

THE MONTANA EXPERIENCE

I questioned Howard Johnson, Chief of Fisheries Management for Montana, about that state's stocking policy. He explained that the state--with few exceptions--does not stock waters which, "will sustain natural reproduction of wild trout". Most stocked trout are fingerling or fry, placed in lakes which do not sustain a natural trout fishery. This policy has been in effect since 1974. It came about as a result of an earlier study on the Madison River which revealed that after stocking was terminated on that famous river, the fishery improved. The improvement was noted for most Montana waters after stocking ceased. Great care is taken to prevent genetic harm to a wild trout fishery. Generally, regional regulations permit the harvest of five trout with no minimum size. Based upon angler pressure against the resource, this is equivalent to between one and two trout per day in Pennsylvania. However, in contrast to the lack of special protection for most of Pennsylvania's blue ribbon streams, the majority of those in Montana have creel limits considerably lower than their stateside limit of five, and/or a limit to the number of larger size trout.

Curiously, many Montana anglers are unaware that their favorite streams are no longer stocked. Apparently the change was not highly publicized.

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