



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

EXHIBIT 8
DATE 2.8.07
HB 439

P. O. Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620-0701
406-444-3186
FAX:406-444-4952
Ref:DO077-07
February 7, 2007

House Fish, Wildlife and Parks Committee Members
60th Montana Legislature
Capitol Station
Helena, MT 59620

Dear Committee Members:

This letter provides answers to three questions asked during the recent hearing on House Bill 439 that I was not able to answer.

The first question related to the size of currently licensed ponds. FWP's pond database does not include this information, so we conducted a quick poll of several regional fish managers. The consensus of the fish managers is that more than 90% of the licensed ponds are less than 5 acres in size. The majority are less than 2 acres.

The second question related to the frequency of Whirling Disease in private ponds. Private ponds are not routinely tested for the whirling disease parasite, but the whirling disease parasite has been documented in a number of private ponds. Once ponds become infected with the parasite they often amplify the concentration of the parasite increasing the level of infection in connected water. Five private ponds in Region 3 have been detected to have the whirling disease parasite. One of these ponds has been documented to have caused the decline of young fish in a portion of the Big Hole River. Two private ponds in Region 1 have been documented to have the parasite. Each of these ponds was stocked illegally from a hatchery in Idaho, and each pond contributed to the presence of whirling disease in the surrounding area where it had not previously been detected.

The third question asked about documented escapes from private ponds. FWP is aware of numerous examples of fish escaping from private ponds. For example, a private pond owner near Eureka introduced brown trout to his pond, even though the pond was not permitted for brown trout. Some of these fish escaped into the Kootenai where brown trout had previously not been reported. The Department took action to remove the fish from the system. Another example on the Kootenai involved illegally stocked minnows in an approved bass pond. The minnows escaped and were found downstream from the pond. An example from Region 3 involved the escape of unauthorized pike into other ponds that were authorized for rainbows; the pike escaped from these ponds as well, and were reported in the Gallatin River. FWP is aware of over 500 documented unauthorized introductions. Many of these may have been the result of escapees from private fish ponds.

If you have any other questions, please let me know.

Sincerely,

Christian A. Smith
Chief of Staff