRESIDENT . . .

FISHIN' FEVER--1984

by John O'Neall Jr.

No season within 20 years' memory (or maybe ever) was as successful for numbers of trout caught from Henry's Lake as was 1984. The population of cutthroat trout was fantastic, the great majority of them in the 15- to 17-inch class, many smaller and a few larger. From mid-June to mid-July, it was almost too easy to catch fish. After that it became more of a challenge. Old timers, who have frequented the lake a lot longer than I, have said they had never seen anything like the fly fishing in late June.

Early in the season there were fair numbers of brook trout caught, many of them the special strains (Temiscame and Assinica) with clipped fins. Most fishermen made an effort to return these special brookies to the lake since they are now getting big enough to spawn and should do so this fall.

The great disappointment lies in the very small percentage of hybrids caught. Several expert anglers who keep careful logs and who caught and released hundreds, even thousands, of fish in the summer of 1984 could at best identify 1-percent to 2-percent hybrids in their catch. One in a hundred is simply not enough and does not square with the comparative stocking rate data provided by the Idaho Department of Fish and Game. Based on catch results, the stocking of hybrids needs to be vastly increased in numbers and proportion versus the cutthroats. As presently constituted, the promised hybrid program is not bearing results.

Since growth rates seem to be slowing, likely due to the very heavy stocking each year and the obviously high population in the lake, it would seem sensible to cut back somewhat on the numbers of cutthroat plants for 1985 and increase markedly the number of hybrids. We need a better return of hybrids to the creel. Obviously, the cutthroat population overwhelms the lake at present, and there is no danger to it.

Seemingly, there is always a threat to the best laid plans. The real threat to the future of the Henry's Lake fishery lies in the anticipated (likely 1985) severe drawdown of the lake to make dam repairs. The repairs must be made. The drawdown can be softened by a higher cofferdam. The extra cost of that has been estimated by the president of the water company at just a few thousand dollars. It is up to Idaho Department of Fish and Game to negotiate with the water company for less drawdown, and it is up to us in the Henry's Lake Foundation to help raise the dollars to make that cofferdam higher. Such action might make all the difference in the salvation of the present population and quality of fishing. When and if that time comes, help all you can!

COMMENTS FROM A SPORTSMAN . . .

George Greer

Anglers found good news during the 1984 season--Henry's Lake is coming back! The fish population approached the saturation point, producing fast fishing. About the only complaint heard was the size of the fish, still far below what it was less than a decade ago when 2-1/2- and 3-pound fish were average. The 50-fish mornings helped erase the memory of the tortuously slow fishing of the late 1970's.

The upswing was the result of the Idaho Department of Fish and Game's commitment--encouraged and aided by Henry's Lake Foundation--to a more intense stocking program with special emphasis on the hybrids. Small hybrids were showing up in the 1984 catch along with the newly-introduced Canadian brookies.

Ongoing projects, such as the screening of major tributaries to reduce losses of fry during the irrigation season and combating the siltation problem, paint a bright future for the health of the lake.

For the lake to realize its potential, however, the work begun must continue. Solutions need to be found for continuing threats to the fishery, such as the scheduled drawdown in 1985. Drawdowns, siltation, overharvest or underharvest, pollution, etc.--there will always be a need for the existence of the Foundation as champion and watchdog to one of the world's truly unique fisheries.

A BRIEF LOOK AT THE HISTORY OF HENRY'S LAKE . . .

Henry's Lake has always been a well known fishery resource. Early settlers in the Montana mining communities, including Virginia City, journeyed to Henry's Lake to harvest supplies of fish for food. The trout were transported back to towns by horse teams pulling sleighs or wagons.

Osborne Russel in his "Journal of a Trapper" mentions visiting Henry's Lake with the mountain men, including Jim Bridger. He noted a small village of Blackfoot Indians was camped on the shores of the lake, and much evidence of early man's activities in the form of artifacts can still be found today. Undoubtedly, the Indians were well aware of the abundant Henry's Lake fishery resource.