



Montana Drought Advisory Task Force  
Lt. Governor Karl Ohs, Chair  
Box 201901  
Helena, MT 59620-1901

November 21, 2001

Dear Lieutenant Governor Ohs:

The Montana Chapter of the American Fisheries Society is an organization of professional fisheries scientists from agencies, universities, and the private sector across Montana. Our objectives are: conservation, development and wise utilization of Montana's fisheries; promoting educational, scientific and technological development; advancement of fisheries science and practice; and exchange and dissemination of knowledge about fish, fisheries and related subjects. Obviously, our membership has been keenly aware of the severity and impacts of persistent drought and its impacts on our fisheries.

In 2000, we were disheartened when Montana's premier fisheries appeared to take a back seat during discussions and planning of the Task Force. As you know, our renowned fisheries bring a substantial contribution to Montana's economy, recreational opportunities, and ecological health. This past summer the Task Force appeared to have improved its consideration of fisheries when considering other important issues and interests. We commend you and the task force for your hard work during this past summer's drought and for the concern you demonstrated for the health of Montana's fisheries. We urge that the Task Force continue to recognize the importance of Montana's fisheries in (God forbid) future drought years, and consider them equitably with other interests.

Natural systems can be quite resilient to natural catastrophes such as drought. While lack of water increases water temperatures, decreases oxygen and forage, and makes fish more susceptible to predation, fish populations can compensate over time. When the drought cycle is broken, we can expect our fisheries to recover within a few years if steps can be taken to minimize additional human-cause impacts. By adjusting water management and fishing regulations and communicating between interest groups, we can give our aquatic systems an edge toward recovery. We feel the Task Force and natural resource agencies have made commendable progress toward these ends. While we may not be able to prevent drought from recurring, we are imminently more prepared if it should return.

Thanks again for your work to recognize fisheries values in efforts to mitigate drought. We hope that we, as Montanans, are better prepared than ever to deal with drought to ensure the long-term health of our fisheries.

Sincerely,

Pat Clancey  
President

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