



**Lakers Unlimited of Montana**

**P.O. Box 131, Fort Peck MT 59223**

January 23, 2005

To members of the Montana Senate  
Fish and Game Committee

Dear Senators:

On behalf of Lakers Unlimited of Montana, a fishing club formed to give a voice to lake trout fishermen and the fine lake trout fisheries we have in Big Sky Country, I am writing to oppose legislation that would limit the new Fort Peck Multi-Species Fish Hatchery to just warm water species and Chinook salmon and cisco. As of this writing, no bill number has been attached to the legislation and no primary sponsor has formally signed the bill. The LC number is LC1149.

Lake trout are an important component of the Fort Peck fishery, yet they have been consistently legislated against both in the bill that created the hatchery and now in LC1149. Walleye fishermen would like you to believe that lake trout are not worth paying attention to in Fort Peck, except perhaps that they occasionally eat walleyes. In truth, many of the same anglers that fish Fort Peck for walleyes also fish the lake for lake trout, including many Walleyes Unlimited members who are not being represented by the state WU organization in its current stance on the bill.

It's also worth noting that lake trout provide a significant portion of the fish harvest from Fort Peck. Behind walleyes, lake trout are the second-most-harvested fish in a diverse game fish fishery.

In the 2004 FWP lake-wide creel survey on Fort Peck, for example, the angler harvest took 9,094 walleyes, 1,064 lake trout, 675 northern pike, 917 smallmouth bass, 191 sauger and 72 Chinook salmon.

Because of this diverse fishery and the importance of lake trout angling to that fishery, we feel that the hands of Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks should not be tied with LC1149 in managing lake trout. Although lake trout have been stocked in Fort Peck in recent times only in the low water years of 1978, 1991, 1992 and 2003, the option of raising lake trout at the nearby Fort Peck Fish Hatchery should be open to fisheries managers. We do not think that lake trout need to be stocked every year. But the 10-year management plan for Fort Peck calls for supplemental stocking when water levels are very low and natural

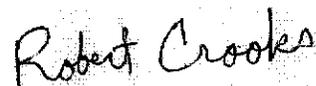
spawning grounds are high and dry. In those low water years, FWP should be able to follow that management plan in the most economically sound manner. Rather than forcing FWP to waste money transporting lake trout eggs to the hatchery at Miles City and then transporting lake trout fingerlings back to Fort Peck from Miles City as it does now, FWP should be able to raise lake trout at the Fort Peck Fish Hatchery. It would save sportsmen's dollars. It would also likely increase the productivity and efficiency of the personnel handling the fish and the productivity and survival of the fish themselves.

Another consideration is the fact that lake trout fishing is, at times, the only economic salvation for guides, outfitters and businesses on the dam end of the lake. In years when the Chinook salmon run is poor, anglers can still go after lake trout and catch them. When the walleye fishing is poor in the late summer months, lake trout provide an option for area anglers and tourists who pump dollars into the local economy. Lake trout also provide a through-the-ice winter fishery on Fort Peck. Set the stage for hurting the lake trout fishery and you also will hurt the individuals and businesses that rely on Fort Peck Lake fishermen for a significant portion of their tourist income.

All we ask is that your committee and the legislature think of all people in Montana when they consider this legislation – not just walleye fishermen who have a strong bias against any species of trout. When the Fort Peck Hatchery was proposed in the 1999 Legislature, one of the big selling points to the Eastern Montana public was that it was going to be a Multi-Species hatchery. That's exactly what it should be. Rather than narrowing the focus of the hatchery with LC1149, if anything, the focus should be expanded to benefit all fishermen in Eastern Montana, no matter what species they seek, walleyes or bass or pike or trout. It is a state hatchery and it should be run so that it benefits all fishermen, not just some of them.

If LC1149 can't be amended and expanded to provide all species of fish for all anglers of Eastern Montana, then this legislation should be killed with as swift a death as your committee can provide.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robert Crooks".

Robert Crooks  
President  
Lakers Unlimited