

## **Madison River Fishing Access Ambassador Program**

- Thank you, Commissioner Walsh, and the Madison River Workgroup, for the opportunity to speak this evening. Many thanks to all of you for your service to Montana sportsmen.
- DLK Background
  - Outfitter for Montana Troutfitters fly shop in Bozeman which my wife Karyn and I founded in 1978
  - Madison River outfitter and guide since 1975.
  - In 1979, I was appointed by MT Governor Tom Judge to the Madison River Study Committee and served on the committee in 1979 and 1980.
  - I am a founding Board member and the first President of Fishing Outfitters Association of Montana FOAM. I am a current FOAM member, and I am also a member of Montana Outfitters and Guides Association MOGA
  - I am a member of the Madison Gallatin Chapter of Trout Unlimited (MGTU). I have been an MGTU member since 1977 and served on MGTU the Board, as MGTU chapter President and on MT Council of Trout Unlimited.
  - Founding board member of the Whirling Disease Foundation and served as the Foundation's Director of Development.
  - I worked for 6 years for national Trout Unlimited directing the Aquatic Invasive Species program.
  - I helped found the Bozeman based Warriors and Quiet Waters therapeutic fly-fishing program for veterans with disabilities and am recently retired from running TU's Veterans Service Partnership.
- Madison River FAS Ambassadors-The Need
  - Madison River Creel Survey and Mail Survey results clearly indicate that traffic, congestion, and poor behavior at Fishing Access Sites (FAS) account for 70% of the dissatisfaction expressed by FAS users. The dissatisfaction is the result of frustration and stress that negatively impacts the Madison River experience for all users. These issues can be mitigated through physical improvements to physical FAS infrastructure to make them safer and more efficient, and the Madison River Workgroup has done an admirable job identifying FAS infrastructure needs and potential solutions. However, even the best designed FAS will not eliminate user dissatisfaction if river users do not understand best FAS practices and protocols. Many of the FAS congestion and river etiquette issues are created by well-intentioned river users who do not understand best FAS practices and proper river etiquette. The creation and implementation of an effective Madison River Fishing Access Ambassador combined with a robust FAS practices and river etiquette education program would help to assure that the physically improved FAS will function safely and efficiently and help lower the level of stress and anxiety that have created the elevated level of river user dissatisfaction.
- Madison River Fishing Access Site Ambassador Program
  - The role of the Madison River Fishing Access Site Ambassadors would be to educate users in best practices, answer questions, assist users with launch and takeout procedures where appropriate, and help improve the FAS traffic flow and safety which will reduce tension and user anxiety at the FAS which will improve the overall river user experience.
  - The Madison River Ambassador program would consist of paid staff. The MRA program would not include law enforcement, but, when necessary, MRA's would communicate with MTFWP enforcement. MRA's primary responsibility would provide information

regarding licenses and water safety equipment requirements, and to serve as traffic managers to ensure efficient launches and take outs.

- Suggest patterning the Madison River Ambassador program after the successful Missoula River Ambassador program which was implemented in 2021 through the 3 Rivers Collaborative group. The 3 Rivers group combines officials from Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Missoula city and county governments, University of Montana, nonprofit organizations such as Five Valleys Land Trust and Clark Fork Coalition, the Missoula Downtown Association and affiliated business owners. While it has no decision-making powers of its own, the group's networking and brainstorming has enhanced a variety of riverside projects throughout the Missoula Valley. A similar collaborative could be formed to support the Madison River Fishing Access Ambassador program.
  - The Missoula River Ambassador program is managed by the non-profit Clark Fork Coalition. The Missoula program recently completed its first year, and Clark Fork Coalition Community Programs Director Lily Haines, Charlie Rieck lead Missoula River Ambassador, and MTFWP Region 2 Supervisor Randy Arnold all agree that the Missoula River Ambassador program was a resounding success and will be continued for 2022. Director Arnold said that the success of the program was related to the program being managed through an organization outside of MTFWP. Madison River Foundation and Executive Director Jon Malovich indicated that MRF is interested in helping to develop the Madison River Ambassador and data gathering program.
  - The MRA had a staff of four and all worked on Missoula area rivers. The MRA were provided training by Region 2 MTFWP staff regarding managing human interactions including a focus on IEDD techniques which stands for "Identify," "Educate," "Disengage", and "Document."
  - MRA leader Charlie Rieck also designed a smartphone-based GIS program which all MRAs used to document and gather user activity data and measure user satisfaction. Madison River Ambassadors could provide this important function to gather Madison River user data using this GIS data gathering program.
  - MRA's set up "stations" at access points. Physical presence at FAS helped established atmosphere of respect and civility. MRA's wore a uniform shirt with crest-hat. They had business cards, did a lot of follow up on social media, passed out stickers, etc.
  - In addition to the "on the river" staff, the Missoula River Ambassador program had an intern responsible for developing and maintaining a robust social media network including Facebook and Instagram pages that contained valuable information useful to river users which was often updated from the river.
- FAS and River Etiquette Education Program
  - An especially vital component of the Missoula River Ambassador program is user education. The educational message is simple and primarily deployed through social media. It should be a message aimed toward all user groups including a school age children. We need an FAS version of "Smoky the Bear" with a simple message like "Only You Can Prevent Forest Fires." Social media exposure is the most effective method of reaching river users. We need some creative hash tags such as #dontcramphtheramp #bearampchamp #goodriveretiquette #goodrivermanners, #riverresponsible etc. The Missoula River Ambassadors updated social media during the day with useful river information, and their social media platforms were quite popular.

- Program Impact
  - Dr. Herbert Benson, the Mind Body Medicine Professor at Harvard Medical School, has studied relaxation response therapy for more than 50 years. Benson described the relaxation response as a mechanism that can counterbalance the stress response. The relaxation response is the purposeful initiation of a physical state of deep rest, one that changes a person’s physical and emotional responses to stress. When practiced, the relaxation response slows down the breathing and heart rate, relaxes muscles, lowers blood pressure, and reduces impact of stress related hormones such as cortisol. The Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation describes fly-fishing as a natural stress reliever because fly anglers are surrounded by nature, unplugged from electronics, and distanced from the so-called real world. That notion is buttressed by a 2009 study by a team of researchers drawn from the University of Southern Maine, the University of Utah, and the VA in Salt Lake City. In their study involving combat veterans, they found that participants had significant reductions in stress and post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms and improvements in sleep quality after participating in a fly-fishing retreat.
  - A well-designed FAS infrastructure improvement program combined with the Madison River Ambassador and river user behavior and etiquette education program will reduce the stress and tension associated with put ins and take outs. A smooth, efficient, and timely launch will get river users on the river faster and more quickly able to enjoy the relaxation response derived from being on moving water while surrounded by the natural beauty of the Madison River with the added distraction and benefit associated with fly fishing for trout. Of course, the same “boat ramp anxiety” occurs at the takeout which would also be mitigated by the FAS infrastructure improvement and FAS education program.
  - The net result will be a significantly higher rate of satisfaction amongst all Madison River users.
- Links and Contact Info
  - Clark Fork Coalition Missoula River Ambassador info
    - <https://clarkfork.org/our-work/what-we-do/engage-our-communities/riverambassador/>
  - Steamboat Springs Colorado program
    - <https://www.steamboatpilot.com/news/local-agencies-providing-more-proactive-education-about-recreating-responsibly-with-video/>
  - Clarks Fork Coalition/Missoula River Ambassador Program
    - Lily Haines, Community Programs Manager
      - [lily@clarkfork.org](mailto:lily@clarkfork.org)
      - 406-5420539 x200
    - Charlie Rieck, Missoula River Ambassador Program Lead
      - [charlescrieck@gmail.com](mailto:charlescrieck@gmail.com)
    - Randy Arnold, MTFWP Region 2 Supervisor
      - 406-552-8708 cell
      - 406-542-5504 work
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