



# Outlet

Fall 2025



## President's Hook by Michelle McGree

It's hard to believe I am stepping into the role of MTAFS President—it's both an incredible honor and big responsibility. Planning the 2025 meeting was a lot of fun (and work!), and now I'm looking forward to leading the chapter in a different way. We've had some massive change and challenges, especially around our federal members (and honestly, everything federal). I've enjoyed working alongside our new past-president Peter Brown to try and support our members as much as we possibly can. The work is far from over, so please continue to let us know if you have ideas on how we can help.

I truly enjoyed the engagement and knowledge shared at our Bozeman meeting last February. I know I'm not alone in my perspective that our membership is full of incredible people doing very impactful work. While it's easy to pass on another multi-day meeting, MTAFS consistently provides a great way to connect with all of you while also learning so much. I always leave inspired and grateful I attended.

We tried a few new things last year, like the Poster and Art Networking Event lunch social, which was a fun way to showcase the talents of many of our members. We also tried to accommodate more of our group through things like online Q&A options. What would you like to see in 2026?

My earliest MTAFS memory is attending Western Division in Bozeman as a graduate student at Colorado State. As a Montana native, I was thrilled to be in the presence of MTAFS professionals, even though I didn't yet call myself one. Now, after more than a decade working at FWP, I drink much less beer at MTAFS, but I am just as impressed at what comes from getting everyone together. I don't know of a better AFS chapter.

I'm proud to be a part of MTAFS, and I believe our members represent some of the best and brightest in the profession. Whether its research, management, fish culture, or sharing ideas, updates, or even setbacks – I hope you consider how you could contribute to our next meeting. Topics don't need to be polished to be engaging and useful. In fact, the most relevant discussions often come from work in progress. What are you working on that could help others?

Let's reconnect and make some progress on important fisheries issues at MTAFS 2026. I look forward to seeing you at Fairmont!



## President-Elect Introduction by Eileen Ryce



Having always been fascinated with water and aquatic organisms while growing up in Scotland, my fisheries career began as a series of fortunate events and my focus was on aquaculture. After receiving a PhD from MSU, I worked as a Post Doctoral Associate in the Montana State University Fisheries Coop Unit researching Bacterial Coldwater Disease in MT hatcheries. I then began my 20+ year career with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) as the first Fish Biologist for the Aquatic Invasive Species program, then known as the Aquatic Nuisance Species program. I progressed into the Hatchery Bureau Chief position before finishing the last eight years of my FWP fisheries career as the Fisheries Division Administrator, or 'Fish Chief'. I retired August 1, 2024, to reprioritize my family and health. With these combined experiences, I have dedicated almost 30 years to the aquatic natural resources of Montana,

## Introduction *continued*

plenty of time to contemplate how fisheries science and management has progressed in the state. Thus, to the position of President Elect I bring fortitude and time. While in the position of Fish Chief I never had the time to take on any additional responsibility. Now, as a Fisheries Retiree, and a full time Special Ed Teacher's Aid in the Townsend School District, I have more time to dedicate and provide my experience and knowledge to volunteer activities.

Therefore, my vision for the 2026 annual meeting is to encourage thoughtful and critical exchange of information. I want the membership to take a deep look at "what we do" and ask the hard questions: is it still relevant? Can I improve? Can I be more efficient/effective? Is it still a priority? Would my time be better spent doing something else? With these questions in mind, we want the membership to reflect and discuss while being open minded to questions and constructive criticism. Let's step into the looking glass and begin shifting our perspectives and questioning the status quo! Please consider hosting a symposium, moderating a session and/or submitting an abstract. Everyone has something valuable to provide to the greater membership of MT AFS and we can all learn from each other.

Please see details below to submit an abstract or symposium idea and reserve hotel rooms. I am looking forward to seeing all or most of you at the 2026 Annual Meeting at Fairmont.

## Montana Chapter 2026 Annual Meeting

### Through the Looking Glass

*When?* February 10<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup>

*Where?* [Fairmont Hot Springs](#)

*For Hotel Reservations:* call the Fairmont reservation line at 800.332.3272 and ask for the *American Fisheries Society* room block.

Group Code: 31781

*Abstract Submission:* Use this [Submission Form](#) link to submit abstracts/symposia.

**\*Deadline for titles is December 1, full abstracts due January 15!**



*Credit: VisitMT*

The theme for the meeting is Through the Looking Glass. If you have any ideas for symposia/panels, please email Eileen your thoughts. The theme is intended to be thought provoking. Think about questions and topics such as:

- Recruitment. Are we successful at recruiting a new generation of conservationists, anglers, biologists, administrators? Are recruitment programs being monitored effectively, efficiently, at all? Analogies to wildlife programs such as "Roosters for Recruitment".
- Should/do we manage for populations or individuals?
- Are drought restrictions effective? Should the State be making more Water Right Calls?
- Front facing sonar: is it the future of fishing? Does front facing sonar provide "screen time" for younger generations while recreating in the outdoors? Does front facing sonar remove fair chase?
- You can't change the past (or can you?) but we can learn from it.
- Treatment/removal of invasive species. Is the treatment worse than the alternative? Can species be recovered? Can invasive species be efficiently/effectively removed?
- What are we doing and are we being honest with ourselves?

Any questions related to the meeting should be directed to Eileen Ryce at ryceeileen1@gmail.com; 406-980-1260.

## 2026 Montana AFS Continuing Education by Kenny Breidinger

The Montana Chapter of the American Fisheries Society will be offering two continuing education courses at the 2026 Chapter meeting. These courses will be held on February 10 and are intended to advance both technical and professional skills.

### MEPA/NEPA

Whether your work focuses on research, monitoring or management, almost every fisheries professional in Montana is eventually involved with the Montana Environmental Policy Act and the National Environmental Policy Act. Intended to assess the environmental impacts of proposed projects and disclose these impacts to the public, these laws provide a decision-making framework for resource managers. Originating in the 1970's these laws are regularly updated and modified by regulators in Helena and Washington DC.

This course will cover the history and regulatory requirements of these laws as they apply to fisheries and compare and contrast each.

### De-escalation Training

Montanans are very passionate about their natural resources. Combined with strong personal values and the current divisive climate, emotions often run high. Tense situations can often be diffused to promote a safe and productive outcome. De-escalation is a learned skill. This training will cover communications, behaviors and body language necessary to calm emotions, prevent dangerous situations and assure productive communication.

## IMPORTANT REMINDERS!

- *Resource Action Fund Application* – due by **January 14, 2026!**
- *Awards Nominations* – be thinking of nominations and visit [here](#) to view categories

## MT AFS ExComm and Committee Chairs

The Montana Chapter of the American Fisheries Society was chartered in 1967. Among its objectives are conservation, development, and wise utilization of the fisheries; promotion of the educational, scientific, and technological development and advancement of all branches of fisheries science and practice; and exchange and dissemination of knowledge about fish, fisheries, and related subjects.

<http://units.fisheries.org/montana>

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