

MONTANA FISH AND GAME DEPARTMENT

Helena, Montana  
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EFFECTS OF PROPOSED HIGHWAY CONSTRUCTION ON THE BEAVERHEAD RIVER  
IN THE DILLON-ARMSTEAD AREA

The proposed route of the interstate highway in the Dillon-Armstead area involves numerous channel changes and other factors that adversely affect the fishery of the Beaverhead River. Several segments of this highway have been completed or are presently under construction.

The Fish and Game Department recently received copies of plans and cross-sections for a segment of this highway entitled I 15-1(5)51, Pipe Organ-North. The letter of transmittal indicates that these plans are for final plan-in-hand inspection.

This project involves portions of the Beaverhead River between Pipe Organ Lodge and the U.S.G.S. gauging station known as Barratts Gauge. The project extends from station 828 on the south to 1325 on the north. The channel relocations (Table 1) indicated on the plans are between stations 850 and 1030. In these six changes, approximately 14,240 feet of natural streambed will be replaced by approximately 9140 feet of artificial channel. In other words, not only will there be about 1 3/4 miles of man-made channel, but the stream will be shortened by nearly one mile as well.

Table 1. Channel changes proposed in Project I 15-1(5)51.

		<u>Original channel</u>	<u>Replacement</u>
Sta.*	860	2200 ft.	470 ft.
Sta.	870	4800 ft.	4400 ft.
Sta.	920	3100 ft.	1700 ft.
Sta.	970	2340 ft.	1300 ft.
Sta.	990	600 ft.	470 ft.
Sta.	1005	<u>1200 ft.</u>	<u>800 ft.</u>
		14,240 ft.	9,140 ft.

\* Indicates approximate location of change.

The effects of stream realignment on fish populations were studied on 13 Montana streams in 1961 and 1962. Reductions in numbers of catchable-sized game fish in altered sections ranged from 45% to 100% with an average reduction of about 75%.

Trout fishing in the Beaverhead River ranks high not only in Montana but nationally as well. In a recent survey by a national outdoor magazine it was listed among the 100 best trout streams in the nation. This section of the Beaverhead supports a good population of brown trout, rainbow trout and mountain whitefish. Recent sampling with a shocker took browns up to 20 inches in length and averaging about 14 inches. The whitefish in this sample averaged about 13.5 inches in length. The statewide creel census shows catch rates of 1.0 to 1.9 game fish per hour during the regular fishing seasons of 1955 through 1960. This catch rate is higher than that recorded for most streams in this area.

The greatest importance of the Beaverhead River fishery lies in the angling pressure that can be absorbed in future years. The size structure of the fish population indicates that a much greater harvest can be taken without jeopardizing the breeding population. A combination of human population increase, more leisure time and better transportation facilities will result in greatly increased fishing pressures on Montana trout streams.

High quality trout habitat, which is especially important for large wild trout, must be preserved if the state and nation's recreation needs are to be met.

Because of the importance of the Beaverhead River to future recreational fishing, the Montana Fish and Game Commission requests every consideration be given to following an alternate route that will avoid damage to that portion of the Beaverhead River described above.