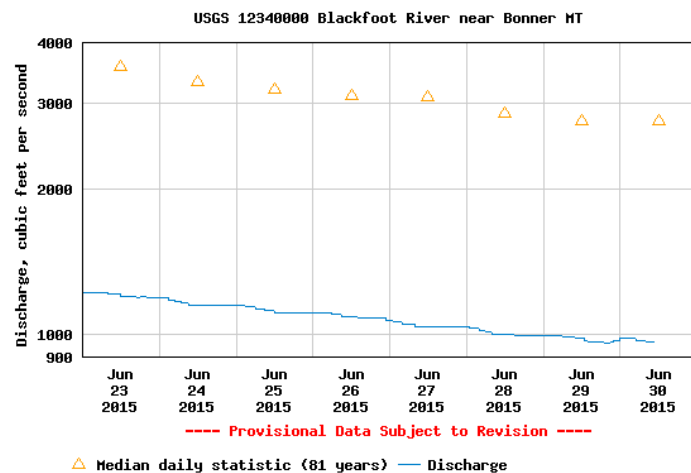


**June 30, 2015** – Due to a lack of late-winter snowfall and early snowmelt, Western Montana’s rivers are running at 1/4 to 1/3 of normal flows for this time of year. With hot weather and no rain in the forecast, the Blackfoot Drought Committee is planning for potential river and water use restrictions as early as July this year. The committee encourages irrigators, outfitters, floaters and anglers to stay apprised of changing water conditions.

“In years like this where we see reduced snowpack and earlier runoff, the Blackfoot Drought Committee wants to encourage people to plan ahead,” said Land Lindbergh, Blackfoot landowner and member of the Drought Committee. “The drought response process is about protecting the Blackfoot’s native fish, but we also want to help ensure we can support sustainable agriculture and the recreation-based businesses of the Blackfoot.”

**There are several ways to check on river conditions and learn about upcoming restrictions:**

- Follow Blackfoot River flows by checking the [USGS river gage web page](#). Drought-related restrictions are announced as flow and temperature triggers are reached. The first flow trigger is 700 cfs at the Bonner gage.
- Check the [Blackfoot Drought Committee updates](#) page on the Blackfoot Challenge web site.
- Follow the suggested [voluntary fishing technique restrictions](#) that help reduce stress on native fish when river flows drop and water temperatures rise.
- Contact the Blackfoot Challenge water program coordinator, Jennifer Schoonen, at [jennifer@blackfootchallenge.org](mailto:jennifer@blackfootchallenge.org).



In 2000, the Blackfoot Drought Committee was formed to coordinate the development and implementation of a voluntary drought response effort, now known as the Blackfoot Drought Response Plan. The plan is based on the premise of “shared sacrifice,” with the goal that all Blackfoot water users (agricultural, irrigators, outfitters, anglers, recreational users, government agencies, homeowners associations, businesses, conservation groups and others) voluntarily agree to take actions that will result in water savings and/or the reduction of stress to fisheries resources during critical low-flow periods. This cooperative effort aims to minimize the adverse impacts of drought on fisheries, while also aiding in the equitable distribution of scarce water resources.

Approximately 90 Blackfoot irrigators have signed on to participate in drought response, each agreeing to take both short-term and long-term actions that reduce their water usage during low river flows. Fishing outfitters have also stepped up to participate, supporting an educational brochure that outlines voluntary fishing technique restrictions to reduce stress to fish in low water periods.

The Blackfoot approach offers an alternative to angling restrictions and traditional enforcement of the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks in-stream flow right (known as the Murphy Right), while engaging the stakeholders of the Blackfoot Valley in the protection and conservation of its water and fisheries. The Blackfoot Drought Committee monitors drought indicators, informs and educates water users about drought conditions, holds public meetings when necessary, and conducts watershed-wide outreach to help water users prepare for and respond to drought.