

"trout's best friend" - Arnold Gingrich

"A hero" - Paul Schullery

# Bud Lilly

brings you the  
**Fish of the Lewis and Clark Expedition**

Saturday,  
October 27, 2001  
7:00 pm  
Lincoln School  
(215 East Lewis)

Free to the public  
Refreshments will be served

Bud Lilly is one of the nation's premier fly-fisherman and has a world-wide reputation.

He has been profiled on  
CNN's Portrait of America  
ABC's 20/20, and the  
Wall Street Journal.

Is Featured in  
A video produced by Montana Fish,  
Wildlife and Parks called "Three Men,  
Three Rivers."

Received  
The American Museum of Fly Fishing's  
Heritage Award in 1999 for his  
commitment to the sport of  
fly-fishing and natural resources  
conservation.

The Wild Trout VII A. Starker Leopold  
Award.  
An honorary doctorate of Science from  
MSU, May 2001

Co-authored  
"A Trout's Best Friend"  
"Bud Lilly's Guide to Fly Fishing the West"  
"Bud Lilly's Guide to Fly Fishing the New West"

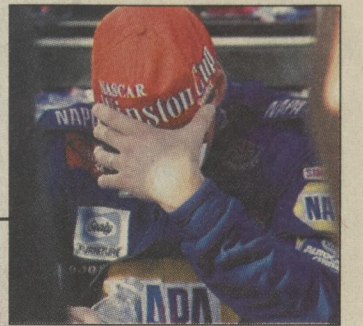
Also on exhibit are "rare and beautiful pictures of wild Yellowstone cutthroat trout in their watery habitat" by Tom Murphy and David Long

Presented by

**GREAT BEND OF THE YELLOWSTONE  
LEWIS AND CLARK HERITAGE COMMITTEE**

Monday

LAST LAP: NASCAR LEGEND DALE EARNHARDT DIES IN DAYTONA 500 CRASH/PAGE 11



Bozeman  
Daily

# Chronicle

Bozeman, Montana

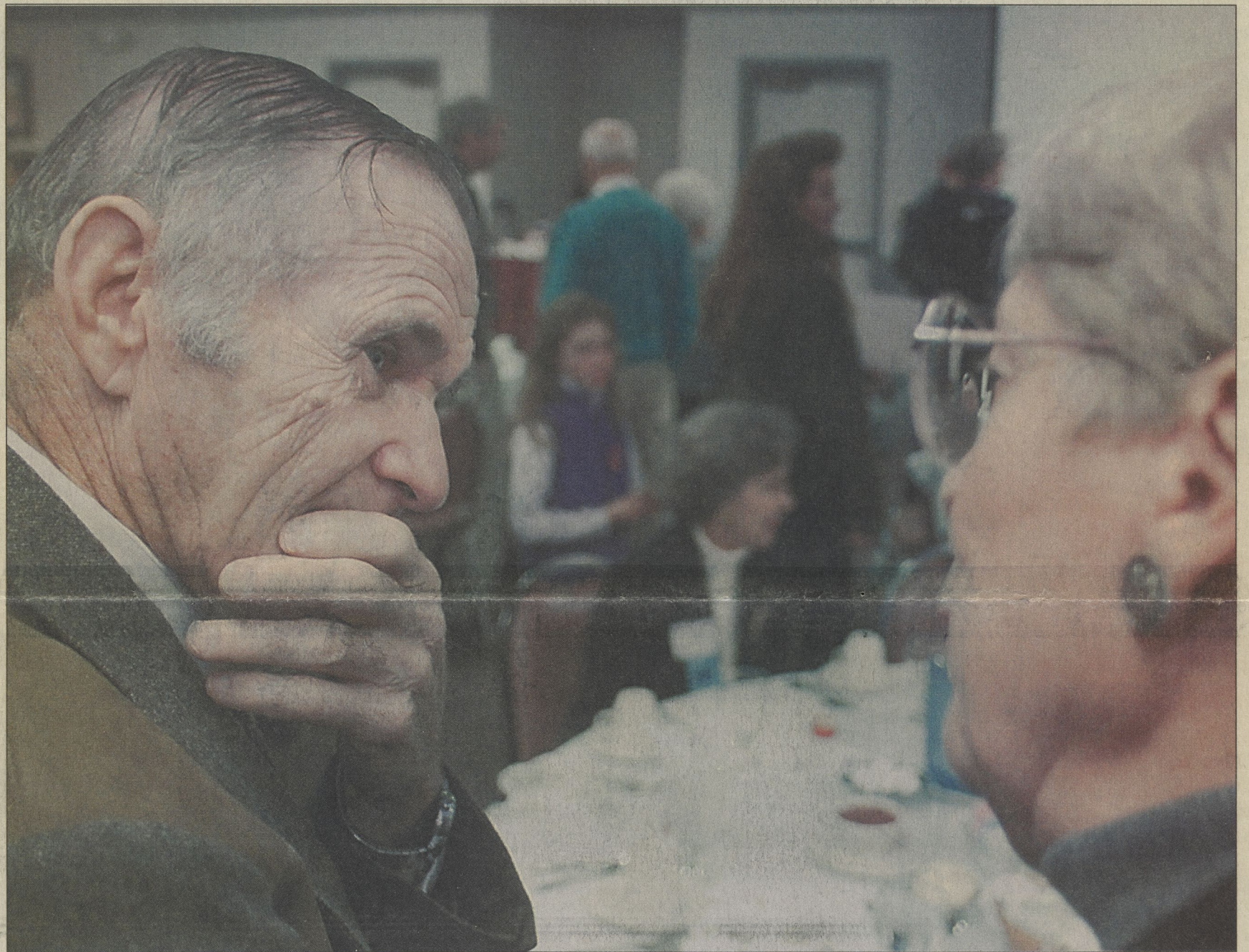
Monday, February 19, 2001

50 Cents

*"The pioneers came out here and became successful ranchers, farmers and business people."*

**Bud Lilly,**  
great-great grandson of pioneer Mary Wells Yates

## A time for remembering



Bob Miller, left, visits with Bev Bacon Saturday just before the 108th annual reunion of the Sons and Daughters of Pioneers at the Holiday Inn. Miller said he was a fifth-generation resident of the Gallatin Valley.

### Families of Gallatin County settlers gather at annual banquet

Story by **Joan Haines**  
for the Chronicle  
Photography by **Thomas Lee**  
of the Chronicle

Granny Yates was a superwoman among local pioneers.

Mary Wells Yates — known in her later years as Granny — was a wagon master who led 13 wagon trains between St. Louis and Virginia City in the 1860s before settling in the Gallatin Valley's Dry Creek Area.

She was a 48-year-old widow, and mother of 11 children, when she made her first trip to the gold fields of Virginia City in 1863.

Professional fly fisherman Bud Lilly, 75, is her great-great grandson. He is proud of her accomplishments, as well as those of the other white settlers. All the pioneers were remembered Saturday at the Sons and Daughters of Gallatin County Pioneers' 108th annual banquet.

"The pioneers came out here and became successful ranchers, farmers and business people," Lilly said in an interview before the banquet.

His mother, Violet Lilly, was a devoted fan of the pioneer group's annual banquets. Lilly said he's been attending the reunions as long as he can remember. On Saturday, 125 pioneer descendants gathered in the Holiday Inn.

"The group represents a survivor-type mentality," said Lilly, who was elected present Saturday. "The families stay here in spite of all the changes."

Shirley Sedivy, 63, of Bozeman is the great-great-granddaughter of Granny Yates and a relative of John Accola, a farmer who homesteaded land north of

Four Corners in 1866. Accola's old home is still standing.

The reunion/banquet "is a tie-back to people who originally settled the valley," Sedivy said. "We all have a common thread."

She started going to reunions with her parents as a child, and has been attending for the last 15 to 20 years as an adult.

According to historical writer Phyllis Smith, "pioneers" are those who settled in the valley by 1868.

Bev Bacon, 72, was a little girl who she first started attending reunions with her parents. Dancing took center stage in the Baxter Hotel and upstairs at the Masonic Lodge.

(More on **Pioneers**, page 10)

## Pioneers/

from page 1

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"It was a big affair," Bacon said. "It went all day and half the night."

She is the granddaughter of Douglas Ferguson, who settled on land that is now the Valley Unit subdivision and owned a cattle ranch and livery stable. Ferguson Lane is named after him.

Several relatives of Stephen White, a pioneer farmer in Gallatin City, now the Trident area, showed up for the reunion. Stephen White was 13 years old when he came to the valley and was brought up by four brothers.

His great grandson, Kerry White, said Gallatin City was the first city in the valley.

"These people are descendants of the original people who settled the valley," said Ray

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**"T**hey get together once a year. When people came in on horses and buggies, it was a big deal."

**—Ray White,  
former Gallatin County  
commissioner**

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White, former Gallatin County commissioner and past president of the county's pioneer group.

"They get together once a year. When peo-

ple came in on horses and buggies, it was a big deal."

Thelma Crouse, 84, is related by marriage to homesteader Henry Crouse. She is the widow of the late Chuck Crouse, former president of the county and state pioneer group.

Henry came to Virginia City looking for gold and stayed in the Gallatin Valley to homestead and farm. At one point, he donated land for the Springhill church.

Florine Kempf, 80, of Billings, traveled to the banquet by bus. She is related to Win Dale, who homesteaded a farm in the Reel Creek area.

"I like to come and see the people I know," Kempf said.

# Forbes

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## The Travel Issue: Dogged Pursuits

# CAST

MONTANA'S BAKER CREEK WAS GIVEN UP FOR DEAD.

# AWAY

TODAY ITS "TROPHY WATERS" FLOW ONCE MORE. BY PHILIPP HARPER

## Bud Lilly, legendary fly-fishing guide

and stalker of wild trout, measures the fallen cottonwood with practiced eyes, his face framed by the peaks of his upturned collar and shielded from the sun by the brim of his Stetson. • "I used to sit under that tree all day and catch fish," says Lilly, 75, who was raised just a few miles up the road in Manhattan (Montana, not New York). • Lilly caught those remembered fish, mostly brown trout, many in the 20-inch range, more than 50 years ago in the briskly flowing bend of Baker Creek now spanned by the cottonwood. In the decades since, the creek has suffered the ravages of agricultural use—grazing cattle breaking down its banks, water diversion—and no longer is the fishery it once was. But that figures to change, and soon. • Just a few hundred yards from where Lilly contemplates his boyhood fishing hole, earth is being moved. Trout ponds, configured to hold monsters, are being dug, and feeder creeks are being restored—and in some cases created—to serve as prime spawning grounds. By spring work will be completed on Baker Creek itself, a hidden treasure in the catalogue of Montana's spring creeks and the central attraction of a residential development, Baker Springs, that is being marketed as a "private fly-fishing community." • The claim is true. It would be difficult to find a greater concentration of world-class trout fishing than on Baker Springs' 232 acres, which lie hard by Interstate Highway 90 about 15 miles west of Bozeman in Montana's Gallatin Valley. Much of the \$1 million being spent to develop the property and its 11 home sites has been earmarked for creek rehabilitation and pond creation. Additionally, the West Gallatin River, itself a blue-ribbon trout stream, flows across one corner of the development. • Admittance to this fishing feast will not be cheap: When the 20-acre home sites go on the market sometime this summer, they'll be priced from \$450,000 to \$600,000.

Photograph by Denver Bryan

If the multiresidential scope of Baker Springs represents something of a new wrinkle in the development of southwestern Montana's water resources, the underlying equation is familiar. Since the early 1980s, wealthy individuals with a passion for fly-fishing have been buying their private slices of trout heaven, roughly defined as the waters within a 100-mile radius of Bozeman. Streams formerly described as "trophy waters," to denote the size

alchemy practiced by Urbani and others has won the approval of state officials who manage Montana's water resources. As long as restorations stay within the stream's original footprint, says state fisheries biologist Pat Byorth, the result is "by and large positive." In some cases, he acknowledges, owners are "taking a spring creek with very little habitat and improving it dramatically."

More controversial than the work itself is the idea of

## FISH-LOVING, WELL-HEELED LANDOWNERS SEEM TO BE SIGNIFICANTLY IMPROVING THE WATER THEY ACQUIRE.

of the trout they held, have themselves become the trophies. Already on Baker Creek, for instance, Bob Emery, CEO of investment banker Robertson Stephens and an avid fly fisher, has restored several miles of the stream for his personal use.

The trend is being driven, says Bozeman attorney Tom Anacker, by the "power of the fish." Referring to "clients who come here and buy property and like to make things perfect," Anacker, an officer of Trout Unlimited's Montana chapter, adds, "the common denominator is the fishing experience."

These fish-loving, well-heeled landowners may not be achieving perfection, but they do seem to be significantly improving the water they acquire. By hiring one of the half dozen or so Montana-based restoration firms, it is possible to take a degraded stream and return it to near pristine condition in a few fishing seasons. The process, says Joe Urbani, a kind of *éminence grise* among Montana stream restorationists, is all about "digging it and pitching it"—taking away here, augmenting there—with the goal of creating a habitat that not only attracts trout but allows them to prosper and grow fat.

Urbani, who is overseeing the work at Baker Springs, says spring creeks have an inherent advantage as habitats because their underground water sources ensure a constant temperature, generally in the vicinity of a trout-friendly 50 degrees Fahrenheit—a characteristic that confers the added benefit of allowing spring creeks to be fished year round. Water flow and quality are other critical variables, as is creek-side vegetation, which provides both food, in the form of insects, and cover from predators.

Put the right ingredients together in the right measures, says Urbani, and the result is a "primordial soup" in which fish thrive. Referring to the work Urbani's eponymous Bozeman-based firm is doing at Baker Springs, Dudley Lutton, a principal in the development, says, "You can take a piece of property that has been tampered with and leapfrog 50 years of evolution."

For the most part, and somewhat counterintuitively, the sort of aquatic

taking a finite state resource (water) and severely limiting access to it. Byorth estimates there are no more than 20 major spring creeks—supplemented by "50 to 70 minor trickles"—within the celebrated 100-mile radius of Bozeman.

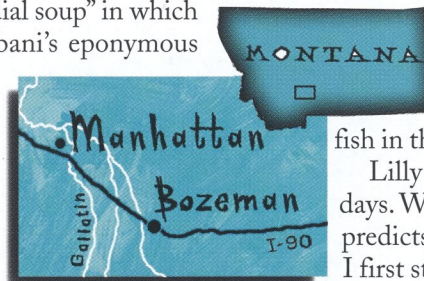
Some of that water, such as the renowned Armstrong-Nelson-Depuy's spring creeks in Montana's Paradise Valley near Livingston, is open to the public on a fee basis. And, Byorth concedes, even when fisheries are effectively removed from public use—most famously the miles of streams restored by Ted Turner—a greater good results because privately restored streams often serve as incubators for trout that will migrate to the state's larger, publicly accessible rivers.

In any event, a case against the privatization of Baker Creek is difficult to make because the ten-mile-long stream never was fished very heavily. Still, it has loomed large in the lives of some of Montana's most celebrated fly fishers. Tom Morgan, who would gain fame as a maker of premium fly rods, guided on Baker until acquiring the R.L. Winston Rod Co. in the mid-1970s. He remembers Baker as a "terrific" stream with several big fish "in every pool you came to," but can't recall ever seeing another angler on the stream.

If he'd been on the stream in the 1930s and '40s, Morgan likely would have seen Lilly, who, though most famous as a Yellowstone River guide, is linked to Baker in some personally memorable ways.

When two scouts for the Cincinnati Reds arrived in Manhattan to check out Lilly's skill as a second baseman—a possible pro career was preempted by World War II—he took them fly-fishing on Baker. And he was on the stream duck hunting when he first learned of the attack on Pearl Harbor. Perhaps most indelible, though, was the day in the mid-1930s when he watched his father battle a nine-pound brown, finally landing the fish in the dark with the aid of a flashlight.

Lilly does not rule out a return to those glory days. When Urbani's restoration is complete, he predicts, "some spots may fish better than when I first started here." •



Map by Kandy Littrell





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# Outdoors



## One man, one creek, one private community

BUD LILLY DEMONSTRATES HIS EXPERTISE on one of the four man-made trout ponds at Baker Springs. Lilly, 76, is taking on a new role as stream manager and fisheries adviser for the private development. Below, four newly created ponds, stocked with rainbows, will be for the exclusive use of residents of the new Baker Springs: A Private Fly Fishing community.

### Bud Lilly returns to the stream of his youth as fisheries adviser

Stories and photos  
by DICK WESNICK

For *The Independent Record*

**O**n a sun-drenched summer day, a peaceful dog-days lull has settled over the western valleys of Montana.

A tanned, brown-haired youngster picks up his telescopic steel Bristol fly rod and stuffs a box of wet flies into his pocket. He climbs onto his bicycle and pedals the straight, flat two-and-a-half-mile stretch of road from his home in Manhattan, to a small sparkling creek that winds its way through meadows and farm land before spilling into the Gallatin River.

The year is 1935. The boy is 10 years old, and although he's been fishing with his father for several years, this narrow, slow moving spring creek is one of the first places he's been allowed to fish alone.

He stands beside a giant cottonwood tree in the knee-high grass — thigh-high to a 10-year-old — and flings a double-hung pair of snelled wet flies to the top of a pool that stretches out along a bend in the creek. A large brown trout flashes out from the under-cut bank, snatches the fly and whiplashes against the tugging youth.

The trout ultimately loses the struggle. In those days, before that same youth would become fly fishing's most ardent advocate of the catch-and-release ethic, the brown trout was destined for the dinner table.

It wasn't anywhere as large as the nine-pound brown that his

father once caught here, finally landing it well after dark under the glow cast by a flashlight held by the youngster after what seemed to be an hours-long battle.

But this brown was nothing to scoff at either. In fact, to this day he never scoffs at the size of any trout. He is perpetually in awe of them.

In the intervening decades, that angler's passion for fly fishing and conservation efforts earned him an international reputation as one of the sport's most celebrated enthusiasts.

That lad was Waleen Lilly Jr., better known as Bud Lilly.

And now, 66 years later, he is returning to Baker Spring Creek as stream keeper and senior fisheries adviser in a precedent-setting — and expensive — endeavor called "Baker Springs: A Private Fly Fishing Community."

In August, Lilly and his wife Ester will move from their home in Bozeman to a meticulously renovated farm house in the midst of the development where the price of lots run from \$400,000 to \$700,000. Houses are "slightly" extra.

From the south windows of his new home, Bud Lilly will be able to see the spot where that cottonwood of his youth once stood. That tree toppled over long ago, and rests along the spring creek shoreline, but others have risen tall in its place.

They represent the effort that is turning typical tired Montana farm land into revitalized habitat for fish and wildlife, and a Mecca for well-heeled humans that the developers hope will soon follow.



### Restoration improves fish habitat

**T**he hopper pattern was in a slow dead drift when a chunky brown trout darted out from under a log and nailed it cold.

A few minutes later, he was unhooked and released back into the private stretch of Lewis and Clark Spring Creek, formerly known as Crest Creek.

"When they're on those hoppers, they take it immediately," said Bud Lilly, my companion and tutor for the next two days.

Only a decade ago, the mile-long stretch of creek that flows into the Gallatin River above Three Forks was typical of many streams that run through farm and ranch land: trampled by cat-

tle, eroded, heavily silted and virtually barren of trout.

Today it serves as an example of what can be achieved through the joint efforts of individuals, conservation organizations and the state of Montana.

The project involved Trout Unlimited; Future Fisheries of the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks; and Fish America, an organization of fishing equipment manufacturers.

"It was part of the original homestead until about 15 years ago when a large corporate ranch bought it," Lilly said. "They later sold it to a man who recognized its potential." After restoration, it was again sold to a private individual from out of state.

"It was down to a point where cattle had destroyed the banks. There was no (trout) reproduction," Lilly said.

More RESTORATION, page 2C

## Keep out; Montana is all mine

By PEGGY O'NEILL  
IR Outdoors Editor

**W**ho's the snob here? Me or them.

By them, I mean the elite few who can afford the life I dream of — a house with a few acres, easy access to a blue ribbon trout stream, few neighbors within shouting distance and a view that is not cluttered with other people who want the same thing.

In short, I want it all and I want it all to myself.

But until I can afford to be one of "them," I can't help but hate them. They are the people who block access to my favorite public spots. There's the guy who built his house at the trailhead of one of my favorite mountain biking trails. There's the guy who built a monstrous castle on the shores of my favorite river. There's the development company that's about to turn my favorite little ski hill into the next playground for the wealthy.

I'm a long way from fitting in with the cash crowd. Sometimes, I don't even have enough money in my pockets to cover the user's fee at the local public recreation areas.

So, I take advantage of all the free public access I can find. Me and a thousand other recreationists. So then I find myself getting upset with other people who dare to hike the same trail that I choose

to hike. I give dirty looks to people who I feel are too close to me when I'm fishing. If someone is participating in an activity that disturbs my own nature experience and sense of solitude, I become irate.

It's a dilemma. Do I hate the few who force me to share with the many? Or do I hate the many who force me to want to become one of the few?

What's a young upwardly stagnant person like me to do? Some argue that wealthy landowners can preserve and restore large areas of land, Ted Turner's Flying D Ranch, the Baker Springs development near Bozeman and the Stock Farm near Hamilton are just a few examples.

While these ranches and developments, which attract mostly out-of-staters, can claim they serve a noble purpose, I find this claim to be insulting. It's as if the people of Montana aren't responsible enough to protect their own land so these noble rich folk come in, put the prices out of our reach and don't allow us in.

What are we, children? Well, some of us act that way. While fishing on a stretch of the Missouri, I found at least 10 cans of Keystone Light that someone left in a fire pit.

While hiking in the Scapegoat Wilderness, I passed a bunch of trails that someone had worn to make a shortcut up some switchbacks.

While cross-country skiing in a well-signed non-motorized area, I encountered a full-sized pickup truck on the trail.

After snowmobiling (and enjoying it) for a story in a place where snowmobiling is allowed, I was snubbed by some of my friends.

But isn't blocking a popular Forest Service access, building an eyesore of a home on a beautiful stretch of river and inviting only the rich people to come and play also a little childish infantile, unrealistic, not to mention selfish?

Grow up. That's the answer. Aren't grownups supposed to respect each other? Don't grownups take good care of their possessions? And don't grownups share?

That's what I was always told as a child.

PEGGY O'NEILL



Breath of Fresh Air

### The Man

### Development combines world class fishing and exclusivity

**D**udley Lutton walks through tall lush grass to the edge of a spring creek, one of two that have been sculpted from former farmland.

He directs a visitor's attention toward the log jutting from the shoreline, providing cover for a brown trout. He notes the gravel beds along the stream bottom, an occasional large rock or two, the undercut banks capped by overhanging vegetation.

If you didn't know better — or weren't told — you'd assume the landscape was created by nature, that it had existed in this state for eons.

He points out the former location of "pits" or deep depressions that were filled with earth dug to create new spring creeks and ponds, or with silt from the original Baker Spring Creek.

The dredgings also were used to create a large berm that separates the development from the north frontage road of Interstate 90.

Lutton steers his gray Suburban along a gravel road that traverses

Baker Springs, stopping to relate the genesis of a rainbow-filled pond that grew out of an empty field.

The aquatic grasses, the thick vegetation that anchors the shoreline and prevents erosion, even the insects that skate along the pond's surface were planted by hand. They sprang from the creative minds of the developers of the private fly fishing community called Baker Springs.

The restoration of Baker Spring Creek and the creation of the two spring creeks and the four ponds were the work of Joe Urbani of Bozeman.

The 232-acre project lies about 15 miles west of Bozeman, and only five strategic miles from the Belgrade airport, providing easy access to out-of-state property owners.

Baker Springs is the ambitious effort of two former Billings men: Lutton, who coached football in the 1980s and later was involved with Grouse Mountain Lodge and Big Mountain developments near Whitefish; and Don DuBeau, who



was president of Big Mountain Development Corporation, the developers of the Big Mountain Ski and Summer Resort, and also the CEO of Eagle Bend Corporation, developers of a planned golf community.

Lutton and DuBeau form the nucleus of the Cold Water Group

LLC, which was established in Bozeman to "create strategies for preserving and enhancing fish and wildlife habitats in the context of innovative residential development."

Lutton was no stranger to the

More DEVELOPMENT, page 2C



# OPINION

day, October 15, 2001

The Source

Guest opinion

## Cooperation produces landmark water lease

By JOHN YOUNGBERG

Montana Farm Bureau  
and LAURA ZIEMER  
Trout Unlimited

For decades, there has been an imaginary line drawn in the sand in Montana. On one side of the line has been conservationists and environmentalists and on the other side has been the agricultural community. Central to this division has been water and all the issues that surround the use and allocation of this precious natural resource.

That line, while not completely erased, just got blurrier a few weeks ago at an event celebrating the decision of the owner of Montana's Sun Ranch to lease to Trout Unlimited water that the ranch formerly used for irrigation. The water, which was in excess of the rancher's needs because of a change in ranch management, will provide 220 cubic feet per second of water to Trout Unlimited for Wolf Creek, Moose Creek, and Squaw Creek — tributaries to the Madison River.

The lease will not only protect water in the stream for spawning and rearing habitat for several species of trout migrating from the Madison River, it will also provide significant habitat improvement for trout that stay in the tributaries year-round, particularly in times of drought.

### Decade of legislation

Attending the event was the rancher — Roger Lang — his neighbors, environmentalists, conservationists, agricultural representatives and politicians. The cooperation that made the lease possible signified a new chapter in Montana's water history — a history whose chapters have been better known for discord rather than cooperation.

What made the water lease possible was a change in the state's water laws that now allows someone with a water right to lease that water so that stream flows can be protected. Under Montana's water laws — as is the case in most arid Western states — water users who take water out of streams for purposes ranging from irrigation to mining to municipal use, have an exclusive right to it. Under this system, the earliest, historic users of water are entitled to all their water before other users — or the rivers themselves — get any water.

What made the old law difficult for ranchers or farmers who did not want to use their entire water allocation, and instead wanted to keep some of it in the river or stream, was that if you are unwilling or unable to use your entire water allocation, you would lose your historic right to the water. Anyone who under-

stands the importance and value of a water right in a semiarid state like Montana knows that, while such a decision could make great environmental sense, it made little economic sense from the standpoint of the water leaseholder.

Efforts were begun over a decade ago to change the law to benefit both the environment and the ranching community by allowing a rancher, farmer or anyone else with a water right to lease all or a portion of their water right so that stream flows could be protected. However, again because of that so-called line in the sand, the very concept of leasing water rights to maintain the flows of rivers and streams provoked a protracted and bitter debate in the Montana Legislature.

### Anglers, irrigators debate

In 1989, anglers and irrigators waged a pitched battle over a proposal to allow the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks to conduct a limited pilot leasing program. In the end, the legislature approved a bill allowing a time to initiate and evaluate leases.

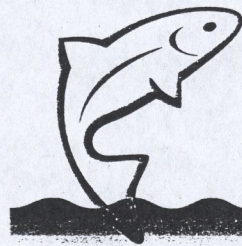
Little by little the two sides in the debate put aside their differences and jointly supported legislation in 1995 that would allow non-governmental groups such as Trout Unlimited to lease water rights for in-stream flows for up to 10 years. Montana Farm Bureau and other agricultural organizations began to realize that the line in the sand could be modified to protect irrigators' water rights and their ability to make a living.

In 2001, the Legislature extended the terms for which water could be leased for such purposes to 30 years, if conservation efforts make that water available.

The decision of the owner of the Sun Ranch to lease some of his water right to support fish was a direct result of this more than 10-year legislative process. The lease to Trout Unlimited is precedent-setting because it is the largest lease of its kind, not only in Montana, but also in the West.

Changes to Montana's water laws and the recently-announced Sun Ranch water lease demonstrate that lines drawn in the sand are just that — lines — and that there is nothing stopping anyone from stepping over or erasing them. It shows the good that can come about when we talk with each other rather than at each other across that imaginary line.

John Youngberg of Bozeman is vice president of state government affairs with the Montana Farm Bureau. Laura Ziemer, also of Bozeman, is director of Trout Unlimited's Western Water Project.



**We can work it out** Montana ranchers and conservationists find common ground

While Montana has never exactly been a hotbed of cooperation between ranchers and environmentalists, these two groups are finding more in common than they thought possible just a few short years ago. For instance, rancher Roger Lang recently granted what amounts to the largest water lease in the West ever signed over to a private, nonprofit conservation group. The lease essentially grants all irrigation water in his three Madison River tributaries to TU for fish habitat. It was a precedent-setting agreement that shows every possibility of being repeated by many other landowners.

Lang can agree to such a lease because he and dozens of ranchers like him are refining their operations for the new century. By converting long-established irrigated pasture and hay lands to natural grasses, and by setting up

water-efficient sprinkler systems in place of outdated flood irrigation techniques, ranchers have reduced their water needs in some cases by up to 90 percent. Streams that could be counted on to become damp gullies each summer now flow with water year-round.

Despite the benefits, many ranchers have been hesitant to use less water, fearing that what they didn't use would be lost to them in the future. But with the recent broadening of a 1995 water rights law, landowners may now offer leases to private parties for longer periods, resulting in a source of income that enables ranchers to invest more money in new equipment.

There is still a long way to go in the war against dewatering, but with the help of a growing number of public and private groups interested in water leasing, the current level of cooperation just might place it

FLY ROD & REEL — JANUARY 2002

## **A MADISON RAINBOW REVIVAL OR CATCH 'EM WHILE YOU CAN**

The word on the street is that the Madison River rainbow trout are back! Judging from the flotilla of boats and anglers this summer on the upper Madison, the rumor must hold some credence. But because of the legendary truth-twisting reputation of anglers, biologists from Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks still conduct annual trout population surveys. Recent surveys are in! Conclusions are being drawn! The results? Rainbow trout of the upper Madison are back! (Well, ...sort of).

Since *Myxobolus cerebralis* started inflicting whirling disease on young Madison rainbows in the early 1990's, the population declined steadily for lack of recruitment. Since then, considerable effort has been expended to learn more about the parasite and the ways it has impacted trout populations. Some of this research sheds light on why, at least for now, the Madison rainbows are back.

Spring of 1998 came slowly, with cooler weather and snowpack lengthening runoff well into July. A similar pattern was repeated in 1999. Temperature and flow conditions in both years apparently had a dampening, if not diluting, effect on the infective stage (triacetomyxon - TAMS) of the parasite. As young rainbow trout emerged from the gravel, they weren't as heavily barraged by TAMS as in previous years since the outbreak. The net effect was two consecutive year-classes of rainbow trout as abundant as pre-whirling days.

Whirling disease researchers discovered this relationship by using a series of live cage experiments. Over several years, young rainbow trout have been placed in cages in key locations along the Madison River for 10 days each, long enough to be infected by TAMS. The young fry were taken to a lab where they were raised to give the parasite time to settle in. The fish were sacrificed and analyzed to determine the extent of *M. cerebralis* infection. Lo' and behold, in 1998 and 1999, infection rates were below lethal levels during peak emergence times.

These two year-classes each survived their second winter (another bottleneck in the upper Madison) to the point the fishing has been reminiscent of pre-whirling days. For example, the Class of 1998 reached three years old this summer, generally 14 to 16 inches long, supporting good catch rates of good-sized rainbows. The Class of '99 hasn't fared quite as well, but still contributed to red hot fishing.

Now, the bad news. Due to persistently low snowpack and drought conditions, it appears that the 2000 and 2001 year-classes were hit hard by whirling disease. Live cage results aren't all in, but infection rates appear to have been high in many key spawning areas during fry emergence. While our champion year classes will continue to carry the fishery for a couple more years, few recruits to take their place may cause an overall decline in rainbow trout abundance.

Now, more good news. A silver lining may be developing in the Madison. Rainbow trout spawned in tributaries used to be at a disadvantage when they found their way to the Madison River. In pre-whirling days, the river was loaded with river-spawned fish that had a size advantage. Thus, a trib-spawned rainbow was the runt due to slow growth rates in icy mountain streams. Now, those icy tributaries are refuges against whirling disease. The parasite just doesn't function as well in low temperatures, so young rainbows aren't as heavily infected. It may take years, but tributaries may eventually supply more consistent recruitment to the Madison.

Brown trout populations in the upper Madison River continue to thrive in spite of whirling disease. Having evolved with the parasite in Europe, brown trout seem to have developed a strong resistance to whirling disease. In fact, brown trout populations in the upper Madison are near all-time highs. While brown trout are a more finicky lot, anglers should continue to enjoy world class fishing in spite of the vagaries of rainbow trout abundance.

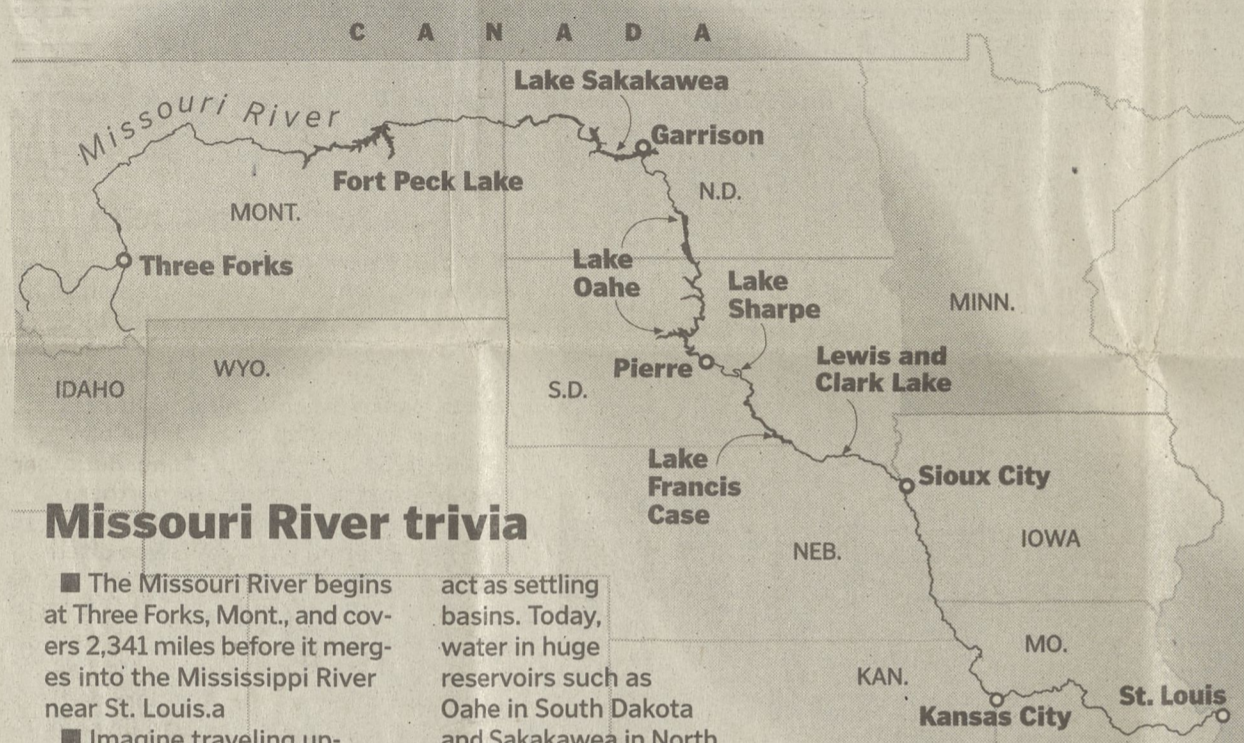
While the Madison River of old may be "back", it could be just a visit. At least until the next outstanding year class emerges to take over where the classes of '98 and '99 left off. Until then, you can rely on brown trout to pick up the slack while tributary spawning catches on. Perhaps the Madison River fishery never really went away; only the players have changed.

# The many currents of Mighty Mo

Missouri River offers fishermen adventure at every bend

Story and photos by Brent Frazier

The Kansas City Star



## Missouri River trivia

- The Missouri River begins at Three Forks, Mont., and covers 2,341 miles before it merges into the Mississippi River near St. Louis.
- Imagine traveling upstream the entire length. That's what Meriwether Lewis and William Clark did. After the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, President Thomas Jefferson sent them to explore the new lands. They followed the river from St. Louis, paddling and polling upstream.
- The river got its nickname, the Big Muddy, because it was miles wide and full of sediment, even in its early days.
- The construction of major dams in Montana and the Dakotas created reservoirs that act as settling basins. Today, water in huge reservoirs such as Oahe in South Dakota and Sakakawea in North Dakota is often crystal clear.
- The giant man-made lakes make up the largest reservoir system in the nation.
- The Missouri River system touches parts of eight states: Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, Nebraska, Missouri, Kansas and Illinois.
- Fishing on the Missouri River system in South Dakota generates about \$50 million annually.
- The largest reservoir on the river, Lake Oahe in South

Dakota, has 2,250 miles of shoreline.

- Lewis and Clark would not recognize the lower one-third of the river today. It was channelized by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and turned into a narrow, swift canal to accommodate barge traffic.

Every time South Dakota fishing guide Cherokee Hight visits Kansas City and passes over the muddy Missouri River, he shakes his head. "I can't believe that's the same river I'm fishing back home," he said. "It's a completely different world."

Hight comes from a world where the Missouri is clear and clean, and the walleye is king. Kansas City is in the middle of a world where the Missouri is muddy and polluted, and the catfish is king.

That contrast merely accentuates the fascination Hight and others have for the river many call the Mighty Mo.

Along its 2,341-mile journey from Montana to St. Louis, the Missouri seemingly changes at every bend.

## The Headwaters

THREE FORKS, Mont. — From its very start, the Mighty Mo isn't the least bit shy about flexing its muscle.

Its cousin, the Mississippi, might begin as a mere trickle, but not the Missouri. By the time three famous great rivers — the Madison, the Jefferson, and the Gallatin — converge to form the Missouri in south-central Montana, it has a full head of steam.

Not that it starts with much ceremony. The only clue that you've reached the origin of the Missouri is a small sign.

And even then, you're left to wonder how explorers Lewis and Clark pinpointed the starting point of the Missouri. It's not until a defining boundary between the tributaries and the big river.

Rather, the waterways seem to gradually blend together in a meadow, fueled by mountain snow melt and the runoff from rains.

From there, the Missouri slashes through rugged terrain with snow-capped mountains in the background, tumbles over rapids

and falls, and rushes downstream with a vengeance.

Every place the whitewater river pauses to catch its breath, fishermen will tell you, there is a chance of catching trout.

"I doubt if this stretch of the river has changed a whole lot since Lewis and Clark first explored it in 1805," said Bud Lilly, one of the pioneers of modern-day fly fishing. "They wrote in their journals about how beautiful this area was and how many trout they saw."

"Well, it still has the beautiful scenery and it still holds plenty of trout."

Oh, some things have changed since the days of Lewis and Clark. Back in the early 1800s, cutthroat trout dominated the Montana stretch of the river. Today, rainbows and browns are more numerous, virtually crowding out the native species.

And man has left his imprint on the river, tearing out many of the cottonwood trees that once lined the banks.

But try as he might, man hasn't been able to tame the Missouri River here. The Mighty Mo still runs cool and clear, meanders where it wants, and provides outstanding trout fishing. It varies from a narrow trout stream to a wide river, flowing through everything from peaceful meadows to mountain valleys.

"I still remember the stories my relatives used to tell about the trout fishing on the Missouri right after World War II," said Lilly, 74, who guided and owned a fly shop for years before retiring in 1995. "They lived in Trident, a little town along the river, and they could go right out their front door and catch rainbows and browns 8 and 9 pounds."

Fish of that size aren't necessarily a thing of the past, though they certainly aren't as numerous as they once were. But in the stretch of the Missouri between Helena and Great Falls, Mont., big trout are still landed.

And though the headwaters portion of the

river isn't as consistent in the fishing it produces, it too can shine.

Lilly has caught his share of trout up and down the river. Like many other Western fishermen, he finds success by trying to "match the hatch."

The river is known for its large hatches of aquatic insects such as caddis flies, salmon flies and mayflies. Lilly learned long ago that the key to catching trout on the Missouri is being able to know when those hatches will occur, which imitations can be used, and where the trout will hold.

"The Missouri gets hit harder now than it did years ago," Lilly said. "But there still are stretches where you can get off to yourself and catch a lot of fish."

## North Dakota's big water

GARRISON, N.D. — Johnnie Candle pulled his fishing boat around a bend on giant Lake Sakakawea and pointed out a North Dakota rarity.

"Four boats fishing the same stretch of water — that's a North Dakota crowd," Candle joked. "You can go miles on this lake without seeing another fisherman."

Get the idea? Lake Sakakawea, which is a flooded section of the Missouri River, provides fishermen plenty of elbow room.

To give you an idea, it is 178 miles long, covers 368,000 acres, has 1,300 miles of shoreline and averages between 2 and 3 miles in width.

To put that in perspective, Missouri's biggest reservoir, Truman, covers 55,600 acres.

Yes, Sakakawea has a lot of water. And a lot of room for fish to roam.

But that doesn't mean those fish are hard to come by. Since it was built in the mid 1950s for flood control, Sakakawea has been known as one of the nation's top walleye fisheries.

By the 1980s, tales of stringers of 8- and 9-pound walleyes being caught at Lake Sakakawea lured fishermen from near and far.

The fishing went downhill during the drought years of the late '80s and early '90s, when water levels dropped and the population of smelt, the walleyes' prime food base, crashed.

But the good times have returned. The smelt are back... and so are the walleyes.

That's why we're stopped here on the second leg of our trip. Nothing defines North Dakota fishing more than Sakakawea, the second dammed section of the Missouri River.

(Fort Peck Reservoir in Montana is the first.)

Some 650 miles from the Missouri River headwaters, it offers a strikingly different feel, both in terms of the landscape and the fishing.

Set in the North Dakota Badlands, the huge reservoir has a shoreline dominated by towering buttes, cliffs and rocky outcroppings.

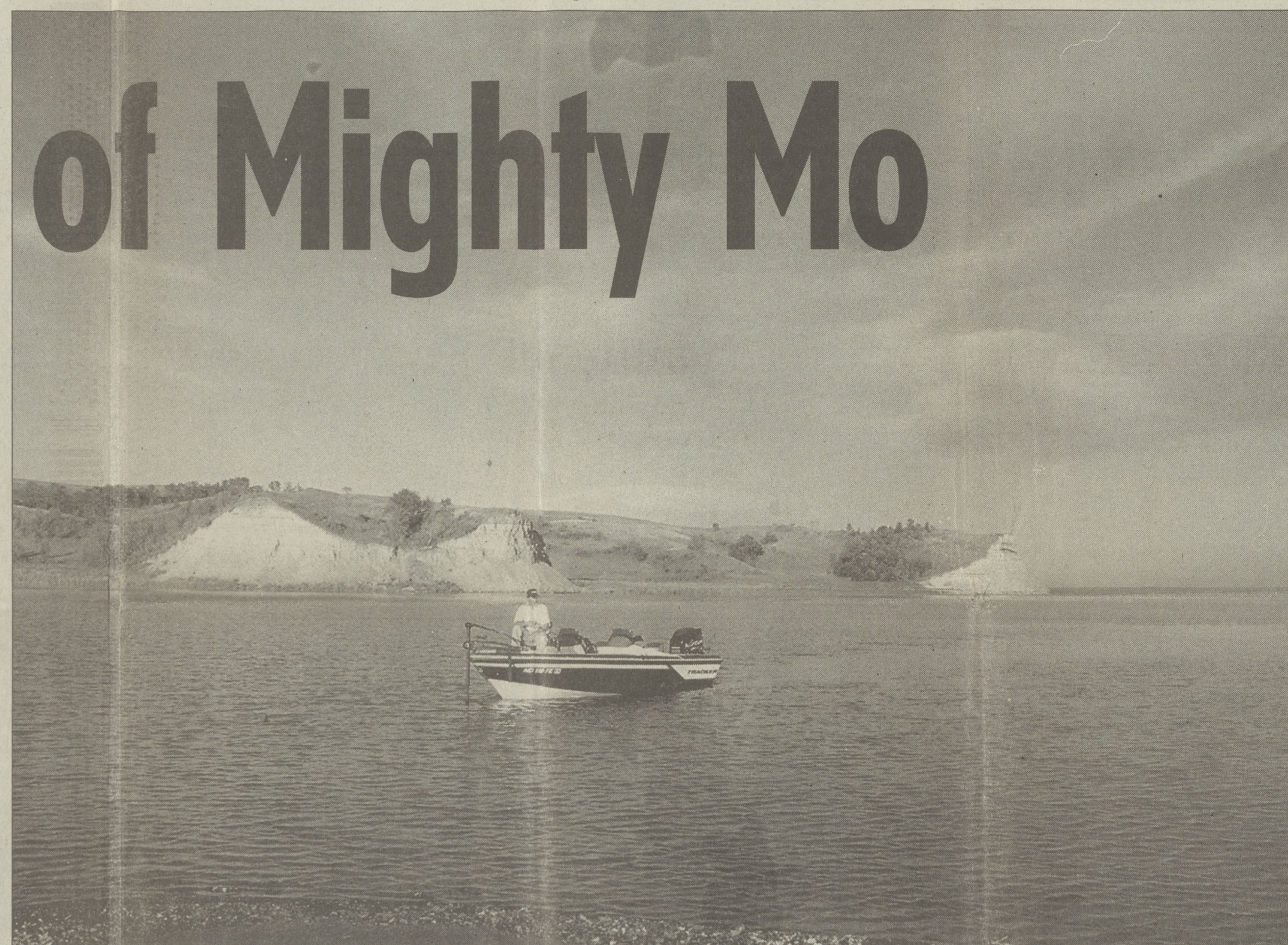
And it's remote. You can travel miles on the water and not see signs of civilization. What you will see is plenty of fish, namely walleyes.

"Our walleyes are bigger now than they've been since the early '80s," said Jeff Hendrickson, a fisheries biologist for the North Dakota Game and Fish Department. "We have a lot of fish 5 and 6 pounds. And that's not something you see all that often."

Candle knows just how special Sakakawea can be. After four years of guiding out of his in-laws' Indian Hills Resort, he is known as one of the top walleye fishermen on the lake.

"The biggest walleye I've ever caught on this lake came about a year ago to this date," Candle said during a recent trip. "It was on Fourth of July weekend and we were trolling with bottom bouncers and spinners."

"We caught 10 walleyes that day, all over 23 inches. The big one was 29 inches, which



## ◀ The North Dakota stretch

- RIVER MILES IN STATE: 350.
- COMPLEXION: North Dakota's stretch of the Missouri River is dominated by Lake Sakakawea, which extends for 178 miles. The giant reservoir is set in the North Dakota Badlands, with towering buttes and rocky outcroppings along the banks.
- FISHING: The walleye is king. But other northern species such as the northern pike and smallmouth bass also provide activity. Fishermen at Sakakawea often find fish along main-lake points and dropoffs.
- DID YOU KNOW...? Lake Sakakawea was named after Sacagawea, an Indian guide who helped Lewis and Clark on their journey to explore the Missouri River and the Dakotas.

Guide Johnnie Candle has no trouble finding elbow room when he fishes immense Lake Sakakawea, a flooded stretch of the Missouri River in North Dakota.

## ▶ The Missouri stretch

- RIVER MILES IN STATE: 498.
- COMPLEXION: The river has plenty of flow and plenty of sediment by the time it dumps into the Mississippi near St. Louis. Because the entire stretch in Missouri was channelized to facilitate barge traffic, the river has lost much of its natural look. Many islands, chutes and backwater areas have disappeared.
- FISHING: Despite its lack of habitat, the Missouri River in this stretch continues to produce impressive catfish. Flatheads weighing more than 20 pounds are common in many stretches. Big channel and blue catfish also can be found.
- DID YOU KNOW...? The Missouri state record for white crappies came from an unlikely spot: the Missouri River. The 4-pound, 5-ounce fish was caught near Sibley, Mo., by Homer Peek in 1981.

Steve Shuty (below) knows that the stretch of Missouri River that flows through the Kansas City area is full of big catfish.

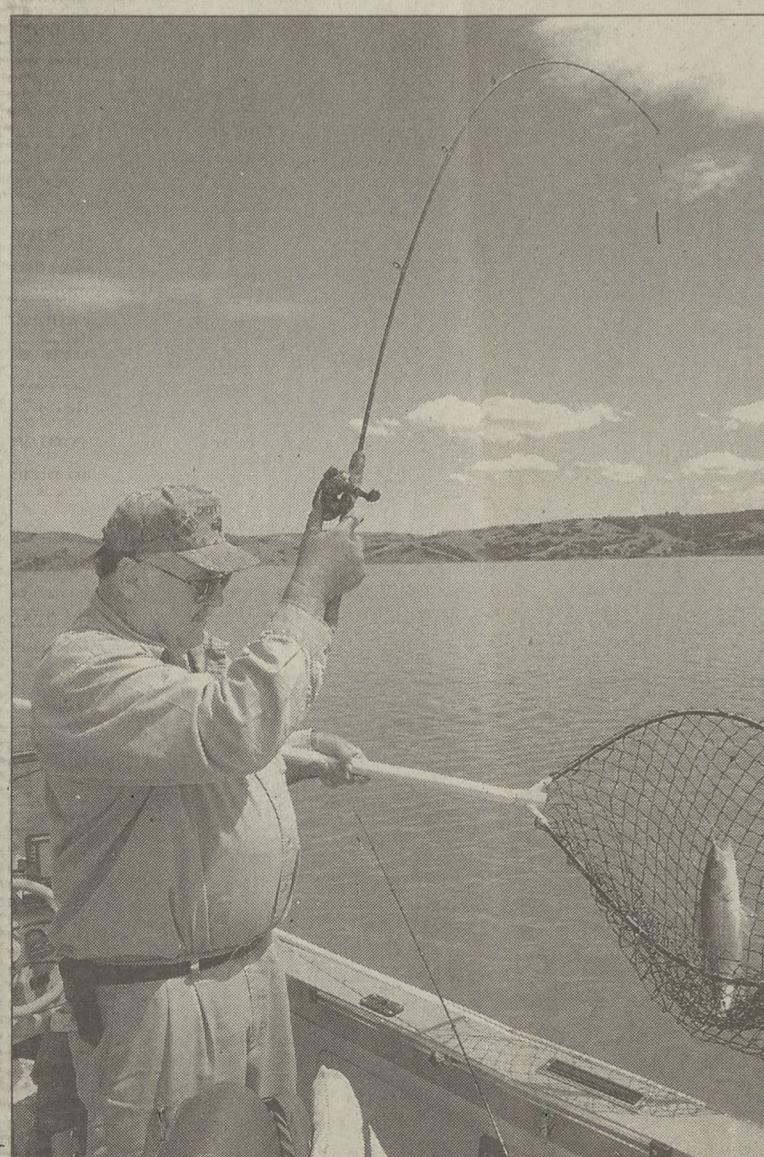
## ▶ The Montana stretch

- RIVER MILES IN STATE: 730.
- COMPLEXION: The Missouri starts near Three Forks, where the Madison, Jefferson and Gallatin rivers join. The river begins as a trout stream, cutting through a mountainous region. But as it winds its way into northeastern Montana, it reaches its first major reservoir, Fort Peck.

■ FISHING: Most of Montana's stretch is trout water. The portion between Helena and Great Falls is especially well-known for its big rainbows and browns. Fort Peck Reservoir also is known for its big walleyes.

■ DID YOU KNOW...? In Montana, the Missouri River actually flows north from its origin before it reaches the Great Falls area and starts heading east.

The Missouri River, a trout stream? It is at its headwaters in Montana. Bud Lilly (right) used his fly rod to lure rainbows at the river's origin.



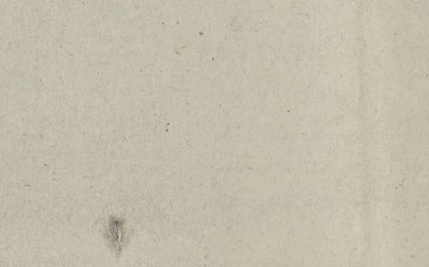
## ◀ The South Dakota stretch

- RIVER MILES IN STATE: 497.
- COMPLEXION: South Dakota is the reservoir state. Dams built on the Missouri River for flood control formed four giant reservoirs: Lake Oahe, Lake Sharpe, Lake Francis Case and Lewis and Clark Lake. The water is clear and the scenery is striking. The lakes are nestled in hill country, with a rolling landscape for as far as the eye can see.

■ FISHING: This is walleye country. Once the reservoirs were built in the 1950s and 1960s, walleyes quickly adapted to the clear water and rocky structure. If you're looking for a bigger tug, trophy northern pike and chinook salmon also are waiting.

■ DID YOU KNOW...? Lake Oahe alone has 2,250 miles of shoreline, which rivals California's Pacific shoreline.

The walleye is king in South Dakota. Guide Cherokee Hight (left) landed one of the golden fish on Lake Oahe.



would have gone at least nine pounds.

"You're not going to do that well every time out. But it shows that there are some big fish in here."

Candle fishes for those walleyes in a variety of ways. For example, he will slowly troll with bottom-bouncers and spinners off main-lake points or vertically jig with a heavy lead head and a minnow. But he isn't reluctant to go to the middle of the lake and troll with deep-running crankbaits, either.

He may look a bit out of place in that deep water, but he knows from his time spent on Lake Erie in Ohio, where he grew up, that some of the lake's biggest walleyes will suspend in that water.

"You might be in 60, 70 feet of water but the walleyes are only 20 feet down," Candle said. "They'll use that open water, as long as there's baitfish near by."

## South Dakota's reservoirs

PIERRE, S.D. — Cherokee Hight doesn't have to travel to North Dakota to find a wide spot in the Missouri River.

About 300 miles from Lake Sakakawea, he has plenty of big water just out the back door of his home in Pierre. In the 1950s and 1960s, when the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers dammed the Missouri River in several spots in South Dakota for flood control, it created giant fishing holes in the process.

Take a look:

■ Lake Oahe, which extends from Pierre north to Bismarck, N.D., is 231 miles long and covers 350,000 acres.

■ Lake Sharpe, on the other side of the dam from Oahe, is 80 miles long and covers 61,000 acres.

■ Lake Francis Case, which flows through south-central South Dakota, is 107 miles long and covers 102,000 acres.

■ Lewis and Clark Lake, on the Nebraska border, is 25 miles long and covers 31,400 acres.

Add it up and you have a lot of fishing water. The type of fishing water that can bring a state fame, especially when walleyes are thrown in to the mix.

"They just took off in these reservoirs," said Hight, who runs Cherokee Charters, a fishing guide service based in Pierre. "They have everything they need in these big bodies of water — good structure, good gravelly and rocky areas for habitat, and in most years,

waterway isn't looked at as an embarrassment. On both the Iowa and Nebraska sides of the metro area, the river is considered a playground.

Check out the scene on a recent weekend. A marina on the Iowa side was bustling with activity, with big powerboats coming and going constantly. Fishermen sat on buckets along the shoreline, hunched over their fishing rods and waiting for a tug. And a campground overlooking the banks on the Nebraska side was full, with campers cleaning their day's catch or sitting by campfires.

Leonard Dandurand was one of those. As he sat on a bucket on a mud bank on the Iowa side, he talked about the river's many riches.

"This river is the only place I fish," Dandurand said as he wiped the sweat from his brow. "I've been coming here since 1964, and I've never wanted to go anywhere else."

"This old river has more fish in it than you'd think. You never know what you're going to catch when you throw your line in."

Big flathead catfish, saugers, drum, carp, crappies, skipjacks — they all bite the night crawlers Dandurand baits his hooks with.

"I like to fish in these eddies along the bank. That's where the fish will do their feeding," Dandurand said. "I caught a 31-pound flathead in a place like this four years ago."

Dandurand paused and smiled.

"But that's just a baby," he said. "There's a lot bigger catfish in this old river."

And really, that's what a lot of people are after — the action.

The river in farm country

SIoux CITY, Iowa — By the time the Missouri River gets to Sioux City, Iowa, it doesn't look a lot different than it does in Missouri.

It's the Muddy Mo — a wide, brown, swift river.

We're 303 miles from the previous stop on our fishing trip, Lake Oahe in South Dakota. But it seems worlds apart.

No more clear water, no more walleyes, no more breathtaking scenery.

The Sioux City area often is looked upon as the river's dividing point, the spot where it changes from a scenic, clear waterway to a straight navigation channel.

When the Army Corps of Engineers channelized (straightening into a navigation canal) a 734-mile portion of the river, it started in the Sioux City area.

What you see here is what you get in Kansas City. The only difference: In Sioux City, that

"I always tell people that you can find solitude under the skyscrapers on our stretch of the Missouri," Allman said. "Because of the lack of access, there just aren't many people fishing the urban stretch."

There has been talk about either state or city governments taking on projects to build urban boat ramps, but so far nothing has happened.

That's a shame, Allman said. He is convinced there are plenty of fish residing in the shadows of the skyscrapers.

"The area just downstream from Kansas City has one of the most impressive populations of channel catfish of anywhere on the river (in Missouri)," Allman said.

Steve Shuty and Jim Pratt of Kansas City aren't surprised. For years, they have been launching their boat at the nearest public access to Kansas City, English Landing Park in Parkville, and running trotlines in the area. What they've found has convinced them the old river still has plenty of life in it.

Consider a sultry summer weekend last year. As they ran their lines baited with goldfish and crawlers, they wrestled a 45-pound flathead, a 40-pound blue cat, and two others that weighed 20 to 25 pounds into their boat. They also caught and released a dozen big channel cats.

"Most people drive over this river and see how muddy it is, and they wouldn't dream that it could still hold big fish," Shuty said. "They think it's just a polluted ditch."

"But the fish we catch in here are all in great shape. Their bellies are bulging and they fight hard."

The final leg

Don't be misled. That muddy river you cross each morning on your way to work in Kansas City might not look like much of a fishing hole. But it is teeming with big catfish, some of them possibly of legendary proportions.

Good luck in getting to them, though. In an urban area where the waterfront is dominated by industrial development, access is sorely lacking.

In contrast to Sioux City, some 300 miles up the road, you won't find marinas, campgrounds or even public boat ramps along Kansas City's banks.

What you will find is a river that goes unused, according to Jake Allman, a Missouri Department of Conservation fisheries biologist.

◀ The Iowa-Nebraska stretch

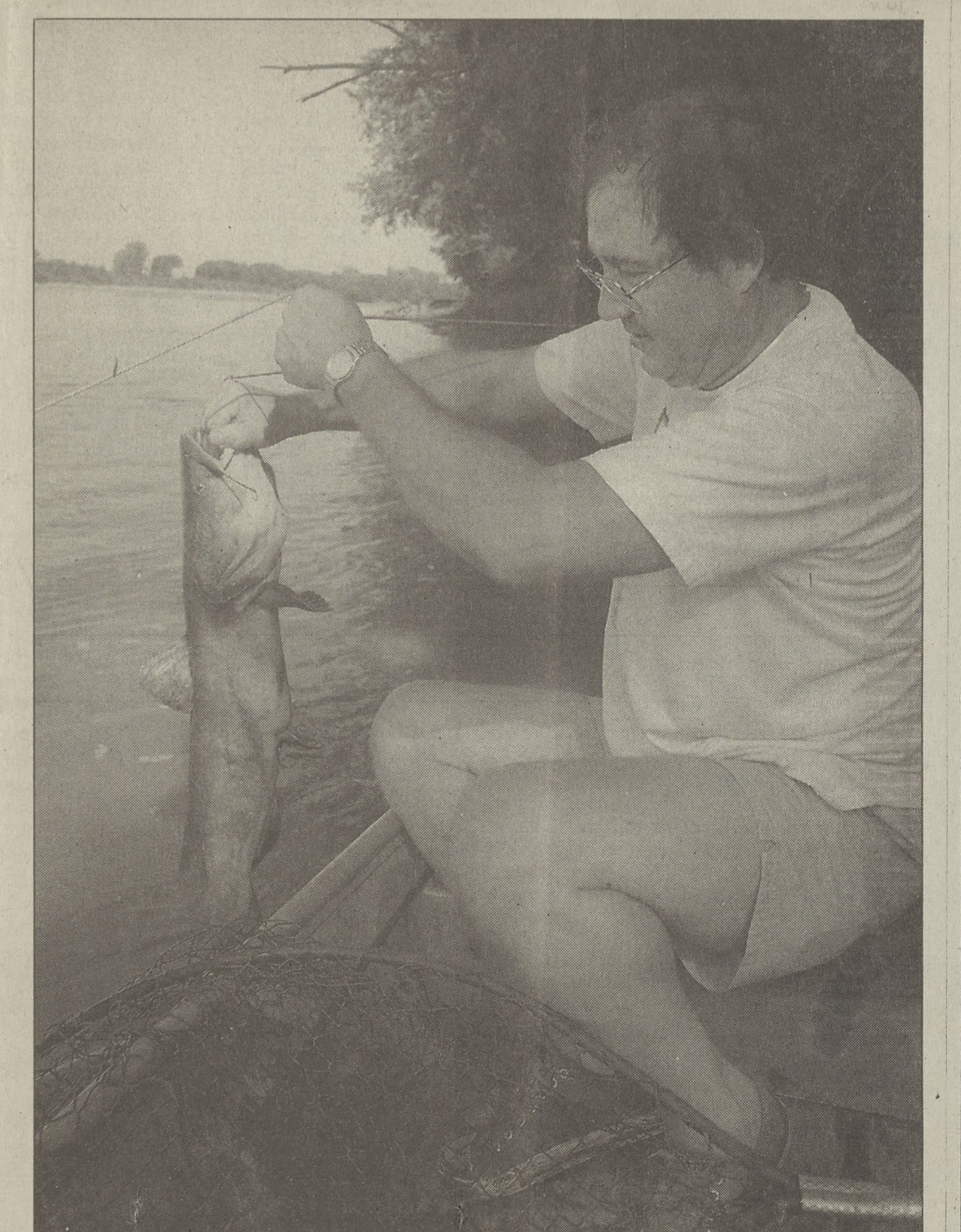
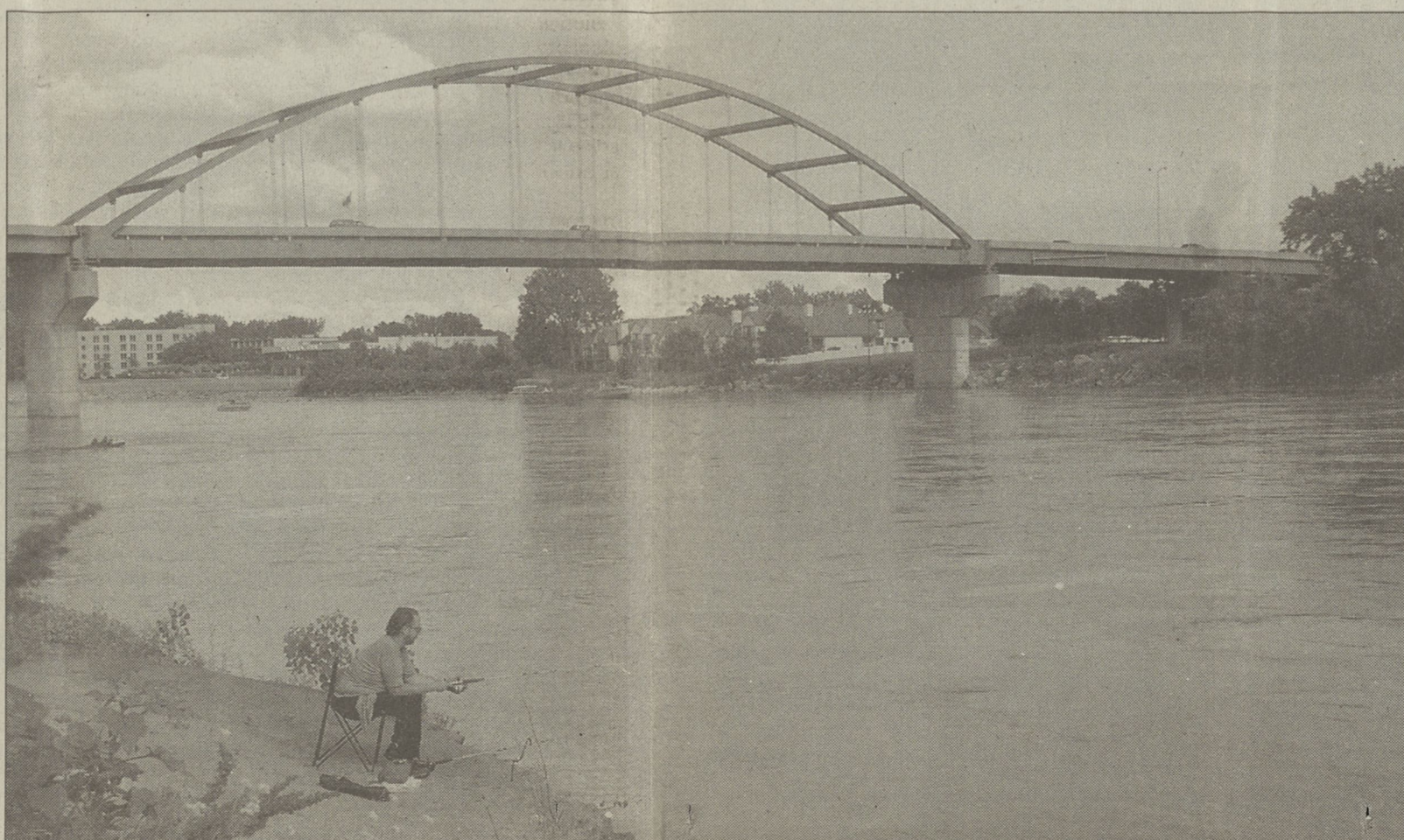
- RIVER MILES IN STATE: 266.
- COMPLEXION: Near Sioux City, the river starts living up to its nickname, "the Big Muddy." That's where the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers began straightening and channelizing the river to allow for navigation. The river here is wide, swift and muddy.
- FISHING: This is catfish country. The river is filled with big flatheads and channels. Fishermen also land saugers, crappies, drum, carp and sturgeon.

■ DID YOU KNOW...? One of the biggest saugers ever caught in the nation, an 8-pound, 5-ounce fish, was caught near Niobrara on the Nebraska side of the river in 1961. That fish stands as a Nebraska state record.

Leonard Dandurand (left) has plenty of water to fish when he tosses his lines into the stretch of Missouri River that flows through Sioux City, Iowa.

Battle lines are being drawn for control of the Missouri River.

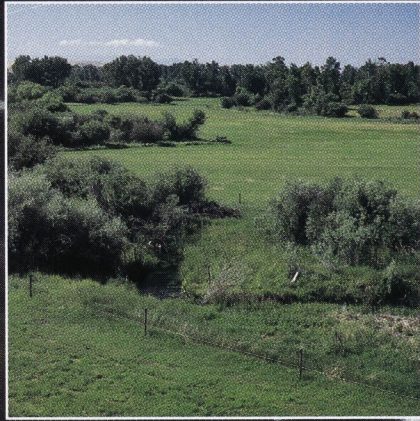
Outdoors, C-12





# MONTANA MIR

RESTORING  
OUR RIVERS  
AND STREAMS



# ACLES

STORY & PHOTOS  
BY GEORGE OCHENSKI

THE WATER EXPLODED AS AN ENORMOUS, HOOK-jawed brown trout smashed the rubber-legged grasshopper and rocketed upward into the overhanging willows. My leader tangled and snapped like a hair as the huge fish rushed back to his deep hole under the bank. The whole episode was over in seconds, leaving me gaping and slack-jawed in the hot, midday sun.

"You had him. You had the big boy," said my companion, Montana fishing legend Bud Lilly. "That one mighta gone twenty-five inches."

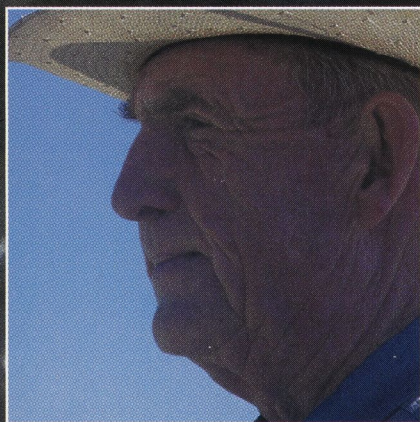
I didn't doubt it. The red-spotted, yellow-bronze giant filled the gap between the water and the willows in the microseconds of his heart-stopping leap to freedom. "Smart fish, heading into the willows like that," I noted, reeling in my now flyless line.

"Sure," Bud laughed. "That's why he's so darn big."

We were a few miles from Three Forks, home of Bud's "Anglers' Retreat" lodge, fishing a spring creek that didn't exist four years ago. It was packed with big, fast, fully wild trout living in a channel I could easily have spanned with the length of my nine-foot rod.

"Over the history of the creek, this was badly trampled," Bud recalled. "Cows eventually turned it into a silted slough. But now, four years after the restoration work began—well, you can see for yourself." Squinting in the sun, he pointed to nearly two miles of productive stream lacing the hayfields. "Besides the fish, there are resident bald eagles, kingfishers, herons, and river otters. It's a miracle."

*Bud Lilly, a big supporter of stream restoration and natural fish reproduction, catches a big brown in Cress Springs. Note how little fencing is needed to maintain a healthy fishery in a productive pasture*



Bud was right, it is a miracle—one that is occurring all over Montana as landowners, conservationists, anglers, and agencies work together to restore Montana's rivers and streams. "This is what should be getting done instead of hatcheries," said Uncle Marshall, owner of the ranch through which this spring-fed stream flows. "Before the work, they only found two little browns and a couple small brookies. Now it's full of fish that are spawning naturally and they're real healthy."

Healthy indeed, I think, recalling the toothy monster that took my hopper as a souvenir.

"Pretty much all that was there were leeches and crawdads when we started," said an obviously proud Becky Garland. She and her husband Rich Thumma, whom she calls "a stream artist with a backhoe," own and operate Streamworks. "We did most of the work over three winters, when the ground was firmed up. The channel was so wide and yucky we had to let it dry out and then do it again. Finally we narrowed it so the water would move faster, created the deep holes, and put in the logs and willows to stabilize the banks."

Garland has every reason to be proud. Bud and I caught and released two dozen hard-fighting trout in a couple hundred yards of that stream. The smallest was eight inches, while the largest—well, the big one always gets away. More than 150 cottonwood logs are embedded in the banks, reinforcing every bend and creating cover for the deep holes where the large trout lie.

"Once the habitat was there," said Garland, "the fish just came up from the Gallatin River, about two and a half miles away."

"It's true—if you build it, they will come," said Dave Decker, who owns the Complete Fly Fisher near Wise River on the beautiful Big Hole River. Decker broke into a smile as he placed his hands in the cold, clear water of the gently gurgling stream he helped design and construct in 1984. "It used to be a swamp, part of the 'Wise River Delta'," Decker recalled. He suddenly stopped talking as a deep "kabloonk" signaled the rise of a very large trout taking an insect off the smooth surface of the pellucid stream. "Hear that? Oh yeah, they're in here all the time, but in the fall, when the big browns are spawning, you can almost walk across their backs."

Decker said this stream was built for spawning, not fishing. "Building a spawning stream was a new concept. We did the research, then designed the stream. You need the right temperatures, the right size gravels, and sufficient flow to keep the spawning beds aerated and clean. Rainbows like finer pebbles, browns slightly larger ones," he said, forming a circle with his fingers. "So we built a conveyor on a truck and put different size gravel in different places and it worked. We finished this thing in August of '85. By October, I counted 800 browns in there. Now, browns, rainbows, and cutthroats all spawn in this one little stream, while grayling use the pond above."



*Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt praised Montana's cooperative restoration project on the Blackfoot River as a model for the nation, then waded in with outfitter Paul Roos to sample the fishing*

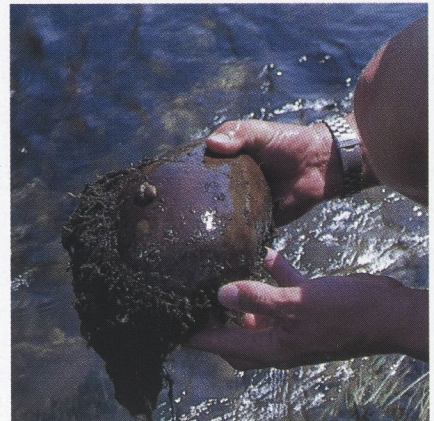


According to Decker, the importance of such an effort cannot be underestimated. He should know. "My guides and I are on this river almost every day. There is no doubt that the Big Hole has benefited tremendously from the recruitment provided by this one tributary. We are getting healthy, wild fish, genetically adapted for this river...something no hatchery could ever provide."

Hal Harper, a twenty-five-year veteran legislator and avid fly fisher, agrees. In 1989 he sponsored legislation to provide state funding for exactly such projects with his River Restoration Act. "The drought of 1988 was bad," recalled Harper. "Everybody in the state, and even guides from out of state, came to the Missouri to fish below the dams. It was obvious so much pressure on so little water was eventually going to destroy the resource. So we set out to restore more miles of rivers where wild trout could naturally reproduce."

When Harper's bill ran into trouble during floor debate, it was saved by Republican Bob Marks, then Speaker of the House. "When environmentalists come up with an idea, it's just natural that cattlemen are suspicious, and vice-versa," recalled Marks, who owns a Clancy-area ranch through which mining-damaged Prickly Pear Creek flows. When engineers first told him how they planned to restore the creek, Marks didn't think it would work. "Well," he admitted, "it did work.

ABOVE: *Replanting willows helps stabilize the banks of the Missouri River near Dearborn*  
 RIGHT: *Fish cafeteria: abundant macroinvertebrates indicates good health in a stream*



And it's still working. There are meanders and cover, rocks, logs, holes, and riffles for the fish. Almost two miles of pretty poor stream was restored to good fishing." Thanks to Marks, the Montana Legislature adopted Harper's idea and funded a modest river restoration effort.

The program was slow getting out of the blocks, but early results were encouraging. During the 1995 legislative session, Livingston Democrat Bob Raney teamed up with Republican ranchers Larry Grinde and Lorents Grosfield to expand the efforts, with their Future Fisheries Improvement Act. "When Raney approached me, I was skeptical," admitted Grinde. "But my God,



RIGHT: Steve Gerdes placed a "drop structure" of woody debris in South Boulder Creek to create falls and pools—perfect fish habitat



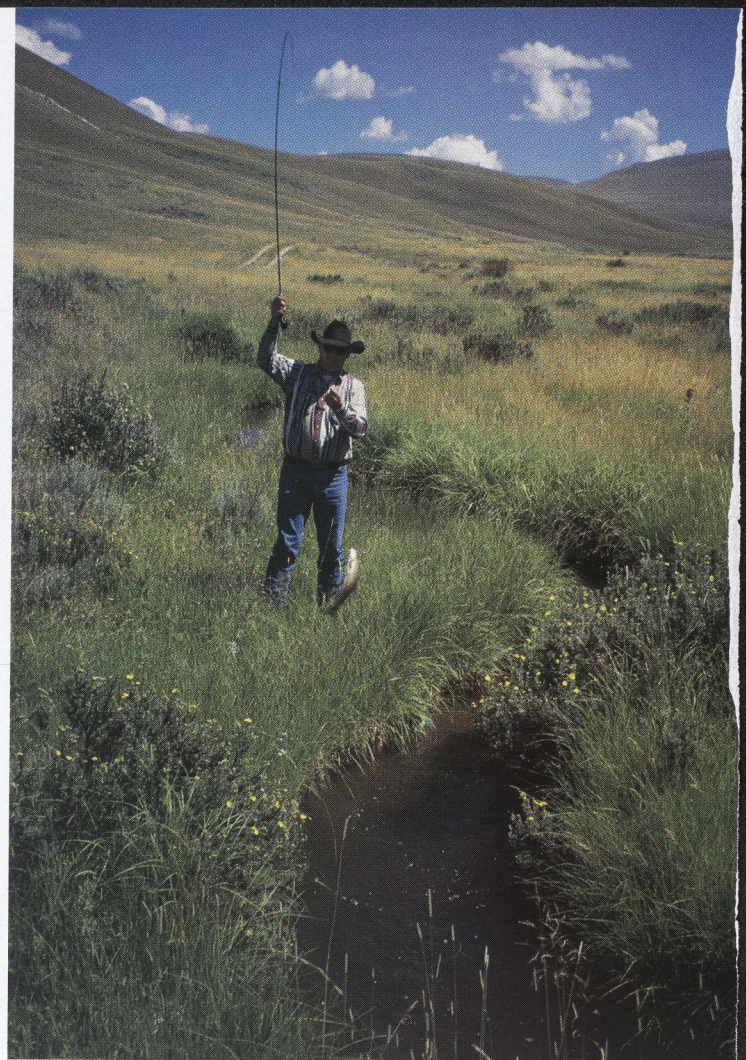
FAR RIGHT: It took Mataador Ranch foreman Ray Marxer longer to catch a grasshopper than it did to catch a plump cutthroat from this tiny stream

what a concept: clean up an area where fish can live, give 'em a place to mate, and we have new fish. And the government doesn't control it. Very basic, very sound."

Determined to put serious money into saving streams, Raney and Grinde looked at the millions being spent on hatcheries compared to the thousands for restoration. "It seemed appropriate to take some of that hatchery building money for habitat," said Raney. The measure found significant support among legislators, but the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks vigorously opposed the re-direction of hatchery dollars. In the end, the legislature prevailed, and sent nearly \$2.5 million toward restoration activities. The late Dick Knox, then Chair of the House Natural Resources Committee, added a citizen's review panel on which ranchers, farmers, landowners, and water users were well represented. "Fact is, most of the small spawning streams are on private land," noted Raney. "We knew the program wouldn't fly if ranchers and farmers didn't buy into it. Our goal was to get the work done cost-effectively without going through a lot of bureaucracy. Their practical experience has been extremely valuable."

"After Future Fisheries passed, money really started to flow," said Stan Bradshaw, of the Blackfoot Chapter of Trout Unlimited. Efforts on the Blackfoot River are Montana's prime example for basin-wide restoration activities. Hundred of volunteers and dozens of organizations have worked together to clean up mining wastes in the headwaters and rebuild spawning tributaries. "Through 1994 most activities occurred through cooperative efforts between private landowners, government grants, and private foundations," continued Bradshaw. "Luckily, just about the time foundation money began to dry up, Future Fisheries became available and now provides the lion's share of funds."

Montana's efforts have not gone unnoticed. When Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt came to the banks of the Blackfoot River this past summer to



announce the listing of the bull trout as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act, he spent most of his speech praising restoration efforts: "The reason I came here to the confluence of the Clearwater and Blackfoot rivers, is because I wanted to find that one place in the West that told the most powerful story about restoration. In six years of traveling to every corner of the West, I haven't seen anything as powerful as the message here—how you've come together, talk together, work together. I will tell people wherever I go that if they want to see a model of what's possible, they ought to come up here and look and listen and learn."

I WAS LISTENING...BUT ALL I HEARD WERE A MILLION HUNGRY mosquitoes humming through the dim light as fisheries biologist Steve Gerdes pointed out stacks of logs carefully placed in tiny South Boulder Creek near Maxville. "People ask me if the Forest Service doesn't have anything better to do than throw logs in the stream," laughed Gerdes. "But since firewood cutters took the trees that would have fallen in, we have to replace the 'woody debris' which is a natural part of a healthy forested stream."

Gerdes believes in these small, cost-effective restoration techniques: "On stable stream types, these projects require almost no engineering. We put fifty trees into a mile and a half of stream for about \$2,000 total cost. In

return we get new holes, protective cover, food for insects, and gravel depositions for cutthroat and bull trout spawning." As if on cue, a fully-mature, six-inch cutthroat darted from under one of Gerdes' logs, smacked a fly, and disappeared into the shadows. "People may laugh, but projects like this will definitely make a difference in the survival of these species."

SOMETIMES STREAM RESTORATION HAS MORE TO DO WITH LAND management than changing the stream. At the age of twenty, Ray Marxer was managing an 80,000-acre grazing unit on the quarter-million-acre Matador Ranch near Dillon. Twenty-four years later, this sincere, soft-spoken man runs 6,000 cow-calf pairs on one of the last truly large working ranches in Montana.

It is a test ground for long-term, large-scale, experimental grazing techniques. "We began planning restoration management in '75. Our first year of rotation was 1976," Ray explained. Their system operates by intensively grazing pastures the first year, grazing in the second year only after the seed heads appear, and completely resting the pasture for the third year. The theory is that grazing cows will press seeds and organic matter into the earth in the second year, which then gets a "rest year" to grow, ultimately leading to healthier, more stable pastures. "It's not rocket science, but it is art," noted Ray. "And it's paying off." The herd size is up, the weaning weights are up, and feed costs are down.

He cracked a smile beneath the well-worn cowboy hat: "The great thing is, I got to watch it all happen." Ray estimates he's put 100,000 miles on the saddle he bought new in 1979, and 30,000 miles of dirt-road travel a year on his pickup, to monitor and direct this giant experiment carried out on 380 sections of bench and high uplands.

The scale is immense. Surrounded by vast Montana space, we rumbled down a rutted dirt road somewhere near Sage Creek. Red-tailed hawks floated above a far ridge, their "kreeyaw" piercing the clean air of this huge, treeless bowl at 6,700 feet elevation. It was surprisingly easy to imagine tipis on the many rock rings hidden in the long grass. Improbably, and almost imperceptibly, a thin ribbon of clear water winds through the glacial cobble of this high alpine meadow. Nebraska sedge armors the banks, the long, slightly greener grasses the only sign there might be water.

Reaching into the back of the truck, Ray pulled out an old spring-steel telescoping fly rod that would do any fishing museum proud. "It was my granddad's," he said, extending it to full length. The steel is shiny from use, eyes bent, ancient reel threaded with monofilament, split shot, and a single, bare hook. "Now, if I could just catch one of these hoppers."

It took him longer to catch a grasshopper than the first fish. A fat fourteen-inch cutthroat made the old

steel rod dance in the sun.

"These fish, God put 'em here," said Ray, smiling hugely as he released the trout back into the foot-deep water. "We're doing what we can to keep 'em here." In the next fifteen minutes, he caught three more. Although the stream was really too narrow for flyfishing, I took a few on my artificial hopper when I managed to get it through the overhanging grasses. So many large, healthy native cutthroats in so little water was astounding.

For the rest of the day we crossed endless meadows split by healthy streams. It was early evening and 183 miles later when we finally arrived back at ranch headquarters. "The most important thing for this state is having people take responsibility for the land and ownership in its management," Ray concluded as we said goodbye.

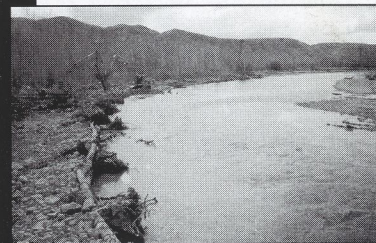
He is right. Throughout the state Montanans are "taking responsibility for the land" as we restore drainages to provide cleaner water and healthy wild trout. From the legislators who approve the funding to the volunteers who plant the willows, the result of exercising ownership in the management of our rivers and streams creates "Montana Miracles" for us all. **M**

GEORGE OCHENSKI is an alpinist, writer, and lobbyist who makes his home in Helena.

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