

2018 INDUCTEE

GEORGE GRANT

1906-2008



On a good day, young George Grant could stretch his lean frame to reach 5 feet, 6 inches tall, but he was destined to become a giant among Montana angler conservationists.

His permanent home was hardscrabble Butte, surrounded by a landscape so damaged by a century of mining and smelting that it became the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's largest Superfund cleanup site.

In the midst of the Great Depression, Grant would steal away to a cabin on the Big Hole River to spend every summer day fly fishing for trout.

It was those bucolic summers that awakened his conservation ethic, and he evangelized for the Big Hole River for the rest of his life. He became the river's fiercest advocate—and a model activist for some of the most profound river conservation battles in Montana history.

In the mid-1960s, Grant—and Tony Schoonen (MOHOF 2016)—convinced a nascent Trout Unlimited to take on as its first national environmental battle the proposed construction of Raichle Dam on the main stem of the Big Hole River. Additionally, Grant and Schoonen formed an unlikely alliance with local ranchers to turn back attempts to build the dam at Notch Bottom. The 150-mile-long river remains among the few free-flowing wild trout streams in the U.S.

A Montana TU pioneer, Grant mobilized followers through "The River Rat," the rabble-rousing newsletter he edited.

Later, to restrict the practice of bulldozing

gravel for irrigation diversions in the Big Hole, Grant and Schoonen teamed up to advocate for Montana's landmark Natural Streambed and Land Preservation Act, commonly known as the "310 Law."

Of course, Grant was already an internationally acclaimed fly-tier, patenting in 1939 his method for weaving hackles. Fly-fishing legend Dan Bailey called Grant's bug imitations "the most beautifully tied flies" he'd ever seen. Two of Grant's books, *Montana Trout Flies* and *The Master Fly Weaver*, are collector's items. In 1973, the Federation of Fly Fishers awarded Grant the most prestigious accolade a fly-tier can receive: The Bud Buszek Memorial Award.

And George Grant's legacy endures. Butte's TU chapter and a state Big Hole River fishing-access site each bear his name. Mike Gurnett's 1991 Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks' film, "Three Men and Three Rivers," pays tribute to him.

Grant wasn't wealthy, but he gave what he could. To humbly fund his Big Hole River Foundation start-up in 1998, Grant, at 92, sold his split cane rod and his angling book collections. All because, as a younger man, he appreciated the life-affirming value of a clean, brawling river that few others shared.

On his 100th birthday, Grant confessed to a reporter for Butte's *Montana Standard*, "It was like I was a millionaire," he said. "And I had my own trout stream." ❧

