

Take advantage of Montana's family fishing access

When I was in grade school, there was a local pond nearby that my friends and I could ride our bikes to and fish. It wasn't much of a pond (mostly bullheads), but we had fun watching our red-and-white bobbers go under once in a while and just messing around along the shoreline. We dug for worms, turned over rocks, watched gulls and turtles—the fun but unremarkable things kids do when they're allowed to spend time in nature.

By the time I was in junior high school, our family had moved to a small piece of land in the country. In summer, I'd cut hay all day at the neighbor's place with their kids, and then afterward we'd all go fishing. Three or four of us—and sometimes my dad, too—would pile into a 16-foot aluminum boat with a little 3½-horsepower motor and cross a nearby lake to fish for perch and sunfish. We also had a little trout stream on our land, where my buddies and I could fish when it wasn't too muddy.

The access I had to fishing waters when I was young is what got me hooked on fishing and then other types of outdoor recreation. That's also true for many FWP employees and other people I talk to while traveling around Montana. We know that, as was the case for us, if kids have accessible places to fish, they will more likely get turned on to the joy of spending time in the natural world, and then work to conserve that world.

That is definitely something this department is committed to making happen.

For instance, FWP's Community Fishing Pond Program funds and supports community efforts to create or improve easy-access ponds where kids have a good chance of catching stocked fish. The 65 waters, like Pine Grove Family Fishing Pond outside Kalispell, are mostly west of the Divide, near Montana's population centers, but a few are in north-central and eastern parts of the state, like Home Run Pond in Glasgow. (Find the ponds on our website at fwp.mt.gov.)

In FWP's two eastern regions (Region 6, the northeast, and Region 7, the southeast), we stock another 200 fishing ponds that have public access. (Call our regional offices for guides showing loca-

tions and fish species available for each pond.)

All these pond fishing opportunities were developed with kids and families in mind. The community members, rod and gun clubs, and FWP staff who maintain and stock these waters know what it's like to see the look on a girl's or boy's face as they reel in their first 10-inch rainbow trout or largemouth bass. It's magical.

And that's just the ponds. FWP also owns and manages more than 330 fishing access sites on streams and rivers statewide. Many provide family-accessible shore fishing opportunities. (They too can be found on the department's website.)

Our department also helps kids learn about fish and angling through our Hooked on Fishing Program. Each year in 200 classrooms across the state, Montana students learn how to dissect a fish,

cast a spinning rod, tie on lures, and figure out where fish are most likely to be found on a pond or stream.

This department is here for several reasons, and a major one is to make it as easy as possible for people—young and old—to connect with the outdoors. That's the thinking that went into the FWP tagline: *The Outside Is In Us All*.

If we want our kids and grandkids to care about a healthy environment, we need to give them reasons to care, and that starts with taking them outside to enjoy and value outdoor recreation. FWP offers a ton of fishing opportunities, especially for youngsters and beginners, and I urge everyone to take advantage of what we have in this state.

The great outdoors is definitely in most Montana families, like that of my wildlife conservation colleague, Kevin Farron, regional policy manager for Backcountry Hunters & Anglers, who took the photo at left this past winter of his wife, Laura,

and daughter, Hadley, ice fishing on Salmon Lake.

It's in my family, too. I'm looking forward to taking my 11-year-old grandson, Gabe, and 10-year-old granddaughter, Dillynn, fishing as much as possible this summer. Maybe you'll see us out there. Look for a boy, a girl, and their grandpa, each with a big grin on their face.

—**Hank Worsch**, Director, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks



Catching yellow perch on Salmon Lake in the Seeley-Swan Valley.