

## DISTRIBUTION AND STATUS OF FISHES IN MONTANA PRAIRIE STREAMS <sup>AFS</sup>

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We sampled fish on 87 occasions at 67 sites in 63, 2<sup>nd</sup> through 6<sup>th</sup>-order streams in the plains ecoregions of Montana during the summers of 1999 - 2001 to assess the ichthyofauna of the area. Flowing water, standing water, and dry channel were present during 66, 19 and 2 sampling occasions, respectively. Fish were present at all except two sites with water. Over 35,000 fish representing 26 native and 11 introduced species, and 9 families were captured. Native species were numerically dominant, comprising 87 percent of all individuals captured. Only two species were captured at more than 50 percent of sites: white sucker (76% of sites) and fathead minnow (75%). We assessed the conservation status of 17 native species by calculating the percentage of our sites where each species occurred, by comparing the overlap in our collections to the records in the Montana Rivers Information System (MRIS) database, and by calculating the percentage of States or Provinces where each species was considered vulnerable to extirpation. Flathead chub, lake chub, and western silvery minnow should be considered for addition to the species on the review list, and brook stickleback, northern redbelly dace, northern redbelly dace x finescale dace, and pearl dace may be more rare than currently thought. The "species on review" (SU) status of brassy minnow, creek chub, Iowa darter, and plains minnow was appropriate, as was the demonstrably secure (S5) status of fathead minnow, longnose dace, sand shiner, shorthead redhorse, stonecat, and white sucker. Sites with northern pike had fewer native species than sites where northern pike were absent (Mann-Whitney U;  $P = 0.08$ ), and the number of native individuals was significantly and negatively related to the number of northern pike ( $P = 0.03$ ,  $r^2 = 0.29$ ).