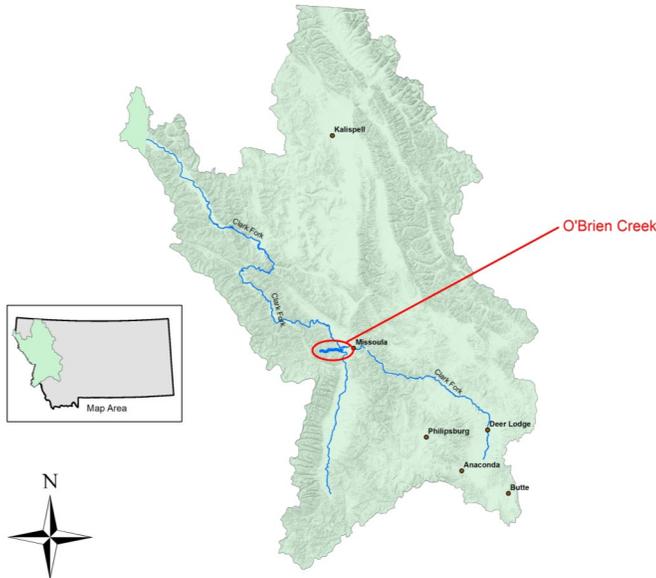




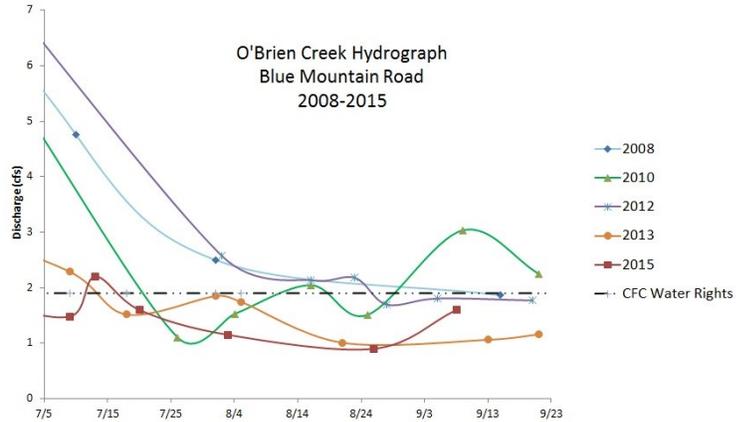
Streamflow Spotlight: O'Brien Creek



0 12.5 25 50 Miles

Clark Fork Coalition - 140 South 4th Street West - www.clarkfork.org - (406) 542-0539

Low, but not dry: What a difference a lease makes



Water leases can keep a creek from running dry, even during the hottest summers. In this graph, colored lines represent flow data from 2008-15. Each year flow drops quickly as summer progresses, but the water lease keeps it from drying up completely during the hottest, driest parts of the summer. This lease literally acts as a safety net to keep the creek wet when water levels fall.

ABOUT THIS STREAM:

O'Brien Creek is the last tributary to the Bitterroot River before its confluence with the Clark Fork. The stream supports healthy populations of westslope cutthroat and is classified as critical habitat for bull trout.

Over the last century the creek was altered by logging, road-building, grazing, and dewatering, leading to erosion, loss of vegetation, and degraded habitat. Restoration projects to enhance aquatic habitat and mitigate sediment have been carried out in its lower reaches and headwaters by MT Fish Wildlife & Parks and Lolo National Forest.

The lower reaches of O'Brien Creek used to run dry on a yearly basis, preventing fish from accessing its cooler upstream waters. CFC began leasing instream water in 2004, allowing the creek to stay connected to the mainstem year-round, and ensuring native fish are able to use the creek for refuge and spawning.

LOW FLOW IMPACTS:

- A dewatered stream means loss of cold water refuge in the summer/fall and loss of habitat for aquatic organisms
- Diminished cold water refuge means higher fish mortality and adverse impacts to the Bitterroot River fishery

WHAT WE'RE DOING:

- Purchased more than 3 cfs of senior water rights on creek (= more than 170 million gallons per year)
- Leasing an additional 1+ cfs (= ~57 million gallons annually)
- Working with irrigators to ensure compliance during periods of low flow



CFC staff monitoring flow on O'Brien Creek

LEARN MORE about instream flow restoration strategies at clarkfork.org and find out how you can help protect and restore Montana's rivers.