

Let's keep the Fort Peck Hatchery open year-round

Imagine owning a factory you could only operate for a few months of the year. The factory makes great products, and people want more of them, but you lack the funding or support to run the facility more than part-time.

That's the situation Montana faces with the new Fort Peck Multi-Species Fish Hatchery. Built in 2006, the hatchery is a high-tech aquaculture facility with enormous capacity to produce fish for stocking in ponds, lakes, and reservoirs across Montana. Unfortunately, FWP has been forced to shut it down for much of each year.

The hatchery sits southeast of Glasgow on the banks of the Missouri River below Fort Peck Dam on 100 acres leased from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The federal agency designed and built the facility, then transferred ownership to Montana. In 1999, the Montana Legislature authorized the sale of a \$5 warmwater stamp to fund the yet-to-be-built hatchery's operations. Lawmakers restricted the facility to raising certain warmwater fish and Chinook salmon, but not trout. The stamp, required of anglers who pursue warmwater fish such as walleyes and smallmouth bass in certain Montana waters, is the only source of income to run the hatchery's daily operations. The stamp covers walleye production, which runs for four months each year. During the other eight months, the hatchery sits idle, except for some Chinook salmon production.

This department definitely wants Fort Peck to continue rearing walleyes, a species that is and will continue to be the hatchery's primary focus. But we don't think it makes sense to squander the opportunity afforded by such a top-notch facility to raise other species, such as trout, during the other months. Right now, we're raising trout at our Giant Springs and Lewistown hatcheries



Walleye production will remain its top priority, but the Fort Peck Hatchery could be doing much more for Montana anglers.

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and then trucking those fish hundreds of miles for stocking in more than 100 fishing ponds and lakes in northeastern Montana. Not only is that a waste of time and gas, but by having to produce trout for the northeastern ponds, the other hatcheries don't have the capacity to produce trout for Canyon Ferry, Hauser, Holter, and other trout reservoirs elsewhere in Montana.

Another problem: Within a few years, FWP will run out of funds for even the Fort Peck Hatchery's walleye-rearing operations. Revenue from the warmwater stamp will fall short of operating expenses, requiring us to

reduce the hatchery's production of warmwater fish.

Over the past year, FWP staff have been meeting with local advisory groups, legislators, angling clubs, and others to figure out how to fund the hatchery and keep it operating. We hope that trout and walleye fans alike will eventually agree that it doesn't make sense to shut down a state-of-the-art fish-producing facility and prevent it from benefiting as many anglers as possible.

—M. Jeff Hagener,
Director, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

NATURAL WONDERS

ILLUSTRATION BY PETER GROSSHAUSER

Q. What's the best way to stay safe when hiking or camping in grizzly country?

A. Being outdoors in grizzly country is not inherently unsafe. Bear encounters are relatively rare, and they almost always result in grizzlies and humans parting ways without incident. According to bear experts, the five most important things to remember to avoid unwanted encounters or incidents: **1.** Avoid travel-

ing alone. **2.** Make lots of noise while walking. **3.** Be extra cautious in areas where bears hang out, such as berry patches. **4.** Keep your camp clean and free of food odors. **5.** Hang food and trash at least 10 feet off the ground, at least 100 feet from your sleeping area.

And let's not forget rule #6: Never hike in a huckleberry suit.

