

**MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE AND PARKS
FISHERIES DIVISION**

JOB PROGRESS REPORT

State:	<u>MONTANA</u>	Element 1:	<u>FISHERIES MANAGEMENT</u>
Project No:	<u>F-78-R-2</u>	Job No:	<u>3561</u>
Project Title:	<u>STATEWIDE FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PROGRAM</u>	Job Title:	<u>SOUTH CENTRAL MONTANA WARMWATER FISHERIES INVESTIGATIONS</u>

Project Period: July 1, 1995 - June 30, 1996

OBJECTIVES AND DEGREE OF ATTAINMENT

Activity 1 - Survey and Inventory

Objective: To survey and monitor the characteristics and trends of fish populations, angler harvest and preferences, and to assess habitat conditions in selected waters.

We sampled Bighorn Lake and Cooney Reservoir during spring and fall, and Lebo Lake during the fall. We also tracked walleye spawning in three tributaries feeding Cooney Reservoir, and marked 500 walleyes. In addition, we initiated a voluntary creel card survey in cooperation with the Parks Division. We sampled 12 other waters, 3 of which are private warmwater ponds where some public access is allowed. We conducted a mark-recapture estimate on channel catfish in the lower Yellowstone River below Billings. We did some test netting with Region 7 fisheries personnel near Cartersville Dam on the lower Yellowstone as part of a study with the Bureau of Reclamation (USBR).

We completed the final report for the cooperative creel survey of Bighorn Lake conducted with Wyoming Game and Fish in 1992.

Activity 2 - Fish Population Management

Objective: To implement fish stocking programs and/or fish eradication actions to maintain fish populations at levels consistent with habitat conditions and other limiting factors.

Bighorn Lake was stocked with 4,000,000 walleye fry and almost 500,000 fingerlings in 1996. Cooney Reservoir received 100,000 fingerlings. We stocked 11 other lakes/ponds, including two new waters, with largemouth bass. Four lakes scheduled for catfish plants were not stocked due to unavailability of fish.

Activity 3 - Technical Guidance

Objective: To review projects by government agencies and private parties which have the potential to affect fisheries resources; provide technical advice or decisions to mitigate effects on these resources; and provide landowners and other private parties with technical advice and information to sustain and enhance fisheries resources.

We responded to many phone calls and written requests from the public regarding warmwater fishing and fisheries issues in southcentral Montana, particularly about building, stocking, and managing private ponds. We also prepared many EA's for pond permits.

We attended three conservation district meetings, addressed 11 310 applications and 4 SPA's. We reviewed flow allocations as part of the Musselshell Basin Commission and reviewed two applications for walleye tournaments for Bighorn Lake.

We attended the annual Bighorn Basin Interagency Coordination Meeting in Cody, Wyoming during March to discuss and coordinate fisheries management for Bighorn Lake with Wyoming Game and Fish.

We coordinated efforts with Region 7, USBR, and the USFWS Cooperative Fisheries Unit at MSU to develop a study to evaluate and solve fish passage problems over diversion dams on the lower Yellowstone River.

We continued to coordinate with the Big Horn County Parks Board in aerating Arapooish Pond. We worked with local sports groups and private landowners to obtain materials and install bank stabilization in Broadview Pond.

Activity 4 - Aquatic Education

Objective: To enhance the public's understanding, awareness and support of the state's fishery and aquatic resources and to assist young people to develop angling skills and to appreciate the aquatic environment.

We presented the latest fisheries information and/or proposed fishing regulation changes to local sports clubs. During spring and fall, we had three elementary school classes and a home school group observe and assist with fish sampling at Lake Elmo and two classes at Lake Josephine. We also participated in two kids' fishing days at Lake Josephine and one south of Hardin.

We provided information to the media and Fishing Log Newsletter, and developed a warmwater pond list for Region 5.

SUMMARY

We progressed in all objectives.

FINAL BUDGET STATUS

<u>Amount Budgeted</u>	<u>Amount Spent</u>	<u>Balance of Funds</u>
\$39,815.00	\$42,967.53	\$-3,152.53

Regional Supervisor

R. Ellis 9/6/96