

FISH HABITAT PROTECTION IN MONTANA – A PROUD HISTORY ^{APS}

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Although Montana's fish and game agency has been in existence for over 100 years, the first fishery biologist was not hired until 1947 and regional offices that included district fisheries biologists were not established until 1955. From the onset, fisheries biologists understood that big dams, water pollution, grazing, timber harvest, highway construction, and irrigation were major threats to fishery habitat. In their minds, protecting habitat was the key to preserving the wild fisheries that Montana was known for. From the beginning, Montana's habitat program was based on the premise that fish habitat in streams consisted of three essential elements: water quantity; water quality; and physical habitat features including the bed, banks, riparian areas, and floodplain. Armed with the convictions that Montana's fishery resources were worth fighting for and the wherewithal to get things done, these early biologists helped establish many of the habitat protection tools that we rely on today.