

# **MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE AND PARKS**

## **NEWS RELEASE**

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### **GROUPS AGREE TO WESTSLOPE CUTTHROAT TROUT CONSERVATION PLAN**

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, in collaboration with several state and federal agencies and private groups, has completed an agreement to conserve and restore the westslope cutthroat trout in Montana's Columbia and upper Missouri river basins

The Conservation Agreement and Memorandum of Understanding for Westslope Cutthroat Trout in Montana, initiated by Gov. Marc Racicot at the 1996 Governor's Westslope Cutthroat Trout Workshop, is the result of more than two years of negotiations and significant participation by an independent committee of technical scientists.

"The goal of the agreement is to ensure long-term, self-sustaining populations of westslope cutthroat trout within the five major river drainages the fish historically inhabited in Montana—the Clark Fork, Kootenai, Flathead, upper Missouri, and Saskatchewan," said Ken McDonald, FWP Native Species Coordinator. "We want to maintain at least 10 populations distributed throughout these drainages with each population occupying at least 50 miles of connected habitat. This would offer Montana anglers cutthroat trout populations healthy enough to allow recreational fishing and harvest."

Signing on to the Conservation Agreement are FWP, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Montana Department of Environmental Quality, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Natural Resources

Conservation Service, Montana Chapter of the American Fisheries Society, Montana Wildlife Federation, and the Montana Westslope Cutthroat Trout Technical Committee.

Others who helped develop the plan include representatives from the Montana Stockgrowers Association, Montana Farm Bureau, Trout Unlimited, American Wildlands, Intermountain Forest Industry Association, and several private landowners, McDonald said.

McDonald said the agreement seeks to:

Protect genetically pure westslope cutthroat trout populations.

Protect some hybrid populations while determining the role these populations may play in westslope cutthroat trout restoration.

Ensure the long-term survival of westslope cutthroat trout within their native range.

Design and implement a monitoring program by 2002.

Westslope cutthroat trout, which are classified as a Species of Concern by the State of Montana and federal land management agencies, have been petitioned for listing as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. To determine if listing is warranted, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is conducting a review of the westslope cutthroat trout's status.

"The problems that could warrant a federal listing under the Endangered Species Act should be significantly reduced or eliminated through implementation of this agreement," McDonald said.

Although the Conservation Agreement was just completed, actions directed toward the conservation of westslope cutthroat trout have been underway for many years, and include restrictive fishing regulations, numerous stream and habitat restoration projects, installation of fish barriers to prevent mixing with nonnative species, and changes to land use practices such as logging and grazing

For a copy of the Conservation Agreement and Memorandum of Understanding for Westslope Cutthroat Trout in Montana, contact the FWP Fisheries Division at 406-444-2449.