



September 25, 2001

Fisheries Division  
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks  
Attn: Karen Zackheim  
PO Box 200701  
Helena, MT 59620-0701

Subject: 2002-2003 Proposed Fishing Regulations

The Montana Chapter of the American Fisheries Society would like to express our support for the proposed regulation change to catch-and-release only for rainbow trout in the Missouri River between Holter Dam and the Dearborn River. We believe the biological evidence for an impending decline in the rainbow trout population due to Whirling Disease in this section of the river is irrefutable. We applaud the department for undertaking a comprehensive research and monitoring program to better understand the Whirling Disease threat, and for pursuing a proactive approach to conserving the wild rainbow trout fishery in this part of the Missouri River. Protecting the adult trout population offers the best hope for some level of natural recovery while biologists continue to develop management strategies to reduce the effects of Whirling Disease.

Although we understand that social issues must also be considered, we think the scientific evidence indicates that continued bait fishing in the catch-and-release section will result in significantly higher mortality of released fish than would an artificial lures only rule. But it is possible that other factors, such as lack of interest in catch-and-release fishing by bait users, may mitigate this potential problem. We hope the department will continue to monitor this fishery and apply sound adaptive management strategies.

Sincerely,

Michael Enk  
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c/o USFS, PO Box 869, Great Falls, MT 59403

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