

## DISTRIBUTION OF WHIRLING DISEASE IN MONTANA<sup>AFS</sup>

Frederick A. Nelson  
Fisheries Division, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks  
Bozeman, MT 59717

The detection of whirling disease (WD), a parasitic infection of salmonids, in the Madison River, southwest Montana, in December 1994 and its subsequent link to a 90% decline in the river's wild rainbow trout, prompted a statewide testing program to map the disease's distribution in Montana's streams, rivers, lakes, ponds and reservoirs. More than 400 sites were tested by fall 1996. Whirling disease is more widespread than anticipated; at least 42 waters in the Clark Fork, Flathead and upper Missouri drainages are infested. Testing failed to detect WD-positive waters in the Yellowstone, Kootenai and St. Mary's drainages. Whirling disease is moving downstream from known headwater outbreaks in the Missouri and Clark Fork drainages. However, within the disease's current distribution, are isolated positive sites that are surrounded by "clean" waters. Infected hatchery fish and fish-eating birds have likely contributed to the introduction and spread of WD in Montana. Other transport mechanisms are possible but unlikely.