

Jared Smith

Thank you for your work on the water quality issues in Fish and Flat Creeks in Jackson Hole.

My family has lived at the headwaters of Fish Creek since 1946. We look out over the ranch lands surrounding Fish Creek and I have fished and played in Fish Creek for all my 64 years. I also worked on the 3/B Ranch in Wilson for several years which is bisected by Fish Creek. I have witnessed firsthand the degradation of this amazing tributary to the Snake River and am concerned not only about habitat issues, but also public health issues. Fish Creek is used by many different stakeholders including fishermen, floaters and wildlife enthusiasts. The fish habitat has greatly diminished, and the e coli levels present in the Creek should have resulted in posting by public health officials declaring the Creek unsafe for users. The e coli levels are 2 to 3 times the level that would cause action by public health departments in most jurisdictions, yet no signs are posted warning users of the risk. This is irresponsible.

The solution is obvious: Government regulators must intercede to require failing septic facilities to be replaced, riparian buffers must be created to limit pollutants from livestock and fertilizers and sewer system must be installed to pipe away effluent where feasible. The voluntary hook-up program in Wilson was successful but must be expanded and made mandatory. State of the art mounded systems do not work when ground water levels are close to the surface as in the Fish Creek drainage. Homeowners, golf courses and their landscape contractors must be educated and penalties for improper activities enforced and assessed. The time for complacency and volunteer-based programs must end.

Local, State and Federal governments must do their part to intercede and enforce existing laws and regulations. Quick release fertilizers must be banned from the Valley and a concerted education campaign must be undertaken. The time for more talk and study is over. Government must take action to stop this degradation. With leadership and resolve, we can reverse the situation and restore the Creek to its healthy pre-development condition. The future of Fish Creek depends on our collective commitment and your agency leadership.