

CENTRAL MONTANA

Fishing Guide

2020

- ✓ Local Fisheries Outlook
- ✓ Tips & Tactics
- ✓ Area Fishing Map



Special publication by the Lewistown News-Argus and Judith Basin Press

Life is better when you're fishing

Time with family, food and fun. Those are just a few of the reasons more than 250,000 of us go fishing each year in Montana.

This year, there is a different reason to get out and cast a line: stress relief.

At the time of this writing on April 1, we are in the midst of a global coronavirus pandemic. Hundreds of thousands have contracted the virus and thousands have already died. Businesses have closed, workers have been laid off, and anxiety is running high. These are scary times for a lot of people.

For those reasons, and many others, now is a great time to grab a fishing rod and head down to your favorite fishing hole.

The ice is just coming off the local lakes, and the creeks are still running clear. Fish don't care about the coronavirus; they're ready to feed after a long cold winter.

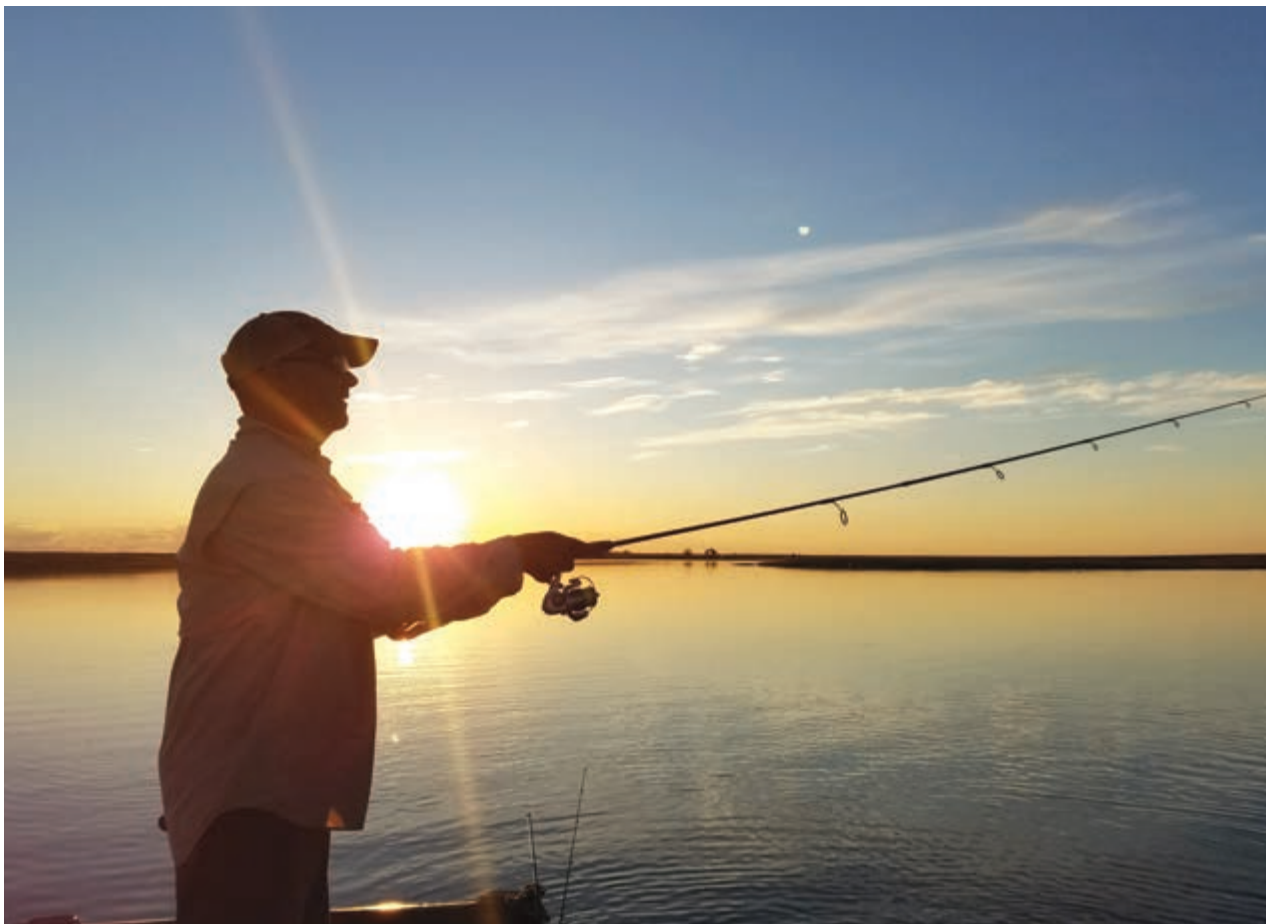
With Central Montana's many lakes and streams, you will have no problem maintaining a comfortable social distance from any other anglers at this time of year.

Whether you catch a fish or not, I'm willing to bet you'll come back feeling better than if you spend your day watching TV and worrying.

So get out and enjoy a day on the water ... Life is better when you're fishing.



Jacques Rutten
News-Argus
Publisher
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Spending a day on one of Central Montana's lakes or rivers is a great way relieve stress during this challenging time in our world.

Photo by Skylar Rutten



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Paddlefish season coming soon

Season begins May 1 on Upper Missouri

Paddlefish season is a tradition like no other on the Upper Missouri River.

The area around the Fred Robinson Bridge draws anglers from all across the country. They come for the chance of hooking into a fish that could tip the scales at more than 100 pounds!

Paddlefish anglers planning to harvest a fish in the Upper Missouri River (From Fort Peck Dam to Fort Benton) had to apply by late March for an Upper Missouri River Paddlefish Tag.

New for this year, applicants had an opportunity to purchase a bonus point for their paddlefish application, similar to

drawings for big game. Applicants may purchase one bonus point per year, either at the time of application or between July 1 and September 30 of the current year. The bonus point can be used in future years to place the applicant's name in the drawing additional times to increase their odds of drawing a tag. The number of additional chances is calculated by squaring the base bonus point.

"We wanted this bonus point opportunity for those folks who put in for the Upper Missouri paddlefish tag year after year and really want a tag, but may not have the best luck," said Region 6 Fisheries Manager Steve Dalbey. "This should level the playing field so everyone can get one of these special tags every few years."

For 2020, a total of 1000 tags were available for the drawing. Successful applicants may harvest a fish anytime during the season, from May 1 through June 15. Those anglers not successful in drawing a harvest tag will be issued a "snag and release" license for the Upper Missouri. Anglers, both resident and nonresident, are required to purchase a fishing and conservation license prior to submitting their applications. Party applications (up to five anglers) are available and encouraged. Notification of results should be available by April 10.

Additionally, anglers that did not participate in the tag drawing that want to participate in the snag and release fishery can still purchase an Upper Missouri River Paddlefish Snag and Release License at any FWP



Paddlefish like this one held up by an FWP employee, can grow to enormous sizes. The state record is currently 142 pounds.

Photo courtesy of FWP

office starting April 10.

As in the past, anglers may select only one area to fish for paddlefish in Montana: Upper Missouri River (White Harvest Tag-1000 tags available through the drawing), Yellowstone River and Missouri River downstream of Fort Peck Dam (Yellow Harvest Tag-1000 fish quota), and the Fort Peck Dredge Cut archery-only season (Blue Har-

vest Tag).

Remember that all harvested paddlefish must be immediately tagged and reported within 48 hours. Reporting options include: on-site where fish were harvested (at check points like Intake Fishing Access Site or roving creel staff), online at myfwp.mt.gov, or on the phone hotline 1-877-FWP-WILD or 406-444-0356.



A pair of fishermen search for paddlefish above Fred Robinson Bridge during a recent season.

Photo by Jacques Rutten

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Goin' Fishin': father and daughter share the ultimate stress reliever

By **CHARLIE DENISON**
Senior Reporter

"I'm a goin' fishin, yes, I'm goin' fishin' and my baby's goin' fishin', too." – "Fishing Blues," Taj Mahal

For as long she can remember, Emma Berry's gone fishin'.

"I've been at it since I could hold a fly rod in my hand," she said. "We lived on the Big Horn. That's when it all began."

Emma's father, Randy, a fishing guide at the time, shared his passion with Emma early on, and the hobby quickly became her own.

"Every summer we'd camp on the Boulder River," she

recalled. "We'd fish for a week. I have lots of fond memories of that."

Now 29, working on her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree at Montana State University-Billings, Emma said fishing remains her favorite way to pass the time.

"I've always tried to stay connected to fishing as much as possible: going to school, working, I've always stayed close to it," she said.

And why not? Fishing, she said, is a great way to relieve stress and a great activity to do with family and friends.

"The thing about fishing is it's less about catching fish and more about who you are

spending time with," she said. "My dad, my mom, they make it special. My dad tells a lot of fishing stories. A day on the water with him always turns into a learning experience: what he's done, where he's been, what songs he's playing on the guitar, what flies he's used. It's all stayed with him. My dad can explain something that happened 30 years ago and explain it like it happened yesterday."

Randy's expertise does not go unnoticed, as Emma is regularly amazed by his technique and his advice. One time, on a fishing trip in Idaho, Emma and Randy were fishing on pontoon boats. Randy told her the fish were going to rise on the left side of the bank and she'd catch some there if she used a black cactus fly.

Continued on page 5

Emma Berry, right, and her father, Randy, have bonded through many memorable fishing trips together.

Photo courtesy of Emma Berry



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Goin' fishin' continued

"Sure enough, about 20 minutes later the fish started to rise where he said. He handed me a black cactus fly and I caught a nice brown trout on my second cast," Emma said proudly. "That was very memorable. My dad really is a master. There is nothing he doesn't know. He is always the first one I call when I have a fishing question."

Fishing together or alone, there's just something about it, Emma said. It sets her at ease. Part of that, she said, is the focus it requires.

"It's not easy," she said. "You have to put the puzzle pieces together. There are always different conditions. It's something that keeps your

mind off other things in your life that might not be so pleasant."

There is nothing she'd rather do.

"There is something about the river and the water," she said. "It's hard to think about what I would do if I didn't go fishing."

Now is an excellent time to pick up the hobby, she added.

"Go for it. It's a very positive thing you can do. It's a release of stress and something that can bring some joy to your life. Get outside and learn something new. Spend time with your family on the water."

Emma proudly holds up a brown trout she caught on the Sun River last summer.

Photo courtesy of Emma Berry

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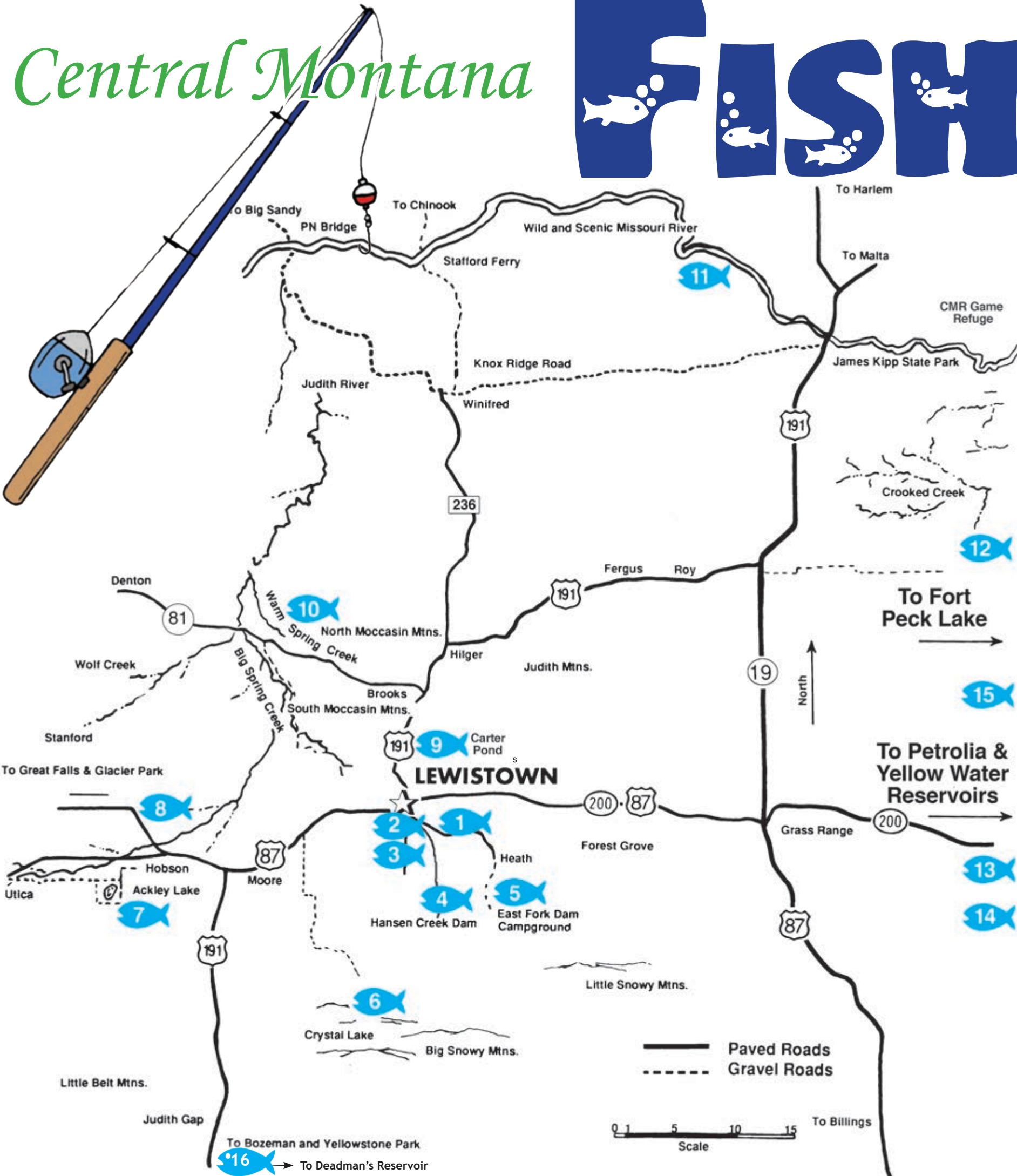
Monthly meetings are held at the Legion downstairs every 3rd Thursday at 7 p.m.

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Central Montana

FISHING



FISHING GUIDE 2020

From big rivers to small creeks and huge reservoirs to stock ponds, Central Montana offers anglers a little bit of everything. Below is a list of fishable waters in the region, along with the type of fish and the general location, which corresponds with the map on the facing page. All of the waters below have some public access and/or are stocked each year by the Fish, Wildlife and Parks. Fish, Wildlife and Parks policy is to stock lakes and ponds; flowing water is not stocked.

1. Big Spring Creek: Originates four miles southeast of Lewistown. Flows 30 miles northwest until it empties into the Judith River. Primary species: brown and rainbow trout. No stocking has occurred since 1982.

2. Frog Ponds: Located on south side of Lewistown, bordered by Airport Road and Spring Street. Primary species: Rainbow trout. Both ponds are stocked with various sizes of trout each year.

3. Big Casino Creek Reservoir: Located 1.5 miles south of Lewistown off Castle Butte Road. In 2019, 5,000 2-inch largemouth bass and 75 tiger muskie were stocked in the reservoir; in prior years some crappie were stocked. Small perch have also been reported in recent years.

4. Hansen Creek Reservoir: Located 6 miles southeast of Lewistown, just east of Big Spring Trout Hatchery. Primary species: rainbow trout and westslope cutthroat trout. In 2019 was stocked with about 2,500 rainbow trout and 1,000 westslope cutthroat trout, most in the 4-inch size range.

5. East Fork Reservoir: Located 11 miles southeast of Lewistown on Route 238. Primary species: northern pike, perch, rainbow trout. The fish population is diverse, however, and the lake has also produced brown and brook trout.

6. Crystal Lake: Located 30 miles south of Lewistown on

Crystal Lake Road. Primary species: rainbow trout. The lake freezes out each year and is restocked at the beginning of summer. In 2020, it will be stocked with 1,000 12-inch rainbows.

7. Ackley Lake: Located 25 miles west of Lewistown, near Hobson. Primary species: Rainbow trout. In 2015, for the first time Ackley received 5,000 tiger muskie ranging from 1.5 to 4 inches in length. Anglers are reporting muskies of over 36 inches. For the 2020 regulation year, anglers can now keep 2 tiger muskie over 36 inches. Ackley will be stocked this year with 55,000 4-inch rainbow trout.

8. Judith River: Originates in Little Belt Mountains, flows east and then north until it reaches Missouri River near the PN Bridge. Limited public access. Primary species: trout in upper reaches; catfish, warm-water fish in lower reaches. No stocking occurs.

9. Upper and Lower Carter Ponds: Located 7 miles north of Lewistown off Hwy. 191. Primary species: Rainbow trout. The Upper Pond was stocked with 3,000 4-inch rainbow trout and 500 brook trout in 2019. The outlet structure at the Lower Pond has been damaged and the pond is reduced by about 3-feet and thus possibly winterkilled in 2019/2020. It was stocked with 2,000 4-8" rainbow trout and 250 brook trout in 2019.

10. Warm Spring Creek: Originates at Gigantic Warm Springs west of Brooks off state highway 81. Flows west until reaching the Judith River. Primary species: trout, smallmouth bass, some sauger.

11. Upper Missouri River: Portion which flows through Central Montana includes the Wild and Scenic portion north of Winifred as well as the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument and portions of the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge. Primary species: Catfish, sauger,

paddlefish, sturgeon, walleye, and many others.

12. Fort Peck Lake: Primary access point in Central Montana is Crooked Creek Recreation Area. Can be accessed near Bohemian Corner off Hwy. 191 or at Winnett off Hwy. 200. Both routes include around 50 miles of gravel road. Primary species: walleye, northern pike, smallmouth bass, perch, crappie, salmon, and many others.

13. Petrolia Reservoir: Located east of Winnett, off Hwy. 200. Primary species: walleye, perch, northern pike. In 2019, Petrolia was stocked with 21,000 1-inch walleye.

14. Yellow Water Reservoir: Located 12 miles south of Winnett. Scheduled to receive 1,000 rainbow trout this year. Has had an abundance of suckers and carp in recent years. In 2019 the reservoir was stocked with about 1,000 rainbow trout, around 4 inches in size. Additionally, the reservoir was stocked with 1,500 tiger muskie in 2019 in an attempt to reduce the abundance of carp and suckers.

15. Missouri Breaks Reservoirs: There are a number of reservoirs in the Missouri River Breaks area east of Roy and north of Winnett that are stocked annually by the FWP and provide excellent fishing for panfish, bass and trout. The shallower reservoirs may have experienced some degree of winter kill in 2018-2019.

16. Deadman's Basin Reservoir: Southeast of Harlowton near Shawmut, the reservoir is 2,000 acres and can be up to 100 feet deep at normal water levels. Irrigation use during the summer means significant draw down may occur. A fishing access site is on the southwest end of the lake, although most of the fishing is by boat. Large trout, both rainbow and brown, have been reported. Last year the lake was stocked with over 150,000 small rainbow trout and more than 105,000 Kokanee salmon. The reservoir also received 1,500 tiger muskie in 2019.

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Take a kid fishing

Hansen Creek Reservoir is a great place to go fishing for a day, or just an evening after work. Located just past the state fish hatchery, the reservoir offers shore fishing as well as a place to launch tubes and small boats. The crowds are usually light and the trout are usually hungry.

Photo by Jacques Rutten



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Be cautious fishing in cold water

With ice coming off Montana's lakes and rivers it's important to remember that cold water can be deadly. If you are recreating on or around water this spring, remember to wear a life jacket and always tell someone where you are going and when you plan on returning.

Here are the phases of cold water immersion:

Cold shock (initial entry to 5 minutes): Gasping for breath and hyperventilation are natural reactions to cold water. Try to get your breathing under control and avoid panicking.

Cold Incapacitation & Swim Failure (5 to 30 minutes): During this time, you will lose dexterity and grip strength. Cooling of arms and legs impairs the ability to swim. Even the best swimmers cannot continue to function in cold water.

Hypothermia: Cooling of the body's core temperature eventually results in loss of consciousness. How quickly hypothermia sets in depends on the water temperature, body type, clothing and behavior. Always seek medical attention right away.

If you have any questions, please contact Sara Smith, Boating Education Coordinator for the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Recreational Boating Safety Program, at 406-444-5280 or sarsmith@mt.gov.

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Hungry trout await at Lewistown's Frog Ponds

Looking for a great way to spend an afternoon? Try casting a line at the local Frog Ponds. Located in the heart of Lewistown near Lewis and Clark Elementary School, the two ponds are stocked annually with trout from Big Springs Trout Hatchery.

Originally called the Old Folks' or Seniors' ponds, the upper and lower Frog Ponds were popular fishing spots from 1954 to 1971 and after. But the ponds silted in and could no longer be stocked with fish. They fell into disuse until 1999, when the City took over and began planning a restoration program.

Cleaning up the ponds consisted of dredging them of waste sediment and installing new drains and flow culverts. As result of this project, the city was able to complete the Chokecherry Trail by putting trails over the dams that create the ponds. The name "Frog Ponds" resulted from a contest conducted by Lewistown schools during the restoration project.

Today the Frog Ponds are a local treasure, playing host to fishermen of all ages, as well as students, hikers, bikers, bird-watchers and dog-walkers.

Restoration of the Frog Ponds involved a variety of local organizations and individuals. One of their goals was to provide a fishing place for kids, senior citizens and people new to the sport.

Everyone, however, is welcome to enjoy the Frog Ponds. Standard fishing regulations apply.



Lewistown residents can enjoy some great fishing without leaving town at the Frog Ponds. The two ponds are stocked three times per year.

News-Argus file photo

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A black and white photograph of two people fishing from a small motorboat on a pond. The person in the foreground is wearing a hat and a light-colored shirt, and is holding a fishing rod. The second person is partially visible behind them. The background shows a line of trees and a clear sky.

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A black and white photograph of several people fishing in a river. They are standing in the water, holding fishing rods. The background shows a line of trees and a clear sky.

Local lakes and ponds offer variety of fish options

By **DEB HILL**
Managing Editor

With a relatively mild winter, and the effects of the COVID-19 outbreak causing many to stay home, Fish, Wildlife and Parks Fisheries Biologist Clint Smith is expecting to see a lot of people out fishing this season. In fact, he's already seeing it.

"We took a drive as a family recently and most of the fishing spots we passed had vehicles parked at them," Smith said.

Luckily, despite the "stay at home" directive from the governor, getting outdoors is still allowed and Smith said there are some great fishing spots in Central Montana to choose from while you are "social distancing."

Hansen Creek Reservoir

Fishing at Hansen Creek Reservoir this year should be "very good," according to Smith. "We added Westslope cutthroat to the mix last year," he said, explaining the stocking rates were reduced so trout sizes should be up. This is native habitat for Westslope cutthroat, so Smith is expecting them to take well to the habitat.

Ackley Lake

With 55,000 four-inch rainbow trout to be stocked this spring, Ackley should be hopping by summer. "It's fishing well right now," Smith said, "with 20 inch rainbows being taken." Smith said regulations for the catch of tiger muskie have changed, allowing fishermen to keep two fish of 36 inch size or larger. The change in regulations followed from concerns tiger muskie could keep trout populations down too low.

Crystal Lake

This summer Smith said he expects Crystal Lake to provide plenty of fun family fishing. "We will stock it as soon as the Forest Service opens the road," Smith said. "We'll be putting in plenty of 10-12 inch trout when the ice is gone."

Carter Ponds

Smith has been working hard on Carter Ponds, both upper and lower, which froze out the past couple of winters. This winter Smith was taking

no chances.

"We put in an experimental solar aerator on the upper pond," he said. The aerator moves water so it remains oxygenated, and prevents freezing, both of which allow fish to survive the winter better.

"There's no indication of a winter kill," Smith said, speaking of the upper pond. "It should be really good for rainbows and brook trout."

The lower pond may be a different story and Smith hopes to get out to it soon to make repairs on the outlet box, which was crushed this winter, either by ice or vandals. "The lower pond is down 3 or 4 feet," Smith said. "It may have winter killed, but I am hoping not."

Frog Ponds

Lewistown's Frog Ponds continue to be a big draw to young fishermen. Smith said the ponds are stocked three times each year, with 10-12 inch rainbows. The first stocking is usually in late April, then again around Fathers Day and in late summer.

Breaks waters

Smith said he has been stocking various ponds in the Breaks over the past couple of years, and suggests people view the fishing maps available at FWP for ideas.

Petrolia Reservoir

Smith said anglers should have good luck at Petrolia Reservoir, especially in the Elk Creek arm. "It's been really good, with a lot of nice catchable size walleye and 10-12 inch perch are moderately abundant," Smith said. "Anglers are trying every combination to see what works with the walleyes, including worm harnesses, spinner rigs, cranks and jigging."

Yellow Water Reservoir

Yellow Water Reservoir is another area where introduction of tiger muskies was done in order to salvage the fishery. "I'm keeping an eye on it," Smith said. "We put tiger muskies in there last May or June to help control the carp. It is a great place to go catch carp, if you like that."

East Fork Reservoir

East Fork is not as good as



Cody Monfils of Lewistown won first place in the Tiger Muskie Division of the Woodsy Cup Ice-Fishing Derby on Ackley Lake in January. This tiger muskie weighs 19.39 pounds and measures 41.5 inches.

Photo courtesy of Nancy Epkes

it was the past couple of years, Smith said, due to overpopulation of perch. "We are seeing a lot of really small, stunted perch," he said. "While there are pike in East Fork, they will not keep the perch down as they don't like 'spiny' things. We tried putting bass in there but they didn't take. It's perfect perch habitat, so there is a very high recruitment of perch. After the City drained the lake, things were better for a while but now the perch are overpopulating again."

Smith said some have suggested stocking walleye in East Fork but he said there are management concerns over walleye getting out and ending up in the Judith River.

Casino Creek Reservoir

Smith said he continues to struggle with Casino Creek Reservoir, which he said was "not doing very well." The efforts to transition to lake to a bass fishery have not been successful.

"It might not be warm

enough," Smith said, "and the turnover rate may be too high." By that he meant the amount of water flowing in and out of the reservoir may not be low enough for bass. "Bass like calm water," he said.

With an overabundance of suckers, Smith added tiger muskie to the lake last spring. This year, he thinks, will lead to a decision on whether it can be a good bass fishery or not. While there are bass and perch in the lake, Smith said he considers it marginal.

The art of the fly

Local fisherman shares tips for successful tying

By **MIRIAM CAMPAN**
Reporter

As a child in Colorado, Dave Salvi discovered a pastime that would last him a lifetime.

"I started when I was 10 years old, over 50 years ago. My friends gravitated towards it and we started tying our own flies," said Salvi.

Now living in Lewistown for 37 years, Salvi is very familiar with the brown and rainbow trout in Big Spring Creek. In his pursuit of the best fishing experience and the most effective tie to attract the big ones, Salvi decided long ago to get hands-on with the art of tying his own flies.

The art requires nimble fingers and quality materials.

"Dexterity," said Salvi, "... and as far as tools go you will need to buy as good a vice as you can afford. It is one of the

key pieces.”

Other recommended pieces available in kits or sold separately are: scissors, a whip finisher, bobbins, hackle pliers, bodkin needle, etc.

"The materials to create the fly are based on what types of fly you are going to tie. Fly tiers are pretty creative and use a variety of materials to imitate the types of bugs that would attract the fish."

"I also recommend to get as good of a hackle as you can afford. The hackle is used to imitate the wings of the fly that you are tying. It saves time and money in the long run, good hackles last longer and you can tie more flies with one neck."

On length of time to create an individualized fly, Salvi said it could take him three minutes to tie a simple midge and up to 20 to 30 minutes to create an elaborate streamer.

“You will also need good light and a comfortable chair,” said Salvi.

"There is a lot of satisfaction in tying your own fly. You can create your own variation of a particular pattern where it actually works and you catch fish. One of the main things is catching your own fish with a tie you created," said Salvi.



A good vice to hold the hook is one of the most important tools in getting started tying your own flies.

Courtesy photo



One of the most satisfying parts of fly-fishing is catching a fish on a fly you created.

Courtesy Photo



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Fort Peck is the place to go for walleye, pike and more

From world-class walleye fishing to giant pike and hard-fighting smallmouth bass, Fort Peck Lake offers a wide array of angling opportunities.

Stretching 130 miles from Petroleum County in the west to the earth-filled dam near Glasgow in the east, Fort Peck Reservoir is Montana's largest body of water.

If you're looking for big walleye, Fort Peck is the place to go. The lake has earned a national reputation for producing walleye over 8 pounds. In fact, the walleye fishing is so good people sometimes overlook the other incredible fishing opportunities the lake offers, including northern pike, catfish, smallmouth bass, salmon, lake trout, crappie and more.

Darin McMurry has been helping to manage the lake for the past 29 years. He is currently the Operations Project Manager for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

McMurry said they want to encourage people to get out and enjoy the lake this spring, but to keep in mind the restrictions are in place allowing day use only at the boat ramps and campgrounds due to coronavirus.

"Whether fishing from shore or a boat or fly fishing, it seems like a good way to isolate and enjoy the outdoors, and we are going to support that," said McMurry.

Crooked Creek Recreation Area is the nearest access point to fishermen and boaters from Central Montana. McMurry said he heard it was a phenomenal ice fishing season in that area. He said the private campground



Walleye are fun to catch and delicious on the table. Fort Peck Lake offers exceptional opportunities to fish for walleye and many other species.

at Crooked Creek will not fall under the federal coronavirus restrictions.

The Crooked Creek Chapter of Walleyes Unlimited has its annual tournament scheduled for May 4-5, with an alternate weekend of Aug. 1-2.

As for lake levels, McMurray told the News-Argus on April 2, the lake is currently at 2,235.7 feet above sea level and snow-pack conditions above the reservoir are right at 103% of average.

Both of those levels are very normal, which McMurry said is "a good sign for us." Based on those numbers, the lake should peak about 5 feet higher than it currently is, or roughly 2,240 feet by the end of June. The normal operating range is between 2,234 and 2,246. Anything above that is considered flood stage.

For more information about lake levels, boat ramps or camping on Fort Peck, call the Corps of Engineers at 406-526-3411.

FWP closes some areas due to COVID-19

As a reminder to stay safe during the COVID-19 pandemic, social distancing guidelines should be followed at all Fish, Wildlife & Parks sites. Keep your distance from fellow recreators. FWP has closed group-use sites. This includes all fishing piers at Montana state parks, fishing access sites and wildlife management areas due to the risk of high congregation.

While state parks, fishing access sites and a few wildlife management areas (check for seasonal closures) remain open at this time, maintenance at FWP facilities will be cut back and public opportunities limited:

Overnight camping will not be allowed.

Campgrounds will be systematically closed to give current campers 72-hour notice.

Group use sites will be closed, including playgrounds and fishing piers.

Visitor center closures will be extended at least through April 10.

Bathrooms may be limited.

Sites will be regularly patrolled by enforcement staff.

If a parking lot at a fishing access site or state park is full, consider another place to recreate. Also, it is a good idea to recreate in your local area.

For more information on FWP's response to COVID-19, visit <http://fwp.mt.gov/covid19>.