



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

December 15, 2015

Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge
27650 B South Valley Road, Lima, MT 59739

The Nature Conservancy
32 South Ewing Street, Helena, MT 59601

USFWS Montana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office
4052 Bridger Canyon Road, Bozeman, MT 59715

Dear Partners,

You worked together over the past ten years to make important, and often controversial, on-the-ground changes to benefit Arctic grayling in the Centennial Valley. For the past 50 years, grazing, dewatering, fragmentation by impoundments, quality of overwinter habitat, and non-native fishes have been repeatedly identified as possible stressors that drive the Centennial Valley Arctic grayling population and precluded its recovery. In a relatively short amount of time you put your heads down and sought to address the issues that many had previously simply talked about.

This group prioritized Arctic grayling conservation on a Wildlife Refuge that emphasized waterfowl for most of its existence. Your successful grayling conservation measures include restoration of a stream that was impounded and channelized to benefit waterfowl but degraded and fragmented grayling spawning habitat, helping to launch research to better understand how overwinter conditions and non-native fishes affect grayling abundances, restoration of active alluvial fan dynamics to grayling streams that had been bisected and altered by roads for tens of years, and active conservation and management for instream flows to benefit Arctic grayling.

Your biggest achievement has been changing habitat dynamics in the headwaters of Red Rock Creek, which supports the vast majority of grayling spawning in the Centennial Valley. Through a series of land acquisitions, changes to water management, active stream restoration, and close work with neighbors to improve riparian grazing practices and develop creative grazing plans to offer alternative pastures, you have changed a stream that 20 years ago had a single discrete reach capable of supporting grayling spawning into one that has clean gravels and spawning fish distributed over more than 10 miles. This focused effort culminated in the Red Rock Creek Arctic grayling population recently reaching the highest recorded abundances in the past 50 years, which ultimately helped drive the decision to not list Montana Arctic grayling under the ESA.

Many of the aforementioned efforts were initially met with little fanfare but frequent criticism, harsh words, and the threat of legal action from both neighbors and segments of the public that

comprised the strongest part of your base, but were advocates for other species or land management direction. Many of these challenges and criticisms continue today. Although your path has been difficult and often thankless you continue on it because you believe in the importance of maintaining the legacy of Arctic grayling in the Centennial Valley. Today, all Montanan's owe you a debt of gratitude for doing just that.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Bruce Rich". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "B" and "R".

Bruce Rich
Fisheries Division Chief