



Al Lucke

Havre, Montana

59501



925 Second Avenue

William Alvord
Superintendent of Fisheries
Helena, Montana.

RECEIVED
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FISHERIES DIVISION

Dear Bill:

It was good to hear from you. I hope the time will come soon when we can talk face to face. Maybe at the spring get together on Beaver Creek.

I will try to give you a resume of the stocking of trout in the Bears Paws as accurately as I have been able to ascertain it.

According to Fort Assiniboine records and some of the old timers none of the streams of the Bears Paws, Little Rockies, Sweetgrass Hills or even those north of Glasgow that drained into the Milk River originally had trout in them. Apparently many had suckers and other rough fish but no trout. The Milk River evidently was too silt laden for trout to ascend from the Missouri or to descend from the headwaters to these areas. However, Eagle Creek which flows into the Missouri above the mouth of the Judith did have cut throat trout and it was from Eagle Creek that the soldiers from Fort Assiniboine first stocked Beaver Creek-sometime around 1880. These fish took hold in the virgin waters of Beaver Creek and by the 1890's and 1900 the fishing there was fabulous. I am not sure but have been led to believe that the plant or plants from Eagle Creek were later supplemented by cut throat brought over from Fort Shaw on Sun River. Birch Creek, too, may have had native cut throat but I have no evidence to assure this. Cow Creek did not originally have any trout due to its excessive alkalinity from a few miles below the T U ranch to its mouth. This may also have been the case with Birch Creek. Also it seems that Beaver Creek was the only one planted to cut throat by the soldiers. Box Elder, Clear Creek, Peop Creek, Cow Creek and Sandy Creek have never had them as far as I've been able to find out. This is understandable as Beaver Creek was almost wholly on the Assiniboine Military reserve, while all the others were originally part of the Indian Reservation and later of the public domain. Fishing in Beaver Creek until Fort Assiniboine was abandoned was restricted solely to the military. Any civilian wishing to fish there legally had to obtain a permit from the C.O. of the Post. In the display of odd licenses there in the fish and Game Department you can find the photostat of one of these old permits issued to Lou Lucke (my father) giving him permission to fish Beaver Creek for the Month of June 1910.

My grandmother, who came to Fort Assiniboine in 1867, told me that four or five wagon loads of them and their friends would go out on a picnic to upper Beaver Creek for a week or two. They would set up camp in the "Meadows" near Baldy (Mt. Bears Paw) which is where the Experimental Station corrals are now. After getting camp in order the men would go fishing and come back with enough trout to fill a barrel. Enough to feed the whole crowd for 3-4 days.

Sometime in the early 1900's it was possible for citizens to request trout from their Senators or Congressmen for planting in their areas. These fish were transported in a railway fish car and the applicants for fish were notified when to meet the car with containers suitable for transporting the fish to their ultimate destination. Usually they were met with cream cans. I met these cars several times with my Dad and I'm quite sure it was always brook trout that we planted as, by that time, they had proved to be the best adapted to our streams in the Bears Paws. I can remember that besides planting in Box Elder, Clear and Peoples Creek we even put some in Bull Hook near the head--and, I'm told there's still a few brooks to be found along a short stretch in the Redwing and Waid places. I'm not sure who first planted Box Elder Creek but it could have been Nick Faber or one of the Kinsellas. It is my understanding that Mosser first stocked Clear Creek and I'm quite sure that Andy Moore planted the first fish in Cow Creek. McNamaras probably put the first brooks in Eagle Creek and Ben Smith at the head of Sand Creek. Hendersons or Max Schmid likely started them in Birch Creek. All this was under that old program whereby the applicant met the fish car and took the fish to where he thought they would do well.

There are still some remnants of the early cut throat in the Bears Paws. An occasional one can be picked up at the head of Beaver Creek. Also, Bill Garrahan tells me that there is an isolated beaver dam-headwaters too of Beaver Creek--with cut throat. On Birch Creek above the old Schmid homestead is a half to three quarters of a mile of beaver dams that have never gone dry. These have cut throat in them and all I have ever caught or seen there are 11 to 12 inches long. Richard Schmid told me that his father planted these fish 30-40 years ago and there has never been any others stocked there. Obviously these must reproduce although I've never seen any small ones. This upper end of the creek is set off from the main creek by a long dry stretch except in heavy run-off. I might add that this is a similar condition to the beaver dam on Beaver Creek mentioned above.

Back in the 1940's or 50's I read an article in Field and Stream or Outdoor Life by Dan Cushman wherein he talks of fishing for cut throat in some beaver dams at the head of Sandy Creek. Dan says he had to ride in to these dams on horseback and that the fish (cut-throat) were so scary that the only leader that worked for catching them was the hair from the tail of his white horse. His story made good reading but when I questioned him about the validity of the horsehair leader he adopted a tongue in cheek expression. However he did maintain that he had some wonderful fly fishing for cut throat in those beaver dams. I think that those dams were likely at the head of Eagle Creek rather than Sandy Creek. It could be that those dams are still there and that there are still cut throat in them.

Well Bill, I hope all this rambling will help to preserve the history of trout in the Bears Paws. Do as you please with it.

When you see my nephew, David Wedum, tell him hello and give him my regards--haven't seen Dave for a year or two.

I do hope we can get together and visit a little before too long.
Kindest regards to your family and best of everything to you,

Sincerely,

Al

Al Lucke

Box 230, Havre, Montana 59501.

P.S.

Bill, you worked here long enough to know (and I think you recommended) that brook trout have proved to be the best for our streams here in the Bears Paws. They not only survive and reproduce the best but furnish the best sport and eating for our fishermen. However, these streams, ~~be~~ being so accessible to fishing pressure throughout their entire lengths are not to be compared with those of the big mountains where the brooks cannot be taken out enough to keep up with their reproductive capacities. These Bears Paws streams are not only easily available for extreme fishing pressure but their black loam bottoms are rich and provide a rich food source for a large population of fish. They cannot be compared to the almost sterile rock bottoms of say the Glacier Park area. These same conditions-availability, and rich beds applies not only to our streams in the Bears Paws but also to those of the Sweet Grass Hills, the Little Rockies and even Porcupine Creek north of Glasgow. Of late years these streams have been stocked only with rainbow--by the state I mean-. Rainbow are O.K. and I enjoy catching them, but as they grow to any size they tend to head down stream for bigger waters leaving the upper reaches of our ~~creeks~~ barren except for those surviving brook trout. Brooks and cut throat ~~and~~ tend to head to the upper stretches of streams so work out much better here by furnishing fishing for the whole length of the streams.

I'm still on the mailing list for Montana Outdoors and enjoy every issue of it. My file goes back to the time when it was a single sheet publication, which was quite some time ago.

So long,

Al.

Helena, Montana
January 31, 1969

Mr. Al Lucke
925 2nd Ave.
Havre, Montana 59501

Al:

The other day someone asked about the distribution of cutthroat trout in the state. I recall that one day in 1953 or 1952, you and I caught a few in a little stream at the head of Beaver Creek. I think you said your dad had planted them some 30 years or so ago at that time. I wonder if you remember any of the details - the stream they were in, any dates, where they were shipped from.

Heard that you were doing some writing. With the background and material you have, you should come up with something might worthwhile. I know it would appeal to anyone who finds western history, particularly Montana history, interesting. Let me know how its coming along.

This winter has been like a few I remember around Glasgow. Saw where Havre had 53° below zero. Has been quite a while since we've had such a long siege of cold weather, so I guess we're spoiled.

Best regards.

Sincerely,

WILLIAM ALVORD
SUPERINTENDENT OF FISHERIES

WA/eb