



MONTANA FWP

The pumpkinseed sunfish is just one of many interesting (and tasty) fish species found in eastern Montana.

Fish the Prairie

I like fishing for trout as much as anyone, but having grown up in Havre I also enjoy angling for warmwater fish. My dad used to take me and my brothers fishing on Beaver Creek and the Milk River, and later in life I caught big paddlefish on the Missouri River and many nice walleyes on Fort Peck Lake, Fresno Reservoir, and Lake Elwell.

The excellent fishing in the state's eastern half may be one of Montana's greatest outdoors recreation secrets. Because the scenery there is less dramatic (and Robert Redford didn't make a movie about catfishing), Montana's warmwater fishing doesn't get the national attention that trout fishing does.

One of the great things about warmwater fish is their eating quality. Walleyes, sauger, panfish, bass, catfish, and other species taste great when filleted, breaded, and fried in oil. Another feature is their willingness to bite. Trout can be finicky, but warmwater species are often eager to consume your night crawler, spinner, or crankbait. What's more, warmwater species are often big. Paddlefish can top 100 pounds, some bigmouth buffalo weigh over 55 pounds, and the state record channel catfish is nearly 30 pounds.

Maybe what's most appealing about warmwater fishing is the

diversity of species you can hook. Coldwater streams have trout and mountain whitefish. On a warmwater reservoir like Nelson, near Malta, you can hook bigmouth buffalo, burbot, goldeye, lake whitefish, northern pike, shorthead redhorse, walleye, and a half-dozen other species. It's like an angling smorgasbord.

Some other top eastern Montana warmwater fisheries to take your family to this summer:

- *Mouth of the Milk River:* Just east of Glasgow, the Milk River runs into the Missouri River. There you can catch shovelnose sturgeon, sauger, walleyes, northern pike, and up to a dozen other overlooked species, including blue suckers.

- *Fort Peck Reservoir:* Fort Peck is nationally known for its walleyes, but the massive impoundment of the Missouri is also one of the few places in Montana to catch hard-fighting smallmouth bass. The best spots are between Rock Creek and McGuire Creek in the upper Big Dry Arm, along the face of the dam, and farther west along rocky points from Hell Creek to Devils Creek.

- *Lower Yellowstone River:* In addition to paddlefish, the lower Yellowstone is an excellent spot for channel catfish and sauger, both delicious species. The sauger fishing is good from Billings downstream to the North Dakota border, and the best channel cat fishing is downstream from Glendive.

- *Tongue River Reservoir:* This impoundment of the Tongue River gets packed with crappie anglers on Mother's Day and Memorial Day weekends, but it's usually uncrowded the rest of the year. By midsummer, the crappies go deep and are harder to find, but that's still a good time to fish for smallmouth bass, walleyes, catfish, and carp.

There are dozens of other warmwater lakes, ponds, and rivers in eastern Montana that have excellent fishing. Some even have trout, if that's your preference. This summer, consider taking your family on an angling adventure to the great fishing waters of the state's eastern half. Find them all on-line in the Montana Fishing Guide at fwp.mt.gov.

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

NATURAL WONDERS

Illustration by Peter Grosshauser

Is it true you can fish for federally threatened bull trout in some Montana waters?

Yes. Anglers can fish for bull trout on Hungry Horse Reservoir, Lake Koocanusa, Swan Lake, and part of the South Fork Flathead River (each water has its own limit and season). By allowing some limited fishing opportunities for this largest of Montana's native trout, FWP hopes to increase public support for bull trout management and habitat protection. Anglers fishing for bull trout must have in possession a valid bull

trout catch card for the water they are fishing. To get the free card, fill out an application from the regional FWP office in Kalispell or go on-line to fwp.mt.gov.

I'm not a fly angler, but I'd like to learn to tell a caddis fly from a mayfly. Any advice?

When sitting on vegetation or the water, caddis flies have downturned wings, while mayflies have upturned wings. When flying, caddis flies flutter erratical-



ly, like drunken moths; mayflies fly gracefully, like tiny fairies.

What's the most frequent law broken by boaters?

The number one infraction is failure to have a "personal flotation device" (Coast Guard-approved life jacket) in the boat for each person in the boat. Adults aren't legally required to wear life jackets at all times (though kids under age 12 are), but the devices must be readily accessible.