

TROUT FISHERY WOULD BE AN ECONOMIC BOON

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Substantial economic development benefiting small businesses and rural communities in a manner that protects and enhances what we love about Bonner County would seem to be a concept any resident could get behind. Recreational fishing is a mainstay of economic activity in Bonner County: In 2011 alone, anglers generated over \$24 million in economic activity to fish Bonner County waters.

Most of the fishing occurs on the many beautiful lakes we are blessed with. What we don't have in Bonner County, however, is a "home river" — a river teeming with trout that provide types of fishing opportunities that bolster so many other counties in Idaho.

By contrast, Boundary County has the Kootenai River and Kootenai County has the Coeur d'Alene River systems to provide year-round stream fishing. Some Bonner County streams are just too small to support a meaningful fishery. Others may de-water or become too warm in the summer to support a robust trout population that can support the type of fishing that would attract anglers and their business.

Having a vital stream trout fishery has a seriously positive economic impact for surrounding communities. For example, a 2003 study indicated that the Coeur d'Alene River provides an economic value of over \$3 million annually. Data from 2011 for the St. Joe River indicates the fishery generated over \$6 million in economic activity.

Compare these with similar-sized Priest River, which has virtually no fishing activity. The reason? High stream temperatures are lethal to trout for two to six weeks each summer, a result of water being drawn from the warm, shallow Outlet Bay.

Priest River has over 40 miles of potentially excellent fishery habitat, except that it becomes too warm to support a meaningful fishery.

Idaho Department of Fish & Game snorkeling surveys conducted in 2010 showed that Priest River has a population of less than one trout per acre, comprised of cutthroat, rainbows and browns.

The Coeur d'Alene River, meanwhile, boasts 80 trout per acre. The St. Joe has more than 100 trout per acre.

The scenery and surroundings around the Priest River rival the Coeur d'Alene and St. Joe rivers.

With its proximity to communities such as Priest River, Sandpoint, Coeur d'Alene and Spokane, the Priest could draw thousands of anglers if its fish populations rivaled those of other North Idaho rivers.

That's not just recreational opportunity. It's dollars for local businesses.

There is a possible solution, however.

In Pend Oreille County, Wash., Sullivan lake and creek had similar temperature issues as Priest lake and river. The Kalispel Tribe, after appropriate studies and due diligence, embarked on a plan to siphon colder water from below the lake's surface to spill into the river system and cool the river enough to sufficiently support resident trout. To date, this plan seems to be working as summertime water in Sullivan Creek were 8 degrees lower than pre-siphon readings.

There is strong evidence to suggest a similar system could be used on the Priest River to cool temperatures and without affecting lake levels or water quality. Temperature modeling by Portland State University shows the siphon plan can indeed work.

If there were popular support for such a plan, grants could be sought to begin the necessary engineering and due diligence to ensure such a project could be developed without harming the lake while providing a recreational and economic boon to the county.

Wouldn't that be something we could all get behind.

- Donald Childress is president of the Panhandle chapter of Trout Unlimited.