



Carbon Pollution

Dave Dittloff
Regional Representative
National Wildlife Federation

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In Montana, fishing and hunting are cornerstones of our way of life. We spend our free time outdoors standing in cold waters and hiking up steep mountainsides stalking our prey. It's often not easy, but that often makes the rewards that much sweeter. We teach our kids the techniques and ethics of the field and the stream so they might understand the lessons of hard work and the connection to the land that fish and wildlife bring us.

We also teach our kids that conservation is the key to keeping our fishing and hunting traditions alive. During the last century, sportsmen have played key roles in countless conservation issues...like the creation of national wildlife refuges and state wildlife management areas, the reintroduction of numerous game species to places where they'd been extirpated, and the passage of key laws like the Clean Water Act, the Farm Bill conservation programs, and the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

These, and other, conservation successes have led to incredible fishing and hunting opportunities here in Montana and across the nation. But it is becoming more and more apparent each year that one danger to our outdoor traditions is growing--the changing climate. It could become the biggest threat our fish and wildlife have faced since the unlimited market hunting of the 1800s. The effects of climate change are wide-ranging and will inevitably alter the geographic ranges and habitats of many species of fish and wildlife.

The scientific studies are alarming. Average temperatures in Montana increased by 2.3°F from 1951 to 2006. Average December through February precipitation from snowfall in Montana declined 17.2% over the same period, and average August precipitation declined 20.4%.

Faced with these climate trends, Montana's trout are now facing a triple whammy of higher summer stream temperatures, reduced summer flows, and more frequent and intense forest fires. In 2007 the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks was forced to close or tightly restrict fishing on 29 rivers in order to protect the fisheries from these conditions.

In addition to impacts on angling, the warmer temperatures are causing montane forests to creep upslope pinching off alpine tundra habitats depended on by bighorn sheep, mountain goats, and ptarmigan. What's more, the warmer winters have led to pine beetle epidemics that have killed off 2 million acres of lodgepole pine forests in the state, and longer and more intense droughts are many years drying up wetlands needed by ducks and geese.

These are serious threats to our fishing and hunting traditions. If not addressed, our children and grandchildren will undoubtedly not enjoy the fishing and hunting opportunities that we have today, and Montana's \$1.1 billion per year fish and wildlife related economy will suffer.

Sportsmen need to add climate change issues to our portfolio of conservation advocacy that has been so effective over the years. To that end, a number of fishing and hunting organizations including Trout Unlimited, Ducks Unlimited, the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, and the American Sportfishing Association created the Season's End campaign in 2008. A huge part of this initiative involves redoubling efforts to make habitats as robust and resilient as possible in order to allow fish and wildlife to survive the changing climate.

But it also means addressing the root cause of the problem—reducing carbon emissions across the globe. Unfortunately, a comprehensive climate change bill is not a part of the dialogue in this session of Congress, but that doesn't mean that the federal government can't act on carbon pollution issues. For example, just last year an agreement was reached between the federal government and thirteen large automakers to increase fuel economy to 54.5 miles per gallon for cars and light-duty trucks by model year 2025.

Another important proposal was just released. It would create the first ever federal carbon pollution standards for new power plants. As of now, power plants are the largest individual sources of carbon pollution in the United States. If finalized, the proposal would require that new fossil-fueled power plants meet an output-based standard of 1,000 pounds of carbon dioxide per megawatt-hour. New natural gas-fueled power plants would meet this standard, but new coal-fueled plants limited by today's technologies would not. This new proposal, in essence, would bring federal carbon pollution standards in line with ones the Montana legislature put on the books five years ago.

It is not a silver bullet. Eventually, carbon emissions at existing power plants will need to be addressed, if we are to bring its carbon pollution down to levels that the scientific community state will be necessary to halt the alarming climate trends. But, combined with the new fuel economy standards, it is a solid start. Anglers and hunters need to step up and support it, if we are to pass down our outdoor traditions to our children and grandchildren. Fish and wildlife populations in Montana are already being impacted by the changing climate. Left unchecked, things could get much worse.

Please write in favor of the new proposal. You can submit comments at www.nwf.org/Global-Warming.aspx.

This is Dave Dittloff for the National Wildlife Federation in Missoula, Montana.