



NEWS

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NEW WHIRLING DISEASE VIDEO AVAILABLE

There are signs of hope in the battle against whirling disease in trout. That's the message of a new video just released by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

"Whirling Out of Control?" is a half-hour video documenting fisheries research and management efforts under way in several Western states. It includes some of the Nation's leading experts on whirling disease and trout fisheries discussing impacts the malady has had on trout populations in the West, current research, and their outlook for the future. The disease is a national problem and there is a national cooperative research and management effort that includes Federal and state agencies, universities, and the private sector.

"Whirling Out of Control?" assesses what is known about the parasitic protozoan that causes the disease. Researchers outline several promising avenues for further field investigations. The video notes that research offers the best long-term approach to containing the disease and potentially lessening its impacts.

"One of the goals for producing this video," notes Acting Fish and Wildlife Service Director John Rogers, "was to let the angling public know there is a significant cooperative effort under way to address this disease. We don't want to raise false hopes, but the way Federal, state, and private fisheries experts and interests are pulling together on this issue is in itself encouraging."

Whirling disease is caused by an exotic micro-organism, *Myxobolus cerebralis*. It is believed that it came into the United States accidentally in 1956 in a shipment of frozen fish. Since that time the disease has been discovered in 22 states: Alabama, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Idaho, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Utah, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, and Wyoming. In many states where it has been found, it has apparently had only limited impact upon trout fisheries. In the West, however, whirling disease outbreaks in the early 1990s have had serious consequences on rainbow trout populations in the Madison River in Montana and the Colorado River in Colorado.

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The spores of *Myxobolus cerebralis*, released when infected fish die, are ingested by *Tubifex* worms, which live in mud. Inside the worm, the parasite takes on a new form, becoming capable of infecting young salmonids, especially rainbow trout, before their cartilage hardens to bone. *Myxobolus cerebralis* gets into the cartilage near a fish's organ of equilibrium and multiplies very rapidly, sometimes into the millions, pressuring the organ and causing the victim to swim erratically, losing its ability to forage or to escape predators.

Copies of the video are available for \$20 from the Whirling Disease Foundation, a non-profit organization (P.O. Box 327, Bozeman, MT 59771-0327; e-mail: whirling@mcn.net) whose mission is to raise funds for whirling disease research.

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