

## CHINOOK SALMON FISH HEALTH CHALLENGES

James Peterson, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, 4801 Giant Springs Road,  
Great Falls, MT 59405, jipeterson@mt.gov

Managing Chinook salmon fisheries in the mid-Missouri River reservoirs of Montana, North Dakota and South Dakota presents significant fish health challenges for fisheries managers. Disease considerations associated with Pacific Chinook salmon stocks have prevented fisheries managers from using salmon from the Pacific northwest as a source of salmon for the Missouri River reservoirs. Chinook salmon from the Great Lakes represented less disease risk and were selected for stocking into the Missouri River reservoirs. However, fish pathogens, such as *Renibacterium salmoninarum*, the bacteria responsible for bacterial kidney disease, are also a concern with the Great Lakes fish, and fisheries managers must evaluate this risk when considering the benefits Chinook salmon bring to the fisheries of these reservoirs. Fish health issues in the Great Lakes in the early 1980s made importation of Chinook salmon into Montana very difficult. Given changes in laws and regulations, importation of salmon into Montana from the Great Lakes would be much more difficult today. Annual spawning, egg distribution and fish stocking operations depend on results of annual health testing conducted during spawning. Fish health inspections have not detected pathogens of concern in Missouri River Chinook salmon populations, indicating these fish are among the most pathogen-free stocks in the United States. However, detection of specific pathogens of concern may hinder future imports of salmon into any of the three states, or into any of the reservoirs.