Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

ANNUAL EDITION
2006

FISHING NEWSLETTER

Table of Contents

Introduction

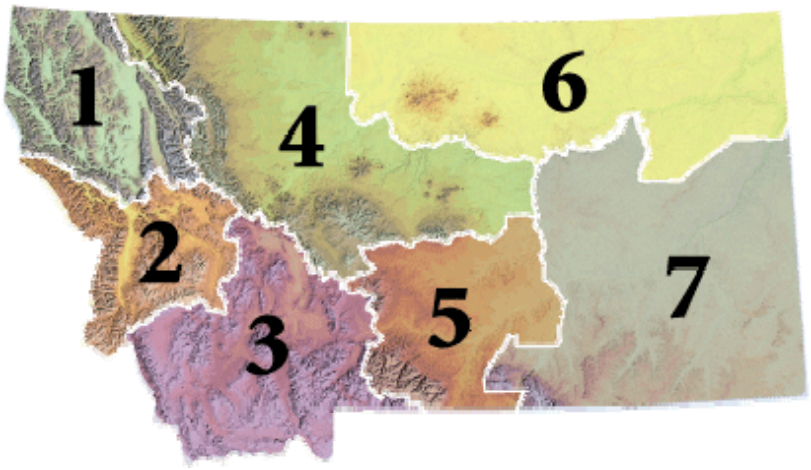
Montana has over 59,000 miles of flowing streams and rivers, and hundreds of thousands of acres of lakes, reservoirs and ponds. These are home to more than 90 species of fish, of which 56 are native species. Montana's fisheries are extremely diverse, ranging from wild rainbow trout, cutthroat trout and Arctic grayling that reside in western Montana's cold rivers and streams to paddlefish, sturgeon, and sauger that reside in eastern Montana's large prairie rivers. Rainbow trout, yellow perch, bass, walleye, and lake trout are among the fish found in different lakes and ponds throughout the state. These diverse and ever-changing fisheries require continuous monitoring to keep track of different populations, to evaluate the effectiveness of regulations, and to monitor the impacts of whirling disease and other aquatic nuisance species.

Management of these diverse fisheries requires information from a variety of sources, including from Anglers themselves. Montana maintains a Fishing Log program where anglers voluntarily keep track throughout the year of where they fish, how often, and what they catch. These data are provided to FWP, and are put into a long-term database that biologists can use to supplement their more formal monitoring and data collection efforts. This newsletter was originally developed to provide information to Fishing Log holders about the status of Montana's fisheries, and was titled the Fishing Log Newsletter. However, because of the interesting information in the newsletter, and increasing interest by a diversity people in what is going on with Montana's fisheries, the newsletter has been getting much wider circulation than just Fishing Log holders. So we have changed the name and look, but the newsletter is still the same interesting publication it has always been. We hope you enjoy the information contained herein, and thank you for you support of Montana's world-famous fisheries resources. And we are also always looking for more anglers willing to keep a log of their fishing activities and catch.

REGION 1

Bull Trout

When bull trout were listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act in 1998, all waters in Montana were closed to bull trout fishing except for Swan Lake, despite the fact that several other populations appeared to be in good shape. By 2004, FWP was able to document that



conservation measures had raised bull trout to conservation recovery levels in Hungry Horse Reservoir, Lake Koocanusa, and the South Fork Flathead River. Normally, recreational fishing is not restored until a species is delisted, which appears to be years away. FWP applied to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to reopen the above fisheries and the Service agreed to an experimental recreational fishery. To control and monitor the fishery, anglers had to get a special bull trout permit and catch card. This allows biologists to measure catch and harvest. Anglers were allowed to harvest 1 bull trout per day, 2 per season from Hungry Horse and Koocanusa, the South Fork was catch and release only. Seasonal closures protected bull trout during vulnerable periods.

Nearly 2,700 anglers obtained permits in 2004 – 2005, although 2/3 of those didn't actually fish. Anglers put in 3,483 days of fishing for bull trout on Lake Koocanusa, 1,650 days on Hungry Horse Reservoir and 725 days on the South Fork Flathead River. Anglers were conservative, releasing nearly 80 percent of all bulls caught. Anglers caught 355 bulls from Hungry Horse and harvested 48. Anglers caught and released 173 bull trout in the South Fork Flathead. Koocanusa turned out to be the most popular fishery and anglers were estimated to have harvested 650 bull trout. All harvests were within predicted levels and 2005 bull trout spawning surveys showed no problems, so the Fish and Wildlife Service renewed the fishery for another year. Issues that FWP will continue to work on include poor returns of catch cards and the fact that a large landslide partially blocked an important Koocanusa spawning tributary which may impact future age classes.

Bull trout spawning surveys elsewhere in northwest Montana held steady. An area of concern for the future is the Swan drainage, which has one of the healthier bull trout populations. Lake trout were detected in Swan Lake in 1998 and small lake trout that appear to be from reproduction have now been found. Lake trout in similar situations elsewhere have caused dramatic shifts in fisheries. A working group of state, federal and tribal biologists and conservation groups has been formed to determine whether lake trout will impact bull trout, Kokanee and other game fish and, if so, how to best suppress the lake trout.

Drought and Water

As of January 2006, snowpacks look much better than the past 5 years. It says something when a slightly above average snowpack (105%) is a cause for celebration. Generally, northwest Montana has fared reasonably well through the past years of drought but the popular Thompson River was closed 7 weeks last summer due to low flows and high water temperatures. As in many other Montana rivers, brown trout appear to be holding up better than rainbow and cutthroat trout.

Libby and Hungry Horse Reservoirs fared well in recent deliberations in the ongoing federal "salmon" lawsuit. The name itself speaks volumes when it comes to resident fish. The Columbia Watershed has focused on providing

water for sea-run migratory fish, often at the expense of Montana's reservoirs and rivers. Each August, the top 20 feet of the reservoirs were flushed downstream to help salmon, reducing reservoir productivity, and causing an unnatural "double peak" in the rivers downstream. Unfortunately, Montana's water has no benefits to salmon smolts in terms of water temperature, and very little benefit in water velocity intended to speed young salmon to the ocean. Conversely, Montana's fish are immediately impacted by the reservoir draft and flow fluctuation in the river. Plaintiffs asked for even more water from Montana, but their request was denied. Instead, the Pacific Northwest region is warming up to a compromise operation developed by MFWP that still helps salmon, but without impacts to resident fish. The new plan reduces reservoir drawdown, improves refill and smoothes the discharge after the spring peak to stabilize river flows during the productive summer months.

A recent problem that may be drought related is the appearance of huge mats of the diatom *Didymosphenia geminata* in the Kootenai River downstream from Libby Dam. It has been found in other Montana rivers but not yet at nuisance levels. Didymo or “Rock Snot” as it is called by anglers, produces mats several inches thick that cover rocks that provide cover for insects and juvenile fish. Corresponding decreases in adult fish have been observed in some waters in New Zealand, Utah, and Colorado. It is not known if these infestations are due to a lack of flushing flows due to drought, changes in stream flows due to dam operations or other factors. A multi-state conference is planned for this spring to look at this newest aquatic nuisance species.

Fishing Access

Human populations are expanding rapidly in parts of western Montana, posing an increasing challenge to managers to maintain access to public waters. A major acquisition in Region 1 within the last year was the 1,800-acre Bull River Wildlife Management area under the AVISTA hydromitigation program. The WMA protects the headwaters of the Bull River, maintains key wetlands, wildlife habitat, and a grizzly migration corridor, and provides for fishing, hunting, and wildlife viewing. A key access was also acquired on the lower Flathead River to access that smallmouth bass fishery and plans are to start construction on an access on state school trust lands on Echo Lake this spring for largemouth bass, northern pike and yellow perch. A new boat ramp and dock were installed at West Shore State Park on Flathead Lake to provide key year-round access.

The Family Fishing Pond Program continued to grow with the addition of the Shady Lane Pond to the Old Steel Bridge Fishing Access in Kalispell. An inaugural Kids Fishing Day was held to introduce the pond and the 2-½ miles of trails to the community. Shady Lane joins a list of family ponds in Whitefish, Eureka, Troy, Noxon, Thompson Falls, and Ninepipes. Several years ago, Carole and Carlie Reum approached FWP about a memorial in honor of their son Carlie Lynn who had passed away. Carlie Lynn was an avid angler so FWP suggested construction of

handicapped accessible "Carlie's Pier" at the Ninepipes Pond. Several memorial dart tournaments provided the seed money coupled with donations from a number of businesses and materials and labor from FWP. Polson Outdoors, Inc. stepped in with the final funding and POI member Gene Ashby was instrumental in onsite design, fabrication, and welding. Carlie's Pier was dedicated at the Ninepipe's Kids Fishing Day in May 2005.

Carlie's Pier on the Ninepipes Family Fishing Pond

Real Science – Brian Marotz

Biologists frequently have to mark fish to track movement, growth and survival, but common marking techniques, such as tags or fin clips, are time consuming, difficult to use on large numbers of fish and may affect fish performance. Biologists sometimes use coded wire tags, smaller than a grain of rice that are inserted under the skin. The tags have individual codes and can be read by a scanner. Now Region 1 biologists are looking at scale chemistry for marks. Each headwater stream where fish are hatched and reared as juveniles has unique water chemistry that is laid down in the layers at the focus or start of the scale. Biologists can sample a group of fish from a large lake or river and by using lasers to analyze the microelemental chemistry from a few scales, can determine with a high degree of accuracy which streams each fish came from. A tiny snip of fin will then provide the genetic history of the fish. Work is now ongoing to determine the persistence of the chemical fingerprint over the fish's life.

In another angle, biologists often want to mark hatchery fish to track them for growth and survival, but marking thousands of fish is a daunting task.

Shady Lane Pond Kid's Fishing Day

Tetracycline mixed into the food will lay down a ring that fluoresces under ultraviolet light, but the mark may fade over time. Most everyone is familiar with aging trees from growth rings. Many anglers know you can age a fish from looking at ring patterns on hard parts, such as scales and otoliths (ear bones). Biologists and fish culturists have determined that raising and lowering the water temperature while the egg is in the eyed stage (eyes are visible), will

lay down different daily growth rings. Each batch of fish can be given a different "fingerprint" of rings. Later in life the otolith can be examined under very high magnification to identify the origin of the fish. Unfortunately, the fish have to be sacrificed to take otoliths as opposed to taking a few scales with the microelemental chemistry analysis.

Region 2

Whirling Disease – Pat Saffel

Whirling disease continues to spread in Region 2. This parasite has decimated some fisheries in the western states and shown little effect in others. Rainbow trout are most susceptible. There is no known cure for whirling disease and no effective ways to manage the infection once it is in a river. How it will affect trout fisheries in Region 2 is being closely monitored.

It appears that Rock Creek has been infected the longest in Region 2. The fishery has experienced a dramatic change in trout species. In the mid-80's Rock Creek was a blue ribbon rainbow trout fishery. Starting around 1996 the change started and now the fishery is dominated by brown trout. For anglers the change has not been so drastic, fortunately. The number of trout in the creek and the catch rate for anglers has remained similar.

The decline of rainbow trout in the Blackfoot River appears to be following a similar pattern as Rock Creek as the disease progresses in this drainage. The number of rainbow trout is reaching historical lows. How much more rainbows will decline remains to be seen. Brown trout and westslope cutthroat trout are increasing and providing some replacement of the rainbow trout.

Sentinel cage used for monitoring whirling disease in a tributary to the Blackfoot River.

Elsewhere, whirling disease is just beginning to take hold. Whirling disease infection has been discovered in the upper Bitterroot River drainage. The infection is gaining in intensity but it is too early to assess effects to the fishery. In the Clark Fork below Missoula to the Flathead River, whirling disease infections are low and the fishery is stable. Rainbow trout are very important parts of the fishery in the Bitterroot and the Clark Fork, so we are concerned that declines in trout could be significant. Then again, as we've seen in Rock Creek, maybe there will be change but still a thriving fishery…or, maybe no change at all. We'll have to wait and see.

Drought and low water has been common in the last decade. Drought is both a confounding and contributing factor in assessing the effects of whirling disease. It confounds the issue because drought can reduce trout numbers like lower-level whirling disease infections. When declines are slight drought may be to blame rather than whirling disease. Lower and warmer water caused by drought can also increase infection rates of trout. Declines of trout can be more extreme during low water years, whereas during more normal years little effect might be seen. If spring and summer flows return to near normal, we may see a reduced effect of whirling disease on trout. The snowpack for spring 2006 looks to be normal for Region 2. Let's hope this continues in future years.

Milltown Dam

The Milltown Dam removal project will begin with a drawdown sometime between spring 2006 and spring 2007. The drawdown, the first of three, will release sediment to the Clark Fork. This sediment is expected to create water conditions that are not good for trout and other fishes and may cause a short-term decline in trout immediately below the dam. High sediment loads can create difficulties in feeding and breathing. Sediment that lies on the riverbed for extended periods can reduce food production (insects) and hiding cover. Water conditions will not persist beyond drawdown events and sediment on the riverbed is not expected to persist beyond the next high flow, if it is near normal or higher. The reduction in trout numbers is expected to be short-lived, maybe a few years at most. However, the removal of the dam will provide many long-term benefits to the fishery. Trout will be able to return to streams to spawn and produce higher numbers of young fish – imperiled native fish such as bull trout will benefit the most. Northern pike that eat trout will drop drastically in number as their habitat (the reservoir) is eliminated. Scour and flood events that release high amounts of contaminated sediment and reduce trout numbers will no longer happen. The project is not expected to affect the trout fishery below the Bitterroot River. So, although the project may affect the trout fishery below the dam in the short-term, the long-term benefits include a more robust, stable, and resilient fishery.

Milltown dam

Region 3

Restoring a Montana Native – Peter Lamothe

Ever heard of a fish called the fluvial Arctic grayling? Lewis and Clark made note of these "new kind of white or silvery trout" in the Beaverhead River in

1805. The Arctic grayling is a species native to northern North America. The only populations native to the lower 48 states were once found in Michigan and Montana. The Michigan population is now extinct and the fluvial or river-dwelling population in Montana has declined significantly in range and abundance. Once widespread throughout the upper Missouri River drainage as far downstream as Great Falls, the remaining confirmed and viable population resides in the Big Hole River of southwest Montana.
Due to its decline, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service classified grayling in the upper Missouri River drainage as a "candidate" species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). In order to restore the declining population, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks-in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and private landowners in the Big Hole Valley-is working on a plan. Under a program called Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances, landowners can sign voluntarily agreements to implement conservation measures on their lands to protect grayling. In return, if the species is listed under the ESA, landowners are offered the assurance that they will not be required to do anything more than what was agreed to previously. The idea behind the program is that participants-in this case Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks and private landowners-ultimately contribute cooperatively to stabilizing or restoring fluvial Arctic grayling in Montana.

For more information about fluvial Arctic grayling or the Candidate Conservation with Assurances program, visit:

www.graylingrecovery.org
or

http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/concern/grayling.html
or

http://mountain-prairie.fws.gov/species/fish/grayling/grayling.htm

Cherry Creek Native Fish Introduction Program – Pat Clancy

The Cherry Creek Native Fish Introduction Project is being conducted by Fish, Wildlife, & Parks in an effort to establish a population of genetically pure westslope cutthroat trout occupying more than 50 stream miles in the upper Missouri River Drainage in Montana.

In September 2005, the U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the use of antimycin to eradicate non-native fish from the Cherry Creek project area is not a violation of the Clean Water Act. The ruling came after an August hearing of an appeal by a citizen who had sued FWP in both state and federal district courts in Montana. The three judge panel ruled unanimously for FWP.
The first year of Phase 2 of the project was conducted in 2005. Approximately eight miles of mainstem Cherry Creek and tributaries were treated. Phase 1 of the project, consisting of approximately 11 stream miles and the 105 acre-foot Cherry Lake, was treated in 2003 and 2004. Genetically pure westslope cutthroat trout will be introduced into waters treated in Phase 1 in 2006.

The second treatment of Phase 2 will be

Photo showing application of antimycin, applied at 10 parts per billion to the stream, and a bag of sentinel fish used to monitor the effectiveness of the treatment station upstream of the one shown here.

conducted in 2006, and if time and manpower demands permit, the first treatment of Phase 3 (approximately 23 stream miles) will also be conducted in 2006.

Upper Yellowstone River – Scott Opitz

The upper Yellowstone River has fared well in light of continued drought. Two sections of the Yellowstone River were surveyed in 2005. These were the Springdale Section and the Mill Creek Section. Results show that in the Mill Creek Section rainbow trout numbers are continuing to increase and are above the long-term average. Brown trout are just below the long-term average and Yellowstone cutthroat continue to be above the long-term average. In the Springdale Section, rainbow trout abundance increased from 2004 and is above the long-term average. Brown trout abundance also increased from 2004 and is just below the long-term average. We were unable to capture enough Yellowstone cutthroat trout in this section to complete an estimate. Overall, the fishery is in good shape and the fish are in great condition. Survey of all four long-term monitoring sections in the Yellowstone is scheduled for spring 2006. We will be tagging Yellowstone cutthroat to get a better feel for movement of these fish in the river and tributaries that they use for spawning.

Shields River – Scott Opitz

With continued drought the fish populations in the Shields River appear to be doing well. In 2005, we surveyed two long-term monitoring sections of the river. Abundance of brown trout in the Convict Grade section appears to be stable and near the long-term average. Brown trout in the Todd Section have declined slightly, but remain above the long-term average. Length-frequency diagrams indicate strong recruitment that will likely end this decline. Overall condition of fish in the Shields River appears good. Survey of three sections in the spring and one additional section in the fall are scheduled for 2006. We will be tagging Yellowstone cutthroat to get a better feel for movement of these fish in the river and tributaries that they use for spawning.

Region 4

MIDDLE MISSOURI RIVER

Pallid Sturgeon Recovery – Bill Gardner

A small remnant population of pallid sturgeon (an endangered species) exists in the approximate 200-mile reach of Missouri River from Morony Dam (near Great Falls) to Fort Peck Reservoir. A stocking program was initiated in 1998 to protect the gene pool and begin to repopulate the species in this recovery area. The goal is to rebuild the population to about 1,000 adult pallid sturgeon by 2025. The pallid sturgeon hatchery program was fairly successful and 36,473 young pallid sturgeon were stocked in the river in 2005. The majority of stocked pallids were fry (33,300), along with 2,480 fingerlings and 653 yearlings. Since 1998, we have stocked 42,318 pallid sturgeon representing five year-classes in the approximate 150 miles of the Missouri River between the confluence of the Marias River and Fort Peck Reservoir. Survival of the stocked pallids has been variable with the 1997 year-class having an exceptionally high survival rate of 42% after seven years in the wild. However, monitoring of the 2001 year-class indicates this group of stocked fish was a total loss. The survival of the other three year-classes is unknown at this time, but further monitoring will provide information in upcoming years. The growth rate of stocked juvenile pallid sturgeon has been surprisingly slow, with the 8-year-old fish now averaging 22 inches fork-length and weighing 1.23 pounds. Our river-side spawning effort was fairly successful this year and we spawned one female. This effort produced about 7,000 fingerling pallids, which were raised at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services Technology Center in Bozeman. Some of these fish were stocked in the river as young-of-year during 2005, while some remaining lots will be stocked as yearling fish in 2006.

Middle Missouri River Fisheries Survey – Bill Gardner

Sauger: Sauger have been receiving considerable attention by fisheries crews because of the sharp declines first reported during the late 1980's. The 2005 survey revealed good sauger numbers in the approximate 150-mile reach from Coal Banks Landing to Fort Peck Reservoir. Numbers of sauger in the Morony Dam and Fort Benton sections continue to be only 20% of the downriver populations and 20% of their past (1976-79) abundance levels. We continued an experimental stocking program to determine if sauger numbers could be improved in this upper reach. The sauger spawning effort was very successful in 2005. We collected 1.8 million eggs in the Robinson Bridge area that were incubated and reared at the Miles City State Fish Hatchery. A total of 436,850 fry produced at the hatchery were stocked into Cochrane Reservoir and an additional 19,668 fingerlings were later stocked into Cochrane, Ryan, and Morony reservoirs. The idea is to have the fingerling sauger use these small reservoirs on the Missouri River near Great Falls as rearing areas with the expectation that most of these fish would gradually pass through the dams and into the river downstream over the course of a year or two. Hopefully these

young sauger will eventually bolster populations in the 30-mile stretch of the Missouri River between Morony Dam and Fort Benton. The experimental stocking program has ended and the results of past stocking will be evaluated.

Other game fish species: Channel catfish, shovelnose sturgeon, smallmouth bass and walleye abundance were all found to be near the 5-year average levels. Excellent numbers and sizes of channel catfish were sampled in the Judith River area and bass were found in good numbers in the stretch from Morony Dam to Fort Benton areas. For the most part, walleye were found in low numbers, favoring the mid-reach of the Missouri River.

2003 Creel Survey: A creel survey was conducted in 2003 in an approximate 200-mile reach of river between Great Falls and Fort Peck Reservoir. A total of 361 anglers were interviewed and they reported catching 574 fish represented by 14 species. The overall catch rate was 0.6 fish/hour with goldeye being the most common species caught (0.2/hour) and channel catfish the most common game fish caught (0.1/hour). Anglers kept 30% of the shovelnose sturgeon caught, followed by sauger at 32%, walleye at 43%, smallmouth bass at 61% and channel catfish at 64%. The fishing pressure for the Middle Missouri River during 2003 was estimated to be 33,250 angler-days that were nearly double that of the 1993 estimate.

LEWISTOWN AREA – Anne Tews

Prairie Fish Survey

A survey of 123 sites throughout Region 4 was conducted as part of the Montana prairie stream inventory. This was the third year of the survey and the first time most of the sites had been sampled. Of the 123 sites surveyed, 53 had water and 32 of the sites with water had fish. A total of 16,325 fish representing 28 species were captured. Twenty species were native to Montana and 8 were introduced. The fathead minnow had the greatest distribution, occurring at 20 sites. Carp were the most widely distributed non-native species. These two species were also the most widely distributed in 2004. Thirteen species of reptiles and amphibians were also recorded during the survey. Tiger salamanders and boreal chorus frogs were the most frequently observed amphibians, while spiny soft-shelled turtles and gopher snakes were the most common reptiles.

Big Spring Creek

Low levels of whirling disease infection were identified from wild fish for the first time in samples collected from Big Spring Creek in 2003 and 2004. Studies using caged juvenile rainbow trout are now being undertaken to evaluate the extent of whirling disease in the creek. To date, whirling disease has only been found downstream of Lewistown. Trout population estimates were completed in 2005 on three sections of the creek. Two of the sites (Burleigh and Brewery Flats) are located upstream from Lewistown and the other site (Carroll Trail) is downstream from Lewistown. Rainbow trout numbers in the Burleigh section continued the decline for the past several years and were at near

record lows. In contrast, brown trout in that area were at near record highs and comprised about 50% of the trout over 10 inches in 2005. In the Brewery Flats section, the estimate for rainbow trout less than 10 inches long was more than twice the number found at any time since the channel was re-meandered in 2000. Estimates for larger trout declined in that section compared to 2004 but numbers were at the post-project average. Rainbow and brown trout numbers increased in the section downstream from Lewistown in 2005.

Big Casino Reservoir

Rainbow trout captured during spring trapping were up to 21.6 inches long with a maximum weight over 3 pounds. However, numbers of rainbows captured in traps and gill nets remained near record-low levels. Yellow perch were at record high numbers in traps and gill nets and their population was estimated at 7,000 fish. Yellow perch up to 0.88 pounds were captured during MFWP surveys, but mean weight was 0.16 pounds. Walleye continue to be caught at low rates in nets but weighed up to 8.4 pounds. Relative weights (a measure of how fat the fish are) were generally higher in Fall 2005 than the previous year. In 2005, a fisherman on the Missouri River near Loma caught a walleye tagged at Big Casino Reservoir in 2002. This fish had traveled at least 165 miles, including two miles from Big Casino Reservoir to Big Spring Creek, 24 miles down the creek to the Judith River, 72 miles down the Judith to the Missouri River, and 67 miles up the Missouri to the Loma area. The fish gained about 4.5 inches and 1.4 pounds during the three-year period.

East Fork Reservoir

Seven illegally stocked 2-3 year old bluegill were sampled in East Fork Reservoir near Lewistown. Bluegill were first sampled in 2003 at East Fork, but this is the first year that more than one was captured. Catch rates of northern pike were very low in traps, likely due to poor weather conditions. Average pike weight was 2.7 pounds and pike up to 6.5 pounds were captured. Average northern pike size was larger than observed since 1998. During spring trapping we handled a record number of 2,355 yellow perch. Our estimates indicate more than 24,000 yellow perch live in East Fork Reservoir. However, gill net catch was less than in 2003. (A 12.2-inch, 1.4-pound yellow perch was captured). Mean weight of yellow perch collected during fall netting was 0.11 pounds. However, a 12.2 inch, 1.4 pound perch was captured. White sucker numbers dropped substantially in traps from past years, but gill net catch was similar.

Other Waters in the Lewistown Area

Martinsdale Reservoir had more water than during the past several years. Few trout were captured during fall gill netting, but they were in excellent condition. Brown trout up to 5.7 pounds and rainbow up to 2.4 pounds were captured. Plans by irrigators to draw down the reservoir for repairs in 2005 were postponed until Fall 2006. Stocking has been cut back in anticipation of this drawdown. In Petrolia Reservoir, northern pike up to 6.2 pounds (mean 3.7) were captured during spring trapping and mean size of northern pike has increased by 7 inches and 2.3

pounds since 2004. Walleye up to 4.5 pounds and low numbers of yellow perch were captured. Yellow Water Reservoir remained very low in 2005 and did not provide good fishing. Upper Carter Pond dam failed in 2004 and the water level dropped to less than 10 feet deep. Trout overwintered but summer-kill occurred in August 2005. Lower Carter Pond remained full throughout 2005. Both Upper and Lower Carter Pond need extensive repairs. MFWP is working with other local government agencies and the landowner to find funds and assistance to repair both dams.

CHOTEAU AREA – Dave Yerk

Tiber Reservoir

Biologists continue to closely monitor Tiber's fishery. Many changes are occurring in the reservoir since cisco (also known as "lake herring") were introduced in 1997 and 1998 to enhance the forage base for walleye. Although cisco quickly became established and now dominate Tiber's fish community, adult cisco are growing too large (about 9.5 inches) to be preyed upon by most of the reservoir's walleye. Thus far, no significant improvements to the walleye population have been realized from this introduction. However, Tiber's northern pike and lake trout populations are utilizing the abundant cisco, and there have been notable improvements in the growth and condition of these predatory fish.

Based on vertical gill netting results, no cisco reproduction occurred in 2005. Currently, this population is dominated by age-3 fish produced in 2002. Most of these fish spawned for the first time in fall, 2005. The production of additional naturally-reproduced year classes is necessary to further reduce cisco growth rates to make this potential forage base more available to Tiber's walleye.

Once again, angler's enjoyed good walleye fishing on Tiber during 2005. Catch rates averaged about 0.5 walleye per angling hour, but average size and body condition of walleye were poorer in 2005 than recent years. Fall gill net surveys confirmed the declining condition and small size of Tiber's walleye. Relative to recent population trends, walleye and northern pike abundances are relatively stable. Yellow perch numbers continue to decline based on netting results, likely due to predation pressure and little recruitment. None of these species are stocked into Tiber and they are dependent upon natural reproduction to maintain their populations.

Lake Frances

Similar to previous years, a light snowpack resulted in low water conditions in Lake Frances during 2005. By August, anglers were using the newly constructed low water boat ramp to access the lake. Despite the low water conditions, anglers traveled from near and far to enjoy another year of excellent walleye fishing on Lake Frances. Walleye catch rates peaked in late June thru early July, then slowed during the heat of the summer. Harvested walleye averaged about 16 inches in length. Fishing for northern pike and yellow perch was slow

throughout the summer.

Although some anglers expressed concern about the numbers of walleye harvested during 2005, fall gill net surveys indicated Lake Frances' walleye population is at record high levels and includes a good diversity of year classes. In contrast, gill net catches of northern pike and yellow perch were at the lowest level ever observed in netting surveys.

Anglers enjoyed excellent walleye fishing on Lake Frances during 2005

The excellent fishing success walleye anglers are enjoying is directly related to the low pike and perch abundances—reduced pike numbers results in less predation pressure on smaller walleye, and reduced numbers of perch, the preferred forage of walleye in Lake Frances, causes hungry walleye which results in a good walleye "bite". Suppressed northern pike and perch populations will rebound quickly once the reservoir's elevation is adequate to flood abundant shoreline vegetation during their spring spawning period.

Bynum Reservoir

This once popular walleye and yellow perch fishery reached its lowest water elevation yet during 2005. Irrigation withdrawals ultimately reduced the reservoir to two small pools with a maximum depth of about five feet. No sampling was completed during 2005, nor were any walleye stocked. It is unlikely any fish are surviving the ongoing low water conditions in Bynum.

Pishkun Reservoir

For the third consecutive year, FWP fisheries personnel removed northern pike from Pishkun Reservoir during spring 2005. Using trap nets, nearly 900 pike were live captured in Pishkun and transplanted into nearby Split Rock Lakes. Anglers readily took advantage of the increased pike fishing opportunities in Split Rock. These efforts are directed at reducing predation pressure in Pishkun to improve northern pike growth rates, enhance yellow perch survival, and promote the establishment of a rainbow trout fishery.

In the past three years, a total of nearly 2,000 pike have been removed from Pishkun. During 2004 the average size of northern pike increased. However, it is evident from our 2005 sampling efforts that numbers of young pike have increased dramatically and average size has subsequently decreased. Thus, it appears Pishkun's pike population self-regulates itself to an extent, with larger adults preying on smaller individuals in the population.

Efforts to establish a rainbow trout fishery in Pishkun do not appear to be succeeding. Over 200,000 rainbow trout were stocked into Pishkun during the

past three years, yet very few individuals are sampled in gill nets. Stomach analyses indicate northern pike are readily feeding on stocked rainbow trout. Management direction on Pishkun Reservoir will be reevaluated in 2006 following one more year of pike removal efforts.

Other East Front Reservoirs

Several of the smaller irrigation reservoirs on the Rocky Mountain Front, including Eureka, Nilan, and Willow Creek reservoirs, provided excellent rainbow trout fishing during 2005. FWP annually stocks rainbow trout into these waters, and they typically grow very well in these productive reservoirs. Fishing is best in the spring and fall when water temperatures are cool, but can slow down considerably during late July and August. Nolan and Willow Creek reservoirs offer boating access throughout the year, but Eureka Reservoir is typically drawn down too low by mid-summer for launching boats. Thus, summer and fall angling opportunities are limited on this reservoir.

The water level in Bean Lake continues to drop. During 2005, this natural pothole lake lost another foot of elevation and now has a maximum depth of about 12 feet. The alkalinity of the water continues to increase as the water level decreases, and no stocked rainbow trout have survived during the past two years. Stocking efforts will be suspended during 2006. Biologists were investigating the potential of introducing Lahontan cutthroat trout, which are very tolerant of highly alkaline waters. However, due to recent increases in alkalinity, efforts will now focus on improving the water level in the lake before any future introductions are considered.

Sun River Adopt-A-Fish Program

The inaugural year of the Sun River Adopt-a-Fish Program was a success. Each week in 2005, from April through November, biologists tracked 20 rainbow trout implanted with radio transmitters in the 2.5-mile reach of the Sun River between Gibson and Diversion dams. Locations of fish were updated weekly on the program's website, and several local schools adopted and named individual fish and tracked their whereabouts from their classrooms via the internet.

Mrs. Ketcham's Choteau Elementary class enjoys their Sun River Adopt-A-Fish Program fieldtrip with MTFWP's Paul Hamlin and "Bruce", their newly adopted brook trout.

Several of the implanted trout met interesting demises: an osprey or an eagle apparently carried one off, two were captured by an unknown predator near the mouth of Beaver Creek, one was diverted into the Pishkun Supply Canal and ended up in Pishkun Reservoir, another

was captured by an angler, and one even went over the 100-foot high falls at Diversion Dam!

Program highlights during 2005 included implanting transmitters into an additional 20 fish and an October fieldtrip with several classes from Choteau, Fairfield, Greenfield, and Simms. On the fieldtrip to the Sun River Canyon, students enjoyed learning about Gibson Dam and the Sun River Irrigation Project, electrofishing and fish biology, area wildlife, and even observed rainbow and brook trout getting implanted with radio transmitters. Currently, there are 33 transmittered fish still active in the program. The transmitters will turn on in late March and early April 2006, and location data will be uploaded from that time through late November. Those interested in the program, tracking the fish, or the Sun River, should visit the Sun River Adopt-a-Fish homepage for additional information:

http://fwp.mt.gov/education/adoptafish/sunriver/default.html

Sun River Grayling Restoration Efforts

FWP changed strategies in 2005 for introducing fluvial (stream dwelling) Arctic grayling into the Sun River above Gibson Reservoir in the Bob Marshall Wilderness. Fluvial Arctic grayling are a special native fish that are designated a Montana Species of Special Concern and are petitioned for protection under the Endangered Species Act. Previous introduction efforts involved the stocking of over 30,000 yearling grayling into the North and South forks of the Sun River from 1999 - 2001. Unfortunately, introduced grayling did not become established in either fork; rather, they tended to migrate downstream and many ended up in Gibson Reservoir.

Introduction efforts during 2005 focused on incubating grayling eggs on-site at three locations on the North Fork Sun River. Biologists feel the North Fork provides the best habitat for fluvial grayling and greatest opportunity to establish these fish in the upper Sun River. Preliminary results from using the same technique in the Ruby River in southwest Montana have been very encouraging.

Over 60,000 grayling eggs were placed in 30 incubators at three locations during spring 2005. Hatching success was fair, and grayling larva drifted into the North Fork Sun River. Introduction efforts using grayling egg incubators will continue for two more years. It is hoped these special fish will survive, imprint and become established in the pristine upper reaches of the Sun River.

Grayling egg incubators set-up in a small tributary of the North Fork Sun River.

Northcentral Montana Cutthroat Trout Restoration Project – David Moser

In 2005, significant progress was made in protecting and restoring westslope cutthroat trout (WCT), which is the only native trout species in the upper Missouri River drainage. Several ongoing restoration projects and some new projects were completed as part of a cooperative work program between United States Forest Service and FWP. Genetically pure WCT remain in less than 3% of their historical habitat in the Upper Missouri River drainage. Most populations are hybridized with non-native rainbow trout. Also, many populations have vanished because of competition with non-native brook trout. Active restoration efforts are key to preserving this rare legacy of Montana's past for the enjoyment of future generations.

WCT conservation projects in 2005 included several transfers of pure WCT adults from healthy populations (donor streams) to protected headwaters recipient streams) that have never held fish because of natural waterfall barriers. These transfers require testing fish for diseases and assessing risks to insects and amphibians in recipient waters. In 2005, pure WCT from East Fork Spring Creek in the Snowy Mountains were transplanted to North Fork Ford Creek on the Front Range and WCT from West Fork Cottonwood Creek in the Castle Mountains were transplanted to Mid Camas Creek on the north side of the Big Belt Mountains. Combined, these projects added three miles of stream with pure protected populations of WCT. Should donor streams ever be ravaged by wildfire or lost because of drought, the essential genetic information of these populations will be preserved in their new homes. Another transfer involved moving WCT that were unprotected from downstream rainbow trout over a waterfall barrier in West Fork Cottonwood Creek in the Snowy Mountains.

West Fork Cottonwood Creek trout prior to transfer.

In 2005, a fish barrier was constructed at the lower end of Crawford Creek, a tributary to Belt Creek in the Little Belt Mountains. Crawford Creek is currently home to fish that are highly hybridized with rainbow trout. The uppermost reach of Crawford holds a very small population of pure WCT (above a small waterfall). A concrete barrier was constructed over two days by local contractors, MFWP, and USFS personnel just west of the Belt Creek Ranger Station. Future plans involve removal of non-native fishes so that genetically pure WCT can recolonize the downstream end of Crawford Creek (Approximately 1.5 miles of stream).

Significant progress was made in an

ongoing restoration project on the South Fork Judith River. This project involves construction of a concrete fish barrier on South Fork Judith River to protect over 25 miles of stream from continued hybridization with rainbow trout that are invading from downstream sources. The design of the barrier is complete and should be constructed in 2006. After completion, additional environmental assessments will be developed in order to pursue removal of non-native fishes upstream of the new barrier with electrofishing equipment. Protecting a large drainage like this will allow WCT to move freely over large distances without encountering non-native fishes, something critical to genetic health and long-term survival of the species.

Construction of Crawford Creek fish barrier.

Other WCT work in Region 4 involved continued removal (with backpack electrofishing equipment) of non-native brook trout above constructed barriers in Big Coulee Creek, Middle Fork Little Belt Creek, and Cottonwood Creek (all in the Highwood Mountains). Populations of pure WCT in these streams have increased dramatically since removal of brook trout. WCT in Big Coulee Creek dropped to less than 50 fish in 2002 before barrier construction and electrofishing removal efforts. Currently, the total population of WCT in Big Coulee is over 500 individuals.

Some of the work planned for 2006 includes construction of the South Fork Judith River fish barrier, headwater fish transfers, continued removal of non-native fishes above barriers, and collection of monitoring and baseline information region wide.

GREAT FALLS AREA – Travis Horton

Wadsworth Pond

A habitat-improvement project was completed in late 2004 on Wadsworth Pond. The project used a hydraulic dredge to deepen the southwest and west edge of the pond to improve fish habitat and the fishability of the pond. Pond dredging and fish community manipulations have caused the fishery in Wadsworth Pond to change. In the past, most perch caught in the pond were small (3-4 inches). In the spring of

Hydraulic dredge on Wadsworth Pond, near Great Falls.

2005, the average length of sampled yellow perch was over 8-inches long! Despite the improvement in size of yellow perch, angling catch rates are still low. Hopefully, the pond will continue to improve over the next few years.

Pelican Point Pond

Sampling conducted in Spring and Summer 2005 on the Pelican Point Pond #1 (the big pond to the south) showed similar results to the previous years. In general, the yellow perch and pumpkinseed sunfish populations are dominated by small fish. In other words, the populations are stunted. Although an occasional 3+ pound largemouth bass is sampled in the pond, there are not many bass overall. In the future, FWP plans to stock more largemouth bass in hopes of increasing predation on stunted panfish populations.

Largemouth bass

Smith River

Fish were sampled in the Eagle Creek section (near the confluence with Sheep Creek) of the Smith River in 2005, and the trends observed over the past few years continue. In general, rainbow trout continue to suffer from drought conditions and poor stream flow, and brown trout continue to do well. For example, the 2005 estimate for 8 inch and longer rainbow trout in the Eagle Creek section was only 55% of the long-term average. Conversely, the 2005 estimate for 8-inch and longer brown trout was 175% of the long-term average. Keep your fingers crossed for normal stream flows in summer 2006.

Missouri River

In 2005, a study was initiated on the Missouri River between Holter Dam and Great Falls to learn more about burbot, also known as "ling". The purpose of the

Burbot from Missouri River

study was to develop special netting techniques to measure burbot abundance, determine current population levels and establish a baseline for future monitoring, and learn more about the distribution and movement of burbot in this 90-mile stretch of river. Based on our survey results, burbot distribution and density seems to be similar to rainbow and brown trout. That is, there are more

burbot near Holter Dam, and the numbers decrease progressively downstream. Rainbow trout populations in the Missouri River continue to hang on, despite drought conditions and the effects of whirling disease. Despite high whirling disease levels in the Dearborn River in 2004, the 2005 preliminary estimate of age-1 rainbow trout in the Pelican Point section of the Missouri River was over 80% of the long-term average. In addition, the estimated number of 10-inch and longer rainbow trout in the Craig section increased slightly from 2004 to 2005. Brown trout numbers have been increasing, but are still not as high as the peak in 2001.

HELENA AREA – Steve Dalbey

Canyon Ferry Reservoir

Angler success on Canyon Ferry in 2005 was a little slow due to reduced rainbow stocking rates in 2005 and very low densities of yellow perch. However, there were periods of good fishing throughout the year..., anglers just had to be there at the right time! Rainbow fishing through the ice was surprisingly good with the majority of success occurring on the south end of the lake near the Silos Recreation Area. Walleye fishing was good throughout the month of June but dropped off once newly-hatched yellow perch became available as forage.

The very popular yellow perch fishery has crashed with population indicators hitting yet another record low. Perch are an extremely important forage for walleye and studies of walleye diets show perch comprising a large percentage of the walleye diet in the fall when the newly hatched yellow perch become available. Even though perch can produce massive numbers of offspring as they did in 2005, very few are living the four years required to reach catchable size (8") because of heavy predation. Starting in the winter 2005, an emergency perch regulation reduced the perch daily and possession limits to 15 in order to conserve the adult perch that remain in the lake. Perch numbers remained at record lows in 2005; therefore this regulation will remain in effect.

Fish, Wildlife & Parks netting surveys in 2005 showed relative abundance of all gamefish were below management goals. Heavy predation by walleye on smaller hatchery rainbow combined with reductions in the number of rainbow stocked by the Lewistown Hatchery has resulted in rainbow trout numbers below the management plan target for the fourth consecutive year. The impacts of reduced rainbow stocking will be felt for several years

even though the Lewistown hatchery is back in production.

Walleye relative abundance declined in 2004 but increased in 2005. Walleye remain slightly below the established management target, however, numbers of smaller walleye caught in 2005 increased, indicating that walleyes continued have good success spawning and recruiting to the sport fishery. Because of excellent production of young perch in 2005, walleye condition factors remained good for all size classes.

Hauser Reservoir

Hauser Reservoir remained a popular destination for anglers in 2005. Angling pressure remained similar to 2004 with anglers finding good rainbow trout fishing in May and June and again in October. The conversion to 8-inch hatchery rainbow trout (stocked in the fall) has been successful with much improved survival of these fish after they are stocked. In fact, all rainbows stocked in 2006 will be at least 8 inches and they will be stocked in the fall to avoid walleye predation. Walleye food demands drop in the fall as the water temperature and feeding activity declines. Additionally, the full allotment of rainbow trout will be stocked in 2006 following a 50% reduction in the number of rainbow stocked in 2005. This reduction was due to the discovery and cleanup of PCB's at the Lewistown hatchery. The rainbow fishery will be impacted for several years even though stocking rates have returned to requested levels.

Walleye densities increased in 2005 providing a good fishery during the early spring and summer months. Good numbers of walleye from 12 to 18 inches as well as a few in the 24 to 28 inch range can be found in Hauser.

Yellow perch habitat enhancement projects continued in 2005 with MFWP deploying over 1,000 freshly cut juniper trees throughout the Causeway Arm as well as in the lower end of the reservoir. These tree bundles are designed to enhance perch spawning and rearing habitat. Junipers were chosen as they appear to last longer in the water and don't degrade as fast as Christmas trees. This is the sixth year of the perch habitat enhancement project and plans are to evaluate these structures in 2006 to determine how long they provide good habitat. Perch relative abundance in gillnets remained unchanged from 2004. This comes as a disappointment following excellent production of young perch in 2003 and 2004.

Holter Reservoir

Holter Reservoir rainbow fishing remained strong in 2005 even though the number of hatchery rainbow being stocked has been reduced by roughly 80% since the discovery and cleanup of PCB at the Lewistown Hatchery. Catch rates in April and May were excellent from shore and boats. This early fishery provides an excellent opportunity for youth and handicapped anglers as the fish are close to shore and are easily accessed.

Rainbow catch rates declined in July and August but jumped to respectable levels in September and October. Similar to Hauser Reservoir, results from experimental rainbow plants since 1996 show that larger hatchery rainbow survive substantially better than small rainbow. Future rainbow trout management in Holter Reservoir involves the elimination of early summer fingerling trout (5-inches) and an increase in the numbers of larger (approximately 8-inch) rainbow. In 2006, the Lewistown hatchery is back in production and Holter should receive nearly 250,000 hatchery rainbow trout of the larger variety.

Walleye fishing jumped to an excellent start in 2005 with near-record catch rates in June and record catch rates in July. Overall, 2005 represented the third highest walleye catch rate on record. Satisfaction was high as anglers were catching good numbers of 13-16 inch walleye as well as the occasional slot limit fish (20-28 inch). Winter ice fishing for perch was variable with moderate catch rates in January and February. Perch collected in fall gillnets was disappointingly below the management plan goal. There was hope that excellent perch production in 2002 combined with a slightly lower walleye population would provide some relief for perch and a few might show up in the angler creel; unfortunately this did not occur in 2005..., maybe 2006!

Kokanee salmon provided a small component of the Holter fishery again in 2005. The majority of the fish caught were hatchery fish stocked in 2002 with some up to 5 pounds. Due to extremely poor survival of hatchery kokanee stocked in Hauser and Holter Reservoirs since 1997 (over 3.5 million eggs/fry/fingerlings and advanced fingerlings have been stocked), the decision was made to discontinue this program in 2005. However, if surplus kokanee are available from the hatcheries, consideration will be given to stocking them in either Hauser or Holter.

Region 5

Bighorn River – Ken Frazer

The Bighorn River received a reprieve from the ongoing drought in 2005, and

the trout populations responded favorably to the additional water. The Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) manages Yellowtail Dam and thus controls flows in the Bighorn River. The BOR has always strived to maintain the best flow conditions possible for the river fishery based on the amount of water available in the drainage and other mandated operating criteria. Under good water conditions the BOR maintains river flows at or above 2,500 cfs. This flow level sustains most of the important side channel areas along the river and helps keep river trout populations near maximum levels for the water available. During drier times, the BOR still tries to hold river flows above 2,000 cfs, which is the minimum target flow necessary to maintain a good fishery. Flow levels below 2,000 cfs start to seriously dewater key side channel habitat. During serious drought conditions the BOR operates the Bighorn River around a third flow level of 1,500 cfs, which has always been considered the absolute minimum flow acceptable. At this flow level, over 60% of the side channel habitat has been lost, and the river fishery is being seriously impacted.

As of May 31, 2005, the Bighorn River had been at or below the absolute minimum flow level of 1,500 cfs for 1,330 continuous days, having dropped to this level in September 2001. This past spring Bighorn flows increased back to the preferred minimum flow of 2,500 cfs the first week of June, and they remained at or above this level through the end of the year. The spring of 2005 was the first time in four years that the Bighorn River actually exhibited runoff. River flows reached a maximum of 6,739 cfs in early July, and flows remained above 6,000 cfs for 17 days. These high flows were enough to flush out most of the sediment that had accumulated in the upper river during the extended period of low water.

Trout populations in the Bighorn River were in the transitional phase of responding to extended low flows going into 2005, which allowed them to take advantage of improved flows. The first drought impacts on the river were expressed as poor recruitment of young-of-year (YOY) trout into the population. When flows first dropped to 1,500 cfs, there were still good numbers of older rainbow and brown trout in the river. These older fish continued to spawn successfully through the drought. Because the most important side-channel habitat was dewatered or unavailable at 1,500 cfs, YOY trout were forced out into the main river channel with the older trout, and most of them became food for these large trout. During 2002 and 2003, very few 6-to-15 in rainbow or brown trout were captured, or even seen, in the upper Bighorn during electrofishing. At the same time, with less competition and a diet of small trout, conditions of the larger trout in the Bighorn continued to improve.

By 2004 numbers of older trout had fallen enough to reduce predation, and more smaller trout were beginning to recruit into the population. Very strong age-one year-classes of both rainbow and brown trout were documented in the upper Bighorn River in 2004, and these fish were ready to take advantage of the improved flows in

2005. Although many age-one rainbow and brown trout were captured during spring electrofishing in 2005, the higher flows made it difficult to recapture enough of these small fish to run estimates. It was only possible to calculate estimates for brown trout 10 inches and longer, and rainbows 13 inches and longer, with populations of both species showing improvements over 2004 levels. Numbers of larger rainbow and brown trout were about equal in the upper Bighorn in the spring of 2005. Good YOY populations of both trout species in spring 2005 electrofishing samples indicated they spawned successfully in 2004. With the improved flows in 2005, a higher percentage of these small trout were able to escape predation and recruit into the population. The strong year-classes from both 2003 and 2004 should dominate the Bighorn trout population in 2006, accounting for a significant increase in overall trout numbers, and keeping anglers happy.

Rainbows have always survived better than brown trout in the Bighorn River during low flow conditions, so it was expected that rainbows could come out on top following this extended drought. Rainbow dominance was very evident during fall shocking on the Mallards Landing section in the fall of 2005. Preliminary estimates for this section were just over 300 8 inches and longer brown trout per mile, which is still low, but an increase over the record low levels of 2004. A majority of these fish were 9 to 12 inches long. At the same time, the rainbow population jumped to a new record high of about 1,875 rainbow 7 inches and longer per mile. Like brown trout, 8-to-12 inch fish dominated the population, but there was a good size distribution with rainbows up to 20 inches in the population. Based on these preliminary estimates, there were almost six rainbows for every brown trout in the lower river during fall 2005. As these rainbows get larger, many of them will probably move up river, shifting the balance in favor of rainbows throughout the river. An in-depth survey completed by Bighorn River anglers in the early 1990s found that most anglers favored rainbow over brown trout, so this shift should make most anglers happy.

Current forecasts indicate that Bighorn River flows should stay close to the preferred minimum flow of 2,500 cfs for the next year, although the winter is starting to look pretty dry. Even if the drought returns, one year of good flows, with two strong year classes of trout to take advantage of it, should help maintain good fishing on the Bighorn River.

Boulder River

Our monitoring on the Boulder River suggested that, despite low water levels, the fish population in the river is doing well. Although counts of rainbow trout are down from 2000, they are still above average for the section. Similar to other freestone rivers in the area, the drought has fortunately had only minor impacts on the fishery. Since the enactment of the more restrictive limits on trout in the Boulder in the early 1990's, the rainbow population has steadily increased, while the brown trout numbers have held steady. The increase in rainbow numbers has been

evident in most age classes of fish, but the larger fish (> 10 inches) in particular have increased substantially, leading to greater angler opportunities on the Boulder. More than 400 fish were tagged near the Boulder Forks Fishing Access Site. Several of these fish have since been caught by anglers, and the returned tags provided valuable information on fish movements and growth rates. These fish, as well as tagged fish from the Yellowstone River, have been observed in known spawning areas upstream of McLeod. No whirling disease has been detected in samples taken from the Boulder River. During 2005, additional tests were conducted upstream near spawning areas. Results from this fall's testing will not be available until later this winter.

Stillwater River – Jim Olsen

Our population estimate for the Stillwater River near Absarokee was completed this fall, and the data suggest that the fish population is in excellent shape. The estimate suggested that there are 4,400 fish per mile in the river at this location with an approximate 60:40 mix of rainbows to browns. This estimate is a substantial increase over two years ago (3,371 fish per mile), when the survey was last conducted. The increase is due solely to rising numbers of rainbows between 8 and 12 inches. Brown trout numbers were stable between sampling times. So fishing should continue to be good on the Stillwater River this year. On a less positive note, one of 30 trout placed in sentinel cages in the river tested positive for whirling disease.

The Yellowstone cutthroat trout restoration project in Bad Canyon Creek (a tributary to the Stillwater) appears to be a success. Non-native trout were removed from approximately three miles of stream. Prior to treatment, 21 of the remnant cutthroat trout in the creek were captured and held in fresh water during the removal project. The fish were released back into the creek after the project, and supplemental stocking has occurred. A drainage-wide survey conducted during 2005 suggested that the 21 fish saved prior to chemical treatment have successfully spawned during 2003 and 2004. The data also indicate that survival of stocked fish has been good. During 2006, the stocked fish should spawn for the first time, and we hope that the population will really start to take off. Also during 2005, we worked with the Custer National Forest and Bureau of Land Management to repair the barrier waterfall that keeps non-native brown trout from accessing the upper three miles of the creek.

Clarks Fork of The Yellowstone River – Jim Olsen

Whirling disease was confirmed in the Clarks Fork of the Yellowstone River during the fall of 2003. Further testing during 2005 suggests the disease is limited, at least for now, to the upper part of the drainage. Sentinel cages of fish were placed in the river at Fromberg, Edgar and near the mouth. Additional cages were placed in the Yellowstone River downstream from the mouth of the Clarks Fork and in Rock Creek. All tests on these fish came back negative. Anecdotal evidence from anglers fishing the Clarks Fork suggests that whitefish fishing has been slow, and that only larger fish (> 16 inches) are

being caught. This could be due to the high infection rate found in the river near the border with Wyoming. In the past, the Clarks Fork has provided an excellent winter fishery for whitefish, and the potential decline of whitefish is of concern. Population surveys will be conducted during 2006 to determine the current status of the fishery.

A fish passage project was completed during the fall of 2005 on Clear Creek, a tributary to Rock Creek (tributary to the Clarks Fork) near Roberts. A box culvert located about 150 yards upstream from the confluence of Rock Creek had become perched approximately 3 feet above the streambed. Working with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Carbon County, and the local landowner, funds were obtained, and a step-pool sequence was constructed downstream of the culvert. This step pool raised the elevation of the creek bed to meet the outlet elevation of the culvert. Additionally, a pool was created at each of the four steps to provide resting areas for fish attempting to migrate up Clear Creek from Rock Creek. The importance of this structure to the fish of this system was evident within a short time of completing the project, as large spawning adult trout were observed navigating the steps into the culvert.

Middle Yellowstone River – Jim Olsen

During 2005 electrofishing surveys, fish were tagged in the Yellowstone River in the vicinity of Reed Point and Big Timber. One notable fish that was tagged in 2004 near Big Timber was recaptured a year later by an angler in the exact location. The brown trout measured 25.2 inches and 6.8 pounds when tagged in 2004. Unfortunately, the angler's measuring tape only extended to 24 inches, so an accurate measurement could not be made, but he estimated the fish to be at least 26 inches (the fish was released). One month and 7 days later, another angler caught this same fish at Loch Leven Fishing Access Site upstream of Livingston approximately 15 miles. The second angler released the fish as well, so who knows where he'll show up next.

Survey electrofishing on the river suggests there continues to be a very abundant crop of 2 and 3-year old rainbows (8-14 inches). Brown trout numbers appear to be relatively stable. The large numbers of younger age-classes of rainbows is very positive for the Yellowstone because it indicates that good fishing should continue into the future. Population surveys near Columbus and Big Timber are scheduled for 2006.

Whirling disease sentinel cages were placed in the Yellowstone River near Columbus, Reed Point, and Big Timber. Whirling disease had been found in the Yellowstone upstream of Livingston, but had never been detected in fish sent in from the Region 5 section of the river. This year it was found in the Yellowstone near Big Timber and at other areas, but the infection rate appears to be mild.

Yellowstone cutthroat trout restoration continued in 2005 in Soda Butte Creek near Cooke City. The chemical removal of brook trout in the headwaters appears to have been successful, and mechanical removals using

electrofishing in the lower creek are going well. Electrofishing in the lower creek is being used to remove brook trout because there is an abundant population of cutthroat trout in the creek that we are trying to protect while eliminating brook trout. During 2005, 667 brook trout were removed from the creek using electrofishing. Most of these fish were age-1 fish that were too small to capture in previous years. Few older, larger brook trout were captured. Complete elimination of brook trout using mechanical means will be very difficult in Soda Butte Creek because of the complexity of the habitat, including deep pools and abundant log jams. We have been able to show in only two years of removal efforts, however, that substantial reductions in the adult population are possible. Removal efforts will likely continue for an additional two or three years. During 2005, electrofishing was conducted down into Yellowstone Park approximately six miles. This survey found that the population of brook trout declined precipitously from Silver Gate downstream.

Lower Yellowstone River

Flows in the lower Yellowstone River were closer to normal in 2005 than they have been for some time. Anglers reported good success for both channel catfish and smallmouth bass throughout the spring and summer from Huntley Dam downstream. Some anglers also reported fair success on sauger and walleye in the lower river. One day of electrofishing in early April around Captan Clark Fishing Access Site captured five channel catfish up to 7.95 pounds and five sauger ranging from 14.5 to 16.4 inches. Electrofishing in the same area in early October captured 11 channel catfish from 0.44 pounds up to 7.20 pounds, two larger sauger, and numerous smallmouth bass from 6.6 to 13.0 inches long. A native fish study started on the lower Yellowstone River in Region 7 last summer will be expanded from the mouth of the Bighorn River upstream to the Clarks Fork River this summer. Radio transmitters will be implanted in channel catfish, ling, sauger, and spiny softshell turtles. This study is intended to continue for at least three more years, and should provide good data on movement and habitat selection in the Yellowstone River for these important native species. Please report any tagged fish, radio or otherwise, to the Billings Headquarters (406-247-2940).

Musselshell River

Flows in the Musselshell River in 2005 were the best they have been in a long time. A very wet spring, followed by reasonable precipitation through the summer, helped reduce irrigation demands in the drainage; the Musselshell flowed all the way to Fort Peck Reservoir most of the year. No sampling was conducted in the lower river in 2005, but flows may have even been good enough to allow fish to migrate up the Musselshell out of Fort Peck Reservoir, which hasn't been possible for a number of years.

The brown trout population in the upper river was in good shape to take advantage of the improved flow conditions. Two days of electrofishing in the standard section near Selkirk Fishing Access Site captured 191 brown trout.

This sample was a 78% increase over the number of brown trout captured with the same effort in 2004. Almost 60% of the brown trout caught in 2005 were yearling fish ranging from 3.3 to 6 inches length. Apparently the brown trout that survived the extended drought in the Musselshell Drainage the past several years were very successful at spawning in 2004. This strong year class of small brown trout should have survived well with the improved flows in the Musselshell this past summer. They should help rebuild the brown trout population in the Musselshell for the future.

The remaining 40% of brown trout captured included a good size distribution of fish from 10.5 inches to over 21 inches. Several brown trout in the 20-inch range were handled. The largest brown trout caught was 21.7 inches long and weighed 3.61 pounds. For anglers who like a smaller river and are willing to work around heavy bank cover, the Musselshell River can offer an opportunity to catch some nice brown trout.

Bighorn Lake

Like the Bighorn River, the Bighorn Lake fishery has been seriously impacted by drought the past several years. This past spring was the first time Bighorn Lake filled since 1999. The reservoir set new record lows each year between 2000 and 2003, reaching 67 feet below full pool in the spring of 2003. Lake levels started to recover in 2004, and finally reached full pool in June of 2005. Angler and netting success on Bighorn Lake dropped along with the falling water levels. Forage fish populations were the first to be impacted, but walleye and most other fish populations seemed to follow the forage populations down. River carpsuckers were the main fish captured in gill nets early in the drought, but by 2004 even they were not showing up in the nets. Two out of six nets fished overnight in the lower lake in the fall of 2004 were empty with only one 14-inch walleye captured in six nets. Two of seven gill nets fished around Barry's Landing the next week were also empty, resulting in an average catch rate of only 0.4 walleye per net. Anglers were having about the same success, and Bighorn Lake was being referred to as the "Dead Sea". Six nets fished in the lower reservoir in the spring of 2005 caught an average of one walleye per net, and six nets set around Barry's landing caught one 10-inch walleye!

It is amazing what a little bit of water can do for a fishery. Once Bighorn Lake filled in the spring of 2005, water levels remained good through the rest of the year. By late summer, anglers were starting to report seeing large schools of forage fish, and they were even starting to catch some walleye and nice perch. Six gill nets set in the lower lake in the fall of 2005 caught an average of 4.8 walleye per net (averaging 15.4 inches long) while six nets set around Barry's Landing caught an average of 6.7 walleye per net. These walleye averaged 16.9 inches long. Based on size, these walleye had to have been in Bighorn Lake during the low water levels, but neither the anglers nor the gill nets could find them.

Smallmouth bass entered Bighorn Lake

from Wyoming with high river flows during the mid-1990s. This fishery was just becoming established when the drought hit. The smallmouth seem to do better than most other fish species in the lake during the low water, and they are now well established throughout the lake. Habitat conditions in Bighorn Lake are more suited to smallmouth bass than walleye, and it is likely the smallmouth will become a dominant part of the sport fishery in the lake.

The normal stocking request for Bighorn Lake has been 4 million walleye fry and 200,000 walleye fingerlings per year. This stocking rate was maintained throughout the low water period. Predation from the abundant smallmouth bass population probably took a major toll on these stocked walleye, especially when other forage populations were low. Walleye stocking requests for Bighorn Lake have been increased to 500,000 fingerlings to help compensate for smallmouth predation. The water forecast looks good for the near-term, and hopefully angler success will improve.

Cooney Reservoir

Cooney Reservoir is a small impoundment (778 acres) on Red Lodge and Willow creeks approximately 50 miles southwest of Billings. Its proximity to major population areas such as Billings and other surrounding communities make it a very popular location for water-related recreation, including fishing. Cooney has historically supported a two-tiered fishery of rainbow trout and walleyes. The walleyes were first introduced in 1984 to control the sucker population that competed for forage with the rainbow trout. Following walleye introduction, it was determined that reservoir operations were allowing little or no natural recruitment of juvenile walleyes. Average sucker size in Cooney began to increase because of walleye predation on juvenile suckers. Average rainbow trout size also increased as competition from suckers was reduced. Initially following introduction, the walleye predation level on rainbow trout was not high, and through the 1990's the reservoir produced a good rainbow trout fishery and an excellent walleye fishery. A former state record walleye, weighing more than 16 pounds, was caught in Cooney.

In 2002, the number of rainbow trout gillnetted in the fall declined dramatically, and this trend has continued through 2005 when 200,000 rainbows were stocked and only two rainbows were captured. There has been a concurrent decline in walleye growth rates in the reservoir, particularly for fish larger than 20 inches. There has been very little change in the walleye population structure despite a reduction in stocking rate from 100,000 to 50,000 in 2002. There was a substantial decline in crayfish numbers in 2002, but they have since recovered. No noticeable reduction in sucker numbers has been evidenced in gillnetting data. Creel census conducted in 2005 suggests that neither anglers nor birds are accounting for substantial rainbow mortality. It is possible that walleyes are now successfully reproducing in Cooney Reservoir, and the walleye population has outgrown its aging, traditional

forage (suckers) and switched to rainbow trout as a primary diet item. Management efforts will focus on restoring a more balanced two-tiered fishery.

Deadmans Basin Reservoir

Deadmans Basin Reservoir was over half full by June of 2005. This was the first time Deadmans reached this level since early in 2000. Good river flows allowed filling of the lake into June, when it reached a peak level of almost 44,000 acre feet, or about 60% full. A wet June, followed by timely summer rains, reduced irrigation demands from the basin, allowing Deadmans to end the irrigation season at the best level since 1999. The concrete boat ramp remained usable throughout the summer.

Angler pressure was up at Deadmans, and both bank and boat anglers had good success. Standardized spring and fall gill netting verified that the fish were there for the anglers. Six gill nets fished overnight in the spring caught an average of almost 18 rainbow trout per net. These fish ranged from about 11 inches to over 17 inches, with quite a few fish in the 15-inch range. Normally few kokanee salmon are captured in spring gill nets, but 10 kokanee were netted this past spring, with the largest one over 14 inches. Gill nets set during fall normally catch more kokanee and fewer rainbows, but fall gill nets still caught 96 rainbows, for an average of 16 per net. A majority of these fish were the 7-to-10 inch rainbows that had been stocked in the spring, but there were still quite a few 13-to-16 inch fish in the sample. Six gill nets set during October caught 88 kokanee salmon, including both mature fish and fish from the spring plant. Three trap nets set along the shoreline caught another 420 mature kokanee. Most of these mature fish were males, indicating full spawning was still a little ways off (although some ripe females were captured). Most of the mature kokanee were 14 to 15 inches long, with some over 17 inches. Immature kokanee ranged from 6.5 to 11 inches, with most of these fish coming from the spring plant. Deadmans Basin received plants of about 210,000 rainbows and 109,000 kokanee in 2005, with similar numbers requested for the future.

Tiger muskies stocked into Deadmans Basin in 1998, 1999, and 2000 definitely suppressed the white sucker population in the lake during the recent low-water period. Historically, white suckers were the most numerous fish species captured in gill nets in Deadmans, averaging about 20 to 50 per net during both spring and fall. In 2005, spring nets caught an average of 3.5 white suckers per net, and fall nets caught 5 per net. Twenty-five of the 30 white suckers netted in the fall were in one sinking gill net. Most of the captured white suckers ranged from 6 to 10 inches in the spring, with a few 14-to-16 inch fish. Only one 14-inch white sucker was netted in the fall, the rest were smaller fish. The tiger muskies in Deadmans are now large enough to eat even the largest suckers in the lake. Tiger muskie plants have been requested for Deadmans the past two years to add another year class of smaller fish to the lake, but these fish have not been available through the hatchery system. They have been

requested for Deadmans Basin again next summer.

Quite a few anglers have been going to Deadmans specifically to fish for tiger muskies, and they have been having some luck. There were a number of reports of trout anglers fishing from the bank and hooking into a tiger muskie. Most of them did not have the necessary tackle to land these "toothy" fish, but they still got a real thrill. Four tiger muskies were captured in gill nets in the spring, while none were netted in the fall. One fish escaped from the net before it could be weighed or measured, but it was estimated to be about 39 inches long. The other three fish ranged from 38 inches to 42 inches long, and all weighed 19 to 19.5 pounds. A fifth tiger muskie captured in a trap net in the spring was approximately 40 inches long, and bottomed out a 25 pound scale. It was estimated this fish probably weighed 29 pounds.

Deadmans Basin should be a destination for anglers in Region 5, whether they are after some nice rainbows or kokanee, or they are trying to hook into a trophy tiger muskie or large brown trout that cruises the lake.

Lake Elmo

Lake Elmo continued to provide a popular fishery for stocked rainbows, with most anglers catching fish, if they were willing to put in some time. The lake received the normal requested plant of 9,600 catchable-sized rainbows in 2005, split between spring and fall plants. As an added bonus, Lake Elmo received about 270 large brood rainbows from the Ennis National Fish Hatchery in the fall. These fish were not very pretty due to serious fin erosion from a lifetime in a hatchery, but they provided an opportunity for someone to catch the largest trout of their life. Lake Elmo also received a plant of 6,200 small channel catfish in September 2005. No large catfish were reported caught from Lake Elmo this past year. Lake Elmo has produced catfish over 15 pounds in the past, but many of the serious catfish anglers on the lake don't talk about their catches.

Seasonal netting indicated there was a very strong year class of perch produced in Lake Elmo in 2005, and for the first time in several years, crappie spawned successfully. An environmental assessment was completed in early 2005 to stock limited numbers of tiger muskies into Lake Elmo and Lake Josephine to reduce sucker numbers in both lakes and eliminate some competition with game species. As these tiger muskies grow, they should provide an opportunity for anglers at either lake to hook into a real trophy-sized fish. Tiger muskies have not been stocked yet because the eggs received at the Miles City Fish Hatchery were in poor condition and did not survive. They have been requested for both lakes again in 2006.

Absaroka-Beartooth Lakes

Yellowstone cutthroat trout egg collection continued during 2005 at Goose Lake. This source of fish will likely replace the existing brood stock of fish kept at the Yellowstone River Trout Hatchery at Big Timber. The egg collection will likely continue through

2006. This stock of fish will eventually replace or supplement the current stock from McBride Lake in Yellowstone National Park. The fish will be stocked into previously planted lakes throughout the Absaroka-Beartooth (A-B) Mountains.

Golden trout eggs were collected this spring from Sylvan Lake in the A-B Mountains. Genetic testing of fish collected from Sylvan Lake in 2004 suggests the fish are pure California golden trout. Approximately 30,000 eggs were collected from 80 female golden trout. These eggs were transported to the hatchery in Big Timber, reared to about 1.5 inches long, and stocked into the previously stocked golden trout lakes in the A-B Mountains.

FWP's high-mountain-lake fisheries crew sampled an additional 32 lakes over the summer from the Clarks Fork, Boulder, Stillwater, and West Rosebud drainages. The primary objective of the lake surveys is to monitor the fisheries in both self-sustaining and stocked lakes to determine fish health and to decide whether stocking rates should be modified. Interns form half of the four-person crew that surveys the lakes from July to the end of August, providing a great opportunity for college students interested in the fisheries field to gain valuable experience.

Region 6

Bailey Reservoir

Bailey Reservoir historically has provided great angling opportunities for black crappie, northern pike, perch, and walleye. However, fish population levels have declined significantly since 2000 due to drought. Water levels have improved in 2005, however the reservoir is still not at full pool. Spring trap netting and late summer gill netting revealed very low abundances of sport fish. Angler catch and satisfaction has also been very poor.

To supplement the fishery, 10,000 four-inch rainbow trout were stocked in late fall 2005. In addition, 10,000 fingerling walleye were stocked in the spring of 2005 and 261 yellow perch were transplanted. Additional perch will be transplanted in the spring of 2006. There is an abundance of forage within Bailey and growth and survival of rainbow trout, walleye, and yellow perch should be good.

Beaver Creek Reservoir - Laura Leslie

Beaver Creek Reservoir is a favorite destination for summer and winter fishing and is currently ranked fifth in the region for fishing pressure. Beaver Creek Reservoir sustained good water levels in 2005 and yellow perch have taken full advantage of the available flooded spawning substrate. Good catches of perch and trout were made throughout most of the year. Anglers are catching the chunky walleye with regularity. Smallmouth bass are also providing a great deal of enjoyment. The northern pike population has been depressed for several years and has allowed for a resurgence of the trout fishery. In 2005 however, pike production was high, with multiple 20 to 34-inch northern pike captured during fall sampling. This reservoir usually draws huge crowds from around the state for the winter perch and trout fishing, however warm weather and poor ice conditions in 2004 and 2005 have prevented tournaments and other ice fishing activities.

Bear Paw Lake - Laura Leslie

The long-term sucker reduction program has increased the growth and condition of stocked rainbow and Yellowstone cutthroat trout and the lake is once again a final destination point for thousands of anglers. Bear Paw Lake currently ranks number four in fishing pressure in Region Six. Increased fishing pressure on this body of water instigated a reduction in the trout limit from five to three, which went into affect in March 2002. The reservoir is home to rainbow trout (9 to 11 inch), Yellowstone cutthroat trout, brook trout, walleye (18 to 22 inches: illegally introduced in 1985), smallmouth bass, and white suckers. The reservoir is currently full and many upgrades to the site were done in the last year with more planned. In 2005, an overnight camping fee of $7.00 was initiated to help defray the costs of future improvements.

Cow Creek Reservoir - Laura Leslie

This reservoir was one of the few unaffected by the drought and the reservoir is currently full. Though travel to this reservoir requires driving over approximately 50 miles of gravel roads, this reservoir is a wonderful destination to fish for some unique species. Those who have traveled the extra distance have reported catches of nine-pound channel catfish. They also report good catch rates of tiger muskies (0.08 fish/hour) and channel catfish (0.07 fish/hour) and exceptional catch rates for walleye (1.96 fish/hour). Anglers should note that the minimum size limit for muskies was increased to 40 inches several years ago.

Dry Fork Reservoir - Laura Leslie

This reservoir went “bone dry” in 2001 and the fishery is now well on it’s way to recovery. Rainbow trout were introduced in 2002 to supplement the fishery and these trout are currently around four pounds. Additionally northern pike, black crappie, and yellow perch were reintroduced in 2002 and are doing very well. With the reservoir near full, there have been numerous reports of 20 to 30-inch northern pike, 16 to 24-inch rainbow trout, and half-pound perch being caught. Walleye were reintroduced in 2004 and 2005 and many are already 18

inches in length. Water levels are stable and the fishery should continue to provide excellent fishing opportunities.

Faber Reservoir - Laura Leslie

The condition of rainbow trout continues to be good after the reservoir was rehabilitated in 2000 to remove white suckers. There continue to be reports of high catch rates with many 13 to 15-inch rainbow trout and the occasional four-pound rainbow trout. Water levels within the reservoir remain stable and 10,000 three-inch rainbow trout are stocked annually to sustain the fishery. Spring and summer fishing should be great.

Fresno Reservoir and Tailwater FAS - Laura Leslie

Spring and summer rains allowed reservoir elevations to increase and remain stable during spawning of various forage fish over the last two years. As a result, yellow perch have pulled off successful spawns in 2004 and 2005. Yellow perch production is attributed to the high abundance of flooded vegetation that provided excellent spawning substrate and cover.

Walleye spawning success remains low and 100,000 young-of-year walleye were stocked into the reservoir in 2003, 2004, and 2005. Fall netting indicates that walleye catch rates are increasing since their record lows from 2001-2002. Catch is still down from record highs in the 1990s, however, walleye are very healthy and exhibit high condition indices. Twenty to 25-inch walleye, weighing four to five pounds are not uncommon catches. The good walleye condition is attributed to the increased ratio of forage fish to predators.

Lake whitefish (8 to 23 inches) continue to have the highest catch rate during fall netting. Northern pike catch declined slightly from 2003, however it continues to be the highest seen since the mid-1990s.

Rainbow tout, walleye and pike fishing below the dam at the Tailwater Fishing Access Site have been very good, however, anglers should be aware that the Bureau of Reclamation has closed the favorite fishing area immediately below the dam due to security concerns. Anglers now must fish slightly further downstream.

Grasshopper Reservoir - Laura Leslie

Water levels are reduced due to drought, however they are remaining stable at these lower levels. Rainbow trout are thriving within the reservoir, and fisherman report good catches of 5-pound rainbow trout, at 14 to 18 inches. Since natural reproduction does not occur in this reservoir, annual plants of 2,500 Arlee and 3,000 Eagle Lake rainbow trout will continue.

H.C. Kuhr Reservoir - Laura Leslie

In 2003, the drought all but dewatered this fine trout fishery and the opportunity was seized to kill off a remnant perch and sucker population, which would certainly cause problems later. The reservoir was restocked in 2003 and closed to fishing. The fishery reopened in 2004, and there were reports of three

to four pound rainbow trout being caught. The reservoir is currently near full and 3,000 three to four inch rainbow trout will be stocked annually. H.C. Kuhr also became part of the Private Lands Fishing Access Program in 2005.

Little Warm Reservoir - Laura Leslie

The reservoir regained some volume in 2004 and 2005, however levels are still below full pool. Good catches of tiger muskies were reported this year. This reservoir receives annual plants of 10,000 walleye and alternate year plants of 2,500 tiger musky. Anglers should note that the minimum size limit for muskies has increase to 40 inches. To improve fishing access, FWP, with the help of landowner Steve Knudsen, installed a much needed boat ramp from a World War II Air Force landing mat in 2003 and a cattle guard was installed at the entrance in 2004.

Missouri River Paddlefish above Fort Peck - Laura Leslie

A valuable recreational snag fishery occurs each year for paddlefish above Fort Peck Reservoir in areas down river of the Fred Robinson Bridge. In recent years, harvest of Fort Peck paddlefish has varied considerably with annual river discharges, but has typically ranged between 300 and 1,000 fish. Historically, paddlefish anglers have caught numerous paddlefish over 100 pounds, however these fish are aging, and being removed form the population. Younger paddlefish are not growing as large due to reduced productivity in Fort Peck Reservoir
In 2006, increased flows have been planned to study the effects of flows on many of the native fishes in the Missouri River. As a result it is anticipated that there will be an increase in the number of paddlefish that migrate up the Missouri River to spawn.

FWP will be continuing to tag paddlefish and encourages anglers to return tags with information on location and size at harvest to the Havre Area Resource Office. This information allows biologists to determine survival, harvest, and growth rates of paddlefish in the Missouri River. In 2006, FWP and the University of Idaho will also be installing radio transmitters in paddlefish to study how spawning locations and spawning success vary with differences in annual flows. This will enable FWP to evaluate habitat use by adult migratory fish under different hydrological and ecological conditions, and to gauge the effects of annual environmental variability on paddlefish migratory behavior and eventual year class strength. FWP asks snaggers to release any paddlefish implanted with transmitters. If mortality occurs, we request that transmitters be returned to the Havre Areas Resource Office so that they can be re-implanted into another paddlefish.

Nelson Reservoir

Though also affected by the long drought, Nelson Reservoir has fared better than Fresno in maintaining its fishery. The percentage of dead storage is significantly higher than that at Fresno and off-stream storage reduces turbidity levels. Good catches have been reported throughout the year on black crappie (5 to 9 inches), lake whitefish (15 to 23 inches), northern

pike (24 to 31 inches), and walleye (9 to 27 inches). Walleye production remains low and as a result, 100,000 young-of-year walleye were stocked into the reservoir. Yellow perch and other forage fish production substantially increased in 2005 as a result of high amounts of flooded vegetation, which provided spawning habitat. Walleye growth and condition are expected to improve in response to the increase in available forage.

Reser Reservoir

The low water and great productivity of this reservoir caused a winterkill in 2002-2003. Rainbow trout and bluegill were stocked in 2003 and two aerator windmills were installed in an attempt to increase dissolved oxygen, which seems to be a limiting factor. In 2004, two thousand 2-inch bluegill were stocked, and three thousand 3-inch rainbow trout were stocked. Fall gillnetting surveys in 2005 show excellent growth and survival of rainbow trout. Water levels are currently high, and the fishing should be good.

Ross Reservoir - Laura Leslie

This beautiful mountain cutthroat fishery was rehabilitated in 2000 to rid it of suckers. It was closed in 2001 to allow fish to grow to acceptable size. Anglers were not disappointed when the pond was opened in May of 2002. Good catches of 13 to15-inch cutthroat were made. Water levels were good this year and 2,000 six to eight inch Yellowstone cutthroat trout were stocked. However, this pond is again plagued with a white sucker problem, and is scheduled for rotenone treatment in 2006.

Other Regional Reservoirs

Water levels in most reservoirs and streams in the western part of the region are full or near full going into the winter months. Fishing is projected to be good throughout the winter and into the spring. Please feel free to contact Havre Area Resource Office on the status of reservoirs before venturing long distances to fish.

Fort Peck Reservoir – Mike Ruggles

This year the drought continued, however it wasn't as severe as previous years, with the pool raising a little over 2.5 feet in 2005. The reservoir's peak elevation was on July 13th, at 2203.7 feet msl. Insufficient snow pack in the mountains and especially in the plains during this winter does not bode well for a significant change in water elevations in 2006.

Fortunately, there are still reservoir areas over 160 feet deep, so cold-water habitat is being conserved, but shoreline conditions for good fish recruitment has been limited for many years. Shoreline vegetation was not substantially flooded in 2005, but it was the first improvement since the drought began. Ultimately, the low water levels will be a plus for fish production when the miles of exposed shoreline vegetation are flooded by successive years of rising water. This will result in many years of excellent fish habitat and base nutrients for revitalizing the reservoir.

Pike and perch young-of-year increased in the Dry Arm in 2005, the first documentation of improvement in their recruitment since the onset of the

drought. Recruitment continues to be low or non-existent in the rest of the reservoir for perch and pike. Walleye recruitment has been declining as well, but due to stocking efforts, recruitment has not been as low as species relying on natural reproduction.

The walleye spawn continues to move down reservoir with receding water levels. It has been challenging to get equipment into the water in the spring as the ice breaks up, as the spawn hasn't been near a boat ramp in several years. Despite the challenges, the egg-take has been successful; let us hope the good luck and hard work continues to pay off. This year 92 million eggs were taken. This operation relies on a vigorous volunteer program to be successful. If you are interested in helping with the walleye egg-take in April, call 406-526-3471 to join the other 80 to 100 annual volunteers. It's a great opportunity to learn more about walleye fishery, see many large walleye, and be a part of the state-wide egg-take that benefits many Montana walleye fisheries.

As a result of the spawn, other Montana walleye waters were stocked with fry and fingerlings, with Fort Peck receiving the lion's share. Over 20 million fry and 1.4 million fingerlings were stocked throughout Fort Peck in 2005. It was planned to stock 2 million or more fingerlings, but supply of fingerlings was limited in 2005. The Fort Peck Hatchery should help us reach a stocking goal of 3 million in 2006.

Annual gill net surveys conducted in 2005 indicate a comparatively strong population of larger walleye exists in Fort Peck, with a steady but diminished number of small walleye since the drought set in. Sampling abundant small walleye in the nets is very desirable, as these are necessary to grow into larger walleyes for anglers. This hasn't been the case for the past few years. Pike have fared far worse, with only 2% of the pike caught being less than 24 inches. Like walleye, there are many larger pike remaining, waiting for another spring when they can spawn over some good clover or tumbleweed stalks.

Annual seining surveys indicated spottail and emerald shiners have maintained fair numbers in 2005. Young-of-year yellow perch and crappie numbers have not recovered and remain very low. Those four species make up the bulk of the shoreline forage for smaller predatory fish like walleye, bass, and pike. Young-of-year smallmouth bass have fared well throughout the drought, as water levels are typically steady during their summer spawn.

Cisco young-of-year had a better than average spawn in 2004 and 2005 with 31 and 27 caught per net, respectively. This compares to the poor years of three and six per net in 2003 and 2002, and to the near record year of 2000, with 251 per net.

The chinook salmon program continues to be plagued by poor returns despite doubling the stocking numbers and tripling the total weight of stocks. Possible explanations could be poor survival of stocks due to poor forage availability and small salmon being

vulnerable to larger predators. Another explanation may be the salmon are attempting to home into Giant Springs as this is where they are reared. It is suspected that predation is playing a much larger role than poor homing, but the combination of the two have created a couple of disappointing years for the salmon program. The new Fort Peck Hatchery will have space to rear spring and fall stock salmon in 2006. Currently over 200,000 fry are waiting to be transferred to the new hatchery. Half of the stock in 2006 will be stocked in the spring, and half will be stocked in the fall at a larger size. The eggs for these fish came from cooperative work with North Dakota and South Dakota.

Lake trout were spawned last year with 27,900 being stocked from Miles City in the spring of 2004. The drought has left about 85% of the known lake trout habitat dry. Trends in lake trout indicate poor reproduction and recruitment when lake levels fall below 2225 msl. At this time lake trout rearing space is non-existent. If you catch a lake trout with a tag, or any other tagged fish in Fort Peck, please record the location, size (length and weight if possible), date caught, tag number and color. We will use any tag information anglers provide, but the more information received the better. After recording all the information possible you may call 406-526-3471 or send the information to us at Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks, Box 165, Fort Peck, Montana 59223, or contact any regional office and they can contact us.

Prairie Stream Survey

Prairie streams were sampled in 2005 in Region 6 during the third year of a statewide sampling program. As with the previous two years, a lot of good information was collected. Seventy-six streams were sampled, of which 43 streams had water with fish, 8 were fishless, and 25 streams were dry. During this year's survey, 7,024 fish were sampled throughout the region. The collected fish represented 24 different species, with 19 native and 5 non-native species.

Fathead minnows were the most abundant species sampled (4,919). Dodson canal produced the most fish at one site, with 1,255 fish, mostly fathead minnows. Nelson Creek, on Fort Peck Reservoir, continued to have the most diversity in fish species, with 9 different species sampled. These fish were all common to those found in regional prairie streams.

In addition to fish sampling, fisheries employee encounters with amphibians and reptiles were also recorded. This information helps fill in distribution gaps of previous sightings within the region. The Northern Leopard Frog was the most common amphibian found. A species of special concern, the Greater Short-Horned Lizard, was found on the Hay Creek drainage, which is located south of the Big Dry Arm of Fort Peck Reservoir.

The stream crew also got an opportunity to sample Box Elder Reservoir, just north of Plentywood. Two experimental gillnets were set overnight, catching a variety of fish species, including some really nice walleyes. The walleye averaged about 1.2 pounds with the biggest at 6.5 pounds. The walleye

body condition was reaching into the fat category, so forage abundance is more than adequate in this reservoir. Each net averaged about 15 walleye per net, with 1.5 yellow perch per net. The perch were nice size averaging almost twelve inches in length.

Region 7 – Miles City

Yellowstone River Paddlefish

Better flows than have been seen in recent years set the stage for a banner paddlefish season on the lower Yellowstone River this past summer. An early spring-melt combined with timely rain events put the hydrograph into a climb which triggered the migratory tendencies in the paddlefish found in North Dakota's Sakakawea reservoir.

The opening day of the 2005 paddlefish season brought few people but many fish. The fish remained at the Intake site and the people responded quickly. The first week of the season saw anglers arriving at Intake in droves. Lots of anglers combined with lots of paddlefish equated to large harvests reaching over 200 fish on the first Saturday of the season. The 1,000 fish target was reached within a few days and the season was closed nine days after it opened.

Paddlefish angling continued to be highly successful for those who were interested in pursuing this ancient fish of the Yellowstone but now catch and release rules were in effect. Creel results from the 2005 season indicated that anglers were very satisfied with the opportunity to catch and release many of these fish once the harvest season was closed.

Large numbers of paddlefish remained at the Intake site until the catch and release portion of the season ended on June 30, 2005. Of interest to anglers and FWP biologists were the large numbers of young male paddlefish found in the harvest and in the caught and released fish. Population work with this fish in years past indicated that there was a potentially strong year-class of fish recruiting to the population as indicated by high numbers of young of the year fish sampled in 1995. Since male paddlefish take 8-10 years to mature and enter the spawning run, the slug of young males found at Intake this past summer was a pleasant reassurance that the paddlefish population was in good condition.

Paddlefish spawning success is attributed to adequate nursery habitats found in the upper end of Lake Sakakawea. During high reservoir years such as 1995, abundant shallow water flats are available to young paddlefish that utilize the turbid waters for cover and feed on zooplankton produced in these types of waters. As the Missouri River Reservoir elevations have declined

over the past few years, so has the spawning success and recruitment of Yellowstone River paddlefish. This raises the questions as to the continued health of the paddlefish population. The pulse of young males may be absent in years to come, a reflection of habitat conditions from 10 years earlier.

Other Yellowstone River Fishing Opportunities

The lower Yellowstone River continues to provide exceptional angling for a variety of fish species. From large, hard fighting catfish to the always eager goldeye, this isolated piece of water continues to surprise and thrill anglers.

Catfish can be found throughout the lower Yellowstone system and smallmouth bass are becoming abundant, especially at tributary mouths. Both fish provide a unique angling experience and make for great table fare.

Just can't put away the fly rod and take up the bait rod again? Why not set the kids up with a glob of night-crawler and get them on a few cats while you slide off to the side riffles and hook a few goldeye on dry flies. The best place in the state to teach a youngster to fly fish is the lower Yellowstone River. Fish a shallow riffle where the current is slow. Float a large, easy to see dry fly and the goldeye will keep you busy.

Sauger fishing on the Yellowstone River continues to provide a good angling opportunity with good numbers of this species found below the Intake Diversion. Fewer sauger are found upstream in the Glendive to Forsyth reach but populations remain constant.

Tongue River Reservoir

Fishing for crappie was reportedly slow this year. The crappie population remains strong but the dominant 8-10 inch age class found in recent years is reaching senescence and is being replaced with a strong year-class of 6-7 inch fish. This cohort will soon attain the quality size sought by anglers. Cool spring weather kept the usual spring bite at a low this past summer. Anglers with light equipment and some patience were able to produce limits of this abundant and tasty fish.

Of significance are the large numbers of bullhead catfish found in this water. During the dam repair and subsequent drawdown of 1997-1999, bullhead catfish were very successful in reproducing and recruiting to the fishery. These fish are now in the 1-2 pound range and make for a great evening along the shore with a simple hook and worm rig. Bullhead catfish produce a great fillet and are exceptional eating.

Reservoir elevations and the duration of high water in the system have a large impact on the spawning and recruitment success of many species in the Tongue River Reservoir. In recent years these conditions have been very favorable for northern pike. The fishery contains at least two strong year classes of the fish, some of which are reaching lengths of 30 inches. These fish put up a good fight and are quite a surprise to anglers focused on catching crappie.

Other fish in the reservoir that are doing

well include smallmouth bass and channel catfish. Walleye numbers have been in decline until this past summer when survey results indicated an increase in this sought-after fish. Continued stocking of fingerling and fry walleye combined with favorable reservoir elevations will hopefully keep this fish on the increase.

Prairie Ponds

Prairie ponds are staging a comeback on the eastern plains of Montana. These simple systems need two ingredients to be successful, fish and water. The spring of 2005 brought timely precipitation events and allowed for the re-charge of many of these small pond systems. Once drained by drought, these systems sometimes take a few years to re-charge ground moisture before the pond will remain full.

Ponds that retained water through the summer of 2005 were stocked with fish and have been extremely productive. Phenomenal growth can be experienced by fish stocked into these highly productive systems.

Continued precipitation events are needed to retain prairie pond fisheries. Those ponds that receive spring rains and maintain full pools should produce good fishing the next season.

The regional fisheries staff monitors approximately 35 of these prairie pond systems each year. Results of these efforts can be found in our annual pond booklet. This booklet is free to the public and can be obtained by contacting the Region 7 office (406) 234-0900. The booklet provides results of the most recent surveys and maps to locate the ponds.

Comprehensive Management

Montana is home to more than 600 fish and wildlife species. Montana's successful tradition of fish and wildlife management has largely come from hunting and fishing license dollars and taxes on hunting and fishing equipment. This unique federal and state funding arrangement has afforded Montana great opportunities to work on sport fish and game species. From elk to trout and upland game birds, the list of accomplishments created by this unique partnership is extensive. However, funding for other nongame or endangered fish and wildlife species has been lacking. Even with the great success of the past 100 years, Montana struggles to conserve its diverse array of more than 600 fish and wildlife species.

Beginning in 2002, Montana has received funding from the U.S. Congress to address species with unmet conservation needs through a program known as State Wildlife Grants. These funds support conservation projects for species of greatest conservation need, meaning those for which biological information is lacking, whose populations are in decline, or that are at risk for decline. Through this program, Montana has been able to begin addressing a number of fisheries conservation needs that otherwise would have gone unmet. These include surveys for prairie fish, restoration of cutthroat trout and grayling, sauger and burbot studies, and investigations into the movements and habitat use of native fish of the Yellowstone River

between Billings the confluence with the Missouri. Some of the accomplishments of that work are reported below.
To ensure that funds are used efficiently and effectively, Congress also charged each state to develop a comprehensive assessment of its fish, wildlife, and their associated habitats by October 2005, before additional funds are allocated.

Montana, like other states, committed to meeting this requirement and after two years of development, has submitted its Comprehensive Fish and Wildlife Conservation Strategy to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for approval, which occurred in April 2006.

Montana's strategy is a technical assessment of the state's fish and wildlife, and is a representation of conservation priorities identified by government agencies, non-government organizations, universities and others in the state. It identifies 17 Tier 1 fish species, 12 Tier 1 Aquatic Conservation Focus Areas, and different aquatic community types in greatest need of conservation. The comprehensive strategy and descriptions of these species and habitats can be found on Montana FWP's website at: http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/cfwcs/strategy.html

This document is meant to enable FWP and others to more efficiently pursue future conservation efforts, including those aimed at keeping species from declining or being listed under the federal Endangered Species Act. This assessment will lay the groundwork for conserving species in greatest need in a way that will also benefit traditionally hunted and fished species, and vice versa. FWP will not shift its focus off of traditionally hunted and fished animals, nor will this effort lead to a reduction in FWP's sport fish and game management activities funded by the sale of hunting and fishing licenses. Instead FWP will be able to broaden its focus to include all animals without tapping into traditional funding sources.

Examples of projects completed by FWP with State Wildlife Grants funding, consistent with the Comprehensive Strategy include:

- Prairie Riparian and Fish Surveys
- Sauger Telemetry
- Cutthroat Trout Restoration in North-Central Montana
- Fluvial Arctic Grayling Restoration
- Rangewide Burbot Status Assessment and Monitoring
- Sauger Genetics
- Yellowstone River Native Species Study

Prairie Riparian and Fish Surveys

An analysis of Montana Fish, Wildlife and Park's (FWP) Montana River Information System (MRIS) database revealed that more than 4,200 streams comprising more than 18,000 stream miles (18% of the mapped stream miles in Montana) were unsurveyed. The overwhelming majority of these waters are small, warm water prairie streams located in the eastern half of Montana. With little potential for sport fish, there is a strong likelihood that many contain intact, diverse assemblages of native fish, reptiles and amphibian species, at least during parts of the year. There is a need to survey these prairie streams to gain a

greater understanding of the fisheries fauna that occur there. This baseline data will enable resource managers to better understand and manage prairie species and their habitats. Funding has been used over the past three years to survey hundreds of never-before-surveyed prairie streams and riparian habitat in Montana's prairie region. The third year of surveys was completed in 2005, when 515 sites were visited. Forty-three percent of the sites sampled were on private property. The remaining were located on Bureau of Land Management (BLM), State, United States Fish and Wildlife Service, or National Forest Service lands. Of the 515 sites, 285 were dry and 230 had water. In 170 of the wet sites fish were sampled and in the remaining 60 streams no fish were found.

During 2005 surveys, 62,148 individual fish representing 41 different species were documented. Twenty-five of the species are native to Montana and the remaining 16 are introduced. The common carp was the most commonly encountered introduced fish (35 sites) followed by the black bullhead and green sunfish, found in 23 and 21 sites respectively. The fathead minnow was the most highly distributed fish, being sampled in 129 sites or 76% of locations. The mean number of fish species per site was 4.8 with the range numbering between 1 and 17 species per site. The most abundant species sampled was the fathead minnow, accounting for 36.3% of all fish sampled. The brook stickleback and plains minnow were the next most abundant species, making up respectively 7.26% and 7.13% of all individuals sampled. The largest number of fish species documented at one site totaled 17. Only one sample site, Region 4's Teton River site, recorded seventeen species. The greatest number of individual fish recorded at a single site was 5,722 at Region 4's Horsetheif Coulee. Arrow Creek followed with 3,840 individual fish, consisting of 14 species. Thirty-five of the streams contained 500 or more fish. Forty-seven percent of the sites had 5 or more species of fish, while the remaining 53% contained 4 or fewer species. Thirty-three sites contained only one species of fish. At 42% (14) of those sites it was a fathead minnow and at 12% of the sites the single species was a brook stickleback.

Sauger Telemetry

A radio telemetry project to monitor sauger habitat use, migratory movements, seasonal migration patterns, and survival was recently completed in the lower Yellowstone River. Seasonal movement, aggregation, and habitat use were investigated by telemeterizing and tracking 30 fish in 2001, 31 fish in 2002, and 30 fish in 2003.

Use of tributaries by sauger for spawning was assessed using the fish telemeterized in 2003. Exploitation rates were assessed by tagging 826 sauger with reward tags. Tag-shedding rate was estimated by double-tagging and nonreporting rate was estimated using postcards as tag surrogates.

Sauger aggregated near spawning areas in spring and subsequently dispersed 5 to 350 km to upstream home river locations where they remained for the rest of the year. During the spawning period, terrace and bluff pools, which are unique geomorphic units associated with bedrock and boulder substrate, were positively selected while all other habitat units were avoided. Tributary use during the spawning period was documented for only one fish (3.3%). Following movement to home river locations, sauger used most habitat units in proportion to their availability but selected reaches of specific geologic types. Exploitation occurred primarily in early spring and late autumn. Annual exploitation rates were low (15.9-20.1%) and were lower in spring when sauger were aggregated (2.9%) than in autumn when they were dispersed (24.2%). Annual tag-shedding rate of both tags was low (2.1%), nonreporting rate was high (61.5%), and annual survival was high (61.3%). Entrainment in irrigation diversions accounted for as much as one third of non-fishing mortality.

Cutthroat Trout Restoration in North-Central Montana

Westslope cutthroat trout in the upper Missouri River basin have declined dramatically in the 200 years since they were first described by Lewis and Clark. Funds have been used in cooperation with the U.S. Forest Service to establish a biologist position to work exclusively on restoration of westslope cutthroat trout in the upper Missouri River basin.

Fluvial Arctic Grayling Restoration

In the lower 48 states, the river dwelling (fluvial) form of Arctic grayling was reduced to only one population – in the Big Hole River. Restoration efforts are underway in Montana to protect and enhance that population, as well as establish at least four additional populations. Funding is being used to help support restoration, reintroduction, and monitoring of this unique, native fish.

MONTANA'S FISH RECORDS (as of February 22, 2006)

SPECIES	WEIGHT	SITE	ANGLER	DATE
Arctic Grayling	3.63 lbs.	Washtub Lake	Glenn Owens	6/28/03
Bigmouth Buffalo	57.75 lbs.	Nelson Reservoir	Craig D. Grassel	6/4/94
Black Bullhead	2.33 lbs.	Lower Flathead River	Darwin Zemple, Jr.	4/4/94
Black Crappie	3.13 lbs.	Tongue River Reservoir	Al Elser	1973
Bluegill	2.64 lbs.	Peterson's Stock Dam	Brent Fladmo	6/3/83
Blue Sucker	11.46 lbs.	Yellowstone River Miles City	Doug Askin	10/7/89
Brook Trout	9.06 lbs.	Lower Two Medicine Lake	John R. Cook	1940
Brown Trout	29 lbs.	Wade Lake	E.H. "Peck" Bacon	1966
Bull Trout	25.63 lbs.		James Hyer	1916
Burbot	17.08 lbs.	Missouri River Wolf Point	Jeff Eugene Iwen	4/18/89
Channel Catfish	27.17 llbs.	Castle Rock Lake	Ed Ellertson	4/26/98
Chinook Salmon	31.13 lbs.	Fort Peck Reservoir Face of Dam	Carl L. Niles	10/2/91
Cisco	1.75 lbs.	Below Ft Peck Powerhouse	Curt Zimmerman	5/19/01
Coho Salmon	4.88 lbs.	Fort Peck Reservoir Face of Dam	Irven F. Stohl	5/29/73
Common Carp	40.2 lbs.	Nelson Reservoir	Jared S. Albus	5/24/98
Cutthroat Trout	16 lbs,	Red Eagle Lake	Wm. D. Sands	1955
Flathead Chub	0.59 lbs.	Thornton Pond	Douglas Jordan	4/29/01
Freshwater Drum	21.59 lbs	Fort Peck – Ghost Coulee	Matt Washut	5/3/03
Golden Trout	5.43 lbs.	Cave Lake	Mike Malixi	7/16/00
Goldeye	3.18 lbs.	Nelson Reservoir	Don Nevrivy	7/4/00
Green Sunfish	0.56 lbs.	Castle Rock Reservoir	Roger Fliger	6/19/91
Kokanee Salmon	7.85 lbs	Hauser Lake	John Bomar	9/23/03
Lake Trout	42.69 lbs.	Flathead Lake	Ruth Barber	6/23/04
Lake Whitefish	10.08 lbs.	Lower St. Mary Lake	Theo Hamby	6/24/95
Largemouth Bass	8.29 lbs.	Many Lakes	Adam Nelson	6/11/99
Largescale Sucker	5.06 lbs.	Kootenai River	Loren Kujawa	5/12/96
Longnose Sucker	3.27 lbs.	Marias River Loma	Ray Quigley	5/8/88
Mottled Sculpin	0.05 lbs.	Belt Creek (North of Neihart MT)	Brad Sullivan	7/30/01
Mountain Sucker	1.60 oz.	Beaver Creek Reservoir	Robert Garwood	4/23/01
Mountain Whitefish	5.09 lbs.	Kootenai River Below dam	Mervin Fenimore	9/15/87
Northern Pikeminnow	7.88 lbs.	Noxon Rapids Reservoir	Darrel Torgrimson	5/28/91
Paddlefish	142.5 lbs.	Missouri River Near Kipp Park	Larry Branstetter	5/20/73
Northern Pike	37.5 lbs.	Tongue River Reservoir	Lance Moyer	1972
Pallid Sturgeon	60 lbs.	Yellowstone River Near Sidney	Gene Sattler	5/13/79
Peamouth	1.05 lbs.	Flathead Lake	Paul Teichman	9/16/02
Pygmy Whitefish (Tie record)	0.23 lbs.	Little Bitterroot Lake	K. Hadley/T Fraley	2/27/05
Pumpkinseed	0.95 lbs.	Milnor Lake	Tim Colver	7/9/85
Rainbow Trout	33.1 lbs.	Kootenai River David Thompson Brdg	Jack G. Housel, Jr.	8/11/97
Rainbow-Cutthroat Hybrid Trout	30.25 lbs.	Ashely Lake	Pat Kelley	5/16/82
Redside Shiner	0.10 lbs.	Lost Lake	Josh Ahles	8/21/01
River Carpsucker	6.42 lbs	Intake – Irrigation Canal	Bill Odenbach	5/22/00
Rock Bass	0.57 lbs.	Tongue River Reservoir	Don Holzheimer	6/1/89
Sauger	8.805 lbs.	Fort Peck Reservoir	Gene Moore	12/12/94
Saugeye	15.66 lbs.	Fort Peck Reservoir Squaw Creek	Myron Kibler	1/11/95
Shortnose Gar	7.02 lbs.	Fort Peck Dredge Cuts	Ron Gulbertson	12/22/03
Shorthead Redhorse	4.68 lbs.	Marias River Near Loma	Ray Quigley	4/14/85
Shovelnose Sturgeon	13.72 lbs.	Missouri River Near Virgelle	Sidney Storm	4/19/86
Smallmouth Bass	6.66 lbs.	Fort Peck Reservoir	Mike Otten	7/30/02
Smallmouth Buffalo	32.63 lbs.	Nelson Reservoir	Richard Liesener	6/4/94
Stonecat	0.54 lbs.	Milk River	Dale Bjerga	6/16/96
Tiger Muskellunge	27 lbs.	Lebo Lake	Dan Dupea	10/2/94
Tiger Trout	4.04 lbs.	Bear Lake	Joe Sobczak	2/9/97
Utah Chub	1.81 lbs.	Canyon Ferry Reservoir	Eugene Bastian	2/5/92
Walleye	16.63 lbs.	Fort Peck Reservoir	Danny Spence	1/21/00
White Bass	2.25 lbs.	Missouri River South of Bainville	Vernon Pacovsky	9/23/98
White Crappie	3.68 lbs.	Tongue River	Gene Bassett	5/10/96
White Sturgeon	96 lbs.	Kootenai River	Herb Stout	1968
White Sucker	5.33 lbs.	Nelson Reservoir	Fred Perry	2/10/83
Yellow Perch**	2.39 lbs.	Lower Stillwater Lake	Josh Emmert	2/19/06
Yellow Bullhead	0.93 lbs.	Tongue River Reservoir	Carl Radonski	5/24/98

Fish Wildlife & Parks
Fisheries Division
PO Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620-0701

5207