



Two boatmen drift through wilderness on a wild river.

Wild River

From a Letter by Dr. John Craighead, Leader, Montana Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit

Dear Ken:

I have your letter requesting that I express myself concerning the proposed impounding of the Middle Fork at Spruce Park.

I am happy to take this opportunity to present some of my thoughts and views in the hope they will prove of value to readers of Montana Wildlife. The views I have propounded are strictly personal and not in any way to be construed as representing the official position of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The problem of impoundment is becoming ever more acute in the Northwest. Some years ago the emphasis was on down-stream impoundments and in general conservationists did not oppose such dams largely because it was evident to all concerned that they increased the usable water for certain purposes and thus were necessary to our growing economy. Those conservationists who realized that the storing of water for irrigation, flood control, power production, and industrial use was frequently in con-

flict with the use of water and watersheds for wildlife and recreation were not sufficiently well organized to bring their thinking before the public in a clear and forceful way.

Nevertheless many citizens did recognize that the construction of dams without a thorough land and water use survey, which would consider all the varied private and public interests, was basically unsound. We still recognize this approach as unsound and many conservationists have become even more alarmed now that impoundments threaten the headwaters of the Columbia River system and some of the finest recreational land left in the U. S. Since much of this land lies in Montana, the problems are ones that Montanans should recognize and be prepared to solve.

I have been particularly concerned about the effects that dams may have on some of these remaining wild regions of Idaho and Montana. **Rivers and their watersheds are inseparable and to maintain wild areas we must preserve the rivers that drain them.**

The Spruce Park Dam has been of special interest as this area is close to home and the proposed dam will have widespread effect on the area between Glacier Park and the Bob Marshall Wilderness Area.

The Spruce Park Dam is just another case where the Corps of Army Engineers has made long range plans and the conservationists are in the unenviable position of having to hastily accumulate biological data at the last minute. In the past, conservationists have been continually on the defensive with regard to impoundments. This is unfortunate since it places us in the light of obstructionists rather than defenders of the public interest whenever a new dam is proposed. We are in this regrettable position with regard to Spruce Park.

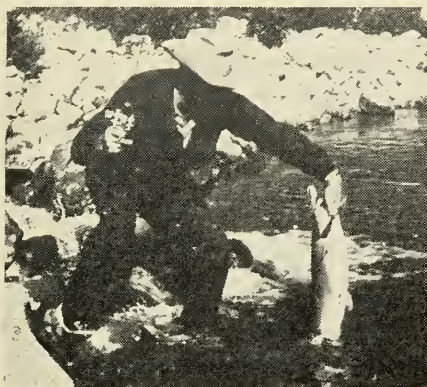
Until conservationists and the recreational industry propose clear cut objectives for the disposition of local and regional water resources, it appears that about all we can do when a dam is proposed is to hastily gather data to evaluate any given situation. This may suffice for the present but it will hardly carry us through to victory in the future.

Last summer I took a five-day raft trip down the Middle Fork with Clifton Merritt, some interested sportsmen from Kalispell, and members of the Montana Fish and Game Department. I have rafted most of the large fast-water rivers of the mountain west. My interest in the Middle Fork trip was to make a personal evaluation of its recreational potential. There is no doubt in my mind that this is one

of the most scenic "wild" rivers in the Northwest; one which conservationists should strive hard to save. The country is ideal for pack trips and the river offers a "white water" float trip of unsurpassed beauty. The scenery is superb, fish and wildlife are abundant and in every direction the outdoorsman meets the challenge of primeval country.

Although it would be highly desirable to have detailed biological and ecological information on the Middle Fork River and surrounding country, and eventually this must be obtained, I do not believe a lack of this should now prevent us from stating our case strongly. In fact, I think we may be imposing severe handicaps on our efforts by allowing ourselves to be pressured into attempting to obtain hasty quantitative biological data, and assigning to this an inadequate dollar value in order to justify preservation of wild areas. It is essential to preserve intact a few of the "wild" rivers of this region for recreation and education of future generations. Any outdoor pursuit which brings a man into intimate contact with natural scenery, natural forces and the unaltered web of life is highly educational. The right to experience this should be as inalienable as freedom of worship. To preserve it is a trust falling to each succeeding generation. The aesthetic and recreational values of a river are so very easily destroyed—far more easily destroyed than similar values of hill and mountain country. There are numerous examples and no specific data is nec-

essary to prove this point. One dam with the accompanying roads would largely destroy the natural beauty of the Middle Fork and would have a tremendous effect on the fish and wildlife and future recreational possibilities. The sport fishing would suffer severely, but the fundamental loss will not be in animal species or populations but in natural beauty and wilderness. There appears to be no way to compromise exploitation of an area with preservation of the values of a virgin country.



A big bull trout comes from the clear water of a wild river.

It is my belief that we should strive to keep intact some wild rivers on the basis that they are essential to our way of life; that they have far-reaching educational and recreational potential and that, therefore, no single group or interest should impound a "wild" river or open it up with roads until a thorough land use survey has been made which would take into account forest and watershed values, the wildlife and recreational potential, educational and aes-

thetic values, and, of course, the value of the water for irrigation, power, and flood control when impounded. Perhaps even more important is the need to evaluate these areas not solely in terms of the present, but in terms of 50 to 60 years from now. In other words, values determined from comprehensive land use surveys made at the present time should be projected 50 years ahead and these values then used to formulate and determine our present action. This task will require the cooperative efforts of all conservation organizations.

Recreational values of areas such as the Middle Fork are not readily recognized or evaluated at the present time, but there is little doubt that they will be proclaimed and placed at a premium in the future. There is ample evidence of this all through the eastern and central states and on the west coast. The question is whether increased power, more industry, more material things will be of greater needs to a population continually increasing, than recreational areas that relieve the tension and stress created by population density. Most certainly we will need both.

Recreational areas such as State and National Parks, National Forests and Wildlife Refuges furnish mass recreation and the value and need of these is generally recognized. The necessity of wilderness areas for high quality recreation is not so generally endorsed and yet these areas are vital to a well-rounded outdoor recreation program.

We have reason to be concerned about our wilderness rivers. When one attempts to enumerate the number of "wild" rivers still left in Montana, one arrives at the startling fact that already they are a rarity. I can think of only one Montana river I would place in this category and that is the Middle Fork of the Flathead. The South Fork of the Flathead has been dammed by Hungry Horse and although the upper portion lies within the Bob Marshall Wilderness area, it is nevertheless not a completely wild stream. The same is true of the Sun River that flows out of the Bob Marshall Wilderness area on the east. It has a large impoundment and others are planned. Roads parallel both sides of the North Fork of the Flathead. The lower reaches of the Middle Fork are in contact with roads but the upper portion is still wild.

Perhaps a reasonable approach is to sharpen our wilderness objectives. We must not only continue to protect existing wilderness areas as such, but focus attention to wilderness rivers—the most fragile portion of wilderness country. In the case of the Middle Fork, we should emphasize the wilderness character of the river itself, making it clear that we are dealing with one of the few remaining wild rivers—a species now close to extinction. Our objective would be to hold this small area intact for high quality recreation. A place where our children and their children can seek adventure, testing themselves against the wilderness.

The fact that the Middle Fork drainage ties in with Glacier National Park and with the Bob Marshall Wilderness area is also a strong argument for preserving it. A dam on the Middle Fork and the inevitable roads would be a threat to the Grizzly bear in Montana and a dam would adversely affect elk winter range and the spawning runs of Cutthroat and Dolly Varden. A high dam, such as proposed, would virtually eliminate the spawning runs of Dolly Varden and prevent seasonal migration of Cutthroats. Efforts to artificially propagate Dolly Varden have been unsuccessful and the Cutthroat is not readily reestablished. The impoundment would favor the increase of rough fish with eventual deleterious effect on the game species.

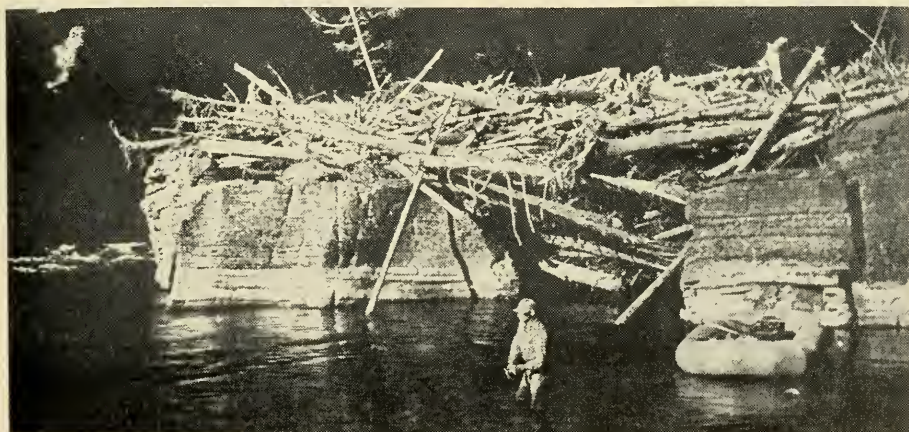
Because it probably will be physically impossible to gather adequate biological data before some action is taken, I think we are justified in drawing heavily from studies made in neighboring areas which are in many cases almost identical to the Middle Fork country. For example, information obtained from tagging studies of Bull trout on the North Fork of the Flathead could well be used in defense of the Middle Fork. The basic biological situation is the same; likewise, data gathered on the marten in Glacier Park and the beaver throughout the Flathead River drainage could well be used specifically in defense of the Middle Fork wildlife since there appears to be very little difference in basic marten or beaver habitat throughout the area.

From our knowledge of elk winter ranges in the South Fork and in the Sun River area, we would state almost without qualification that the winter elk range on the Middle Fork is vital, that any reduction in this range would have an effect on the elk population. Although no intensive long term studies have been made of the Grizzly, we know from studies of Robert Cooney and others that the fundamental requirement is a wild area, and certainly the opening up of the Middle Fork would greatly decrease the Grizzly range. In a similar way it would adversely affect the mountain goats of the area.

At the present time it is impossible to tell whether Kalispell, Polson, and Missoula will, in the future, become industrial centers. If this should occur, then there is little likelihood that we could hold all of our wild regions inviolate and we probably should not seek to do so. There is, however, good indication that these

cities will never be large industrial areas and that a major Montana industry is and will continue to be outdoor recreation. I use this in its broadest sense. Moreover, there is strong indication that the recreational industry, now ranking third in Montana, will continue to grow. The demand for wild areas will increase and these areas must serve not just a state or local area, but the nation. As I see it, the job of the conservationist is to assure that these areas are held intact until public thinking matures and crystallizes, then our generation or following ones can make wise decisions based on adequate information.

Possibly the first task of conservationists today is to develop a system for evaluating upstream drainages and to classify these according to their potential as recreational areas of the future. We might tentatively place Montana's upstream drainages into four categories:



The lack of man's interference is reflected in the primitive nature of the landscape.

1. Wild river,
2. Semi-wilderness rivers,
3. Semi-exploited rivers,
4. Exploited rivers.

We might go further and define **Wild rivers**, as those that are inaccessible except by trail and that are free of impoundments. These streams and their watersheds are essentially virgin. **Semi-wilderness rivers** would constitute those accessible by road but where the watersheds were still largely in virgin condition. The **semi-exploited river** would be easily accessible by road and close to urban areas. It would be characterized by heavy land use on its watersheds, but the upper reaches still unimpounded.

The **exploited river** would fall into a group characterized by impoundments, artificial channeling and dyking, and exhibiting varying degrees of pollution. The lower reaches of most Montana rivers would fall into this category.

From the conservationist's viewpoint it would be desirable to encourage increased use of downstream areas for impoundments and to continue to harness those rivers already exploited, striving to keep intact the few remaining wild and semi-wilderness rivers.

I do not believe that we should make a stand by trading one river or dam site against another. This becomes a political football in which fundamental issues are readily confused and when this is done the peo-

ple whose task it is to make recommendations through democratic procedure cannot sort out the facts or issues involved. Our approach should be positive and clear to all interested users of land and water. If Montana's rivers should be surveyed and classified according to their recreational values, then we would have stated objectives and standards to maintain. These objectives could eventually be integrated into the development plans of the entire river system. Competing interests would know where conservationists stand and the people could decide with a minimum of confusion where their interests lay. Such information is essential if the State and Federal agencies responsible for the management of our land and water are to administer them in the best interests of all the people. If it is found to be in the public interest to harness these wild rivers, then I do not think conservationists will stand in the way of economic progress. If, however, exploitation is found not to be in the best public interest, then we have preserved a fragile thing of beauty, giving other generations an opportunity to know the wilderness, and make possible an educational and spiritual experience for future Americans that no man-made institution can synthesize.

Sincerely,

JOHN J. CRAIGHEAD,
Leader, Montana Co-
operative Research Unit.