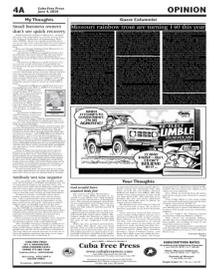


Title: **Missouri rainbow trout are turning 140 this year**
 Author:
 Size: 51.30 column inches
 Cuba, MO Circulation: 3250



Missouri rainbow trout are turning 140 this year

By Rik Hafer

If you fish for trout in Missouri, you have something to celebrate this summer. Because rainbow trout are not native to Missouri, the first stocking in the state occurred 140 years ago in the summer of 1880. Why were they planted in Missouri? Where did they come from? The answers tell an interesting tale.

Rainbows came to Missouri as part of the government's plan to manage the nation's fish stock. Atlantic salmon and other coastal fish populations were diminishing rapidly. Inland fish stocks also experienced depletion as the nation moved westward. Believing that governmental intervention was the only viable answer, Congress passed and President Grant signed Joint Resolution No. 22 in 1871. The resolution created the U.S. Fish Commission and set the government on the path of fish management.

The Commission quickly began experiments to curtail the decline in fish stocks by relocating fish around the country. Eastern shad went from New York to California while Pacific salmon were shipped from California to the East. While transplanting shad was quite successful, Pacific salmon never established a foothold in the East or in any other state in which they were planted, including Missouri. That's right; those in charge thought a spawning run to the Gulf of Mexico and back could be created by stocking salmon fry in, amongst others, the Missouri River near Kansas City.

Officials quickly realized the folly of their attempt to relocate salmon. But in the McCloud River in Northern California, the river from which the salmon were taken lived another cold-water fish of interest: The rainbow trout. By 1879 the Commission's interest shifted from salmon to collecting and fertilizing rainbow trout eggs and shipping them via rail to federal and state hatcheries across the country. After hatching the eggs, the rainbow fry were transported to streamside in milk cans and deposited in many states' rivers, including Missouri's.

Rainbows were not the first trout in Missouri, however. In 1879 the newly formed Missouri Fish Commission planted Eastern brook trout in several Ozark streams, some still fished by modern anglers: Spring Creek in Phelps County, the Spring River near Verona, and the ever-popular Bennett's Spring outside of Lebanon. But brook trout are finicky and did not take to Missouri's streams. So, beginning in 1880 the commission tried rainbows from the McCloud and fish managers and the public's love affair with the rainbow has not waned since.

Where were the first batches of rainbow deposited? Spring River received another stocking. Over the next 20 years it would receive more trout stockings than any other river in the state. And for good reason. By the mid-1880s officials of the U.S. Fish Commission reported that rainbows from the 1880 planting already had grown to several pounds and were found in abundance. Spring River demonstrated the potential success of the Commission's effort of introducing rainbows far from their home waters.

Other streams getting an initial stocking of rainbows included Maramec Spring and Crane Creek. Maramec Spring today is home of one of the state's cold-water hatcheries and trout park (as is Bennett Spring). Crane Creek has a special allure. It was one of the first to get rainbow trout, and some believe that its current population of wild rainbows is the last vestige of the original strain from the McCloud River. (They are not.)

Many changes in how the state manages its trout population occurred during the intervening years. Fish culturists quickly discovered how easy it was to propagate rainbows in hatchery conditions. This made the McCloud River operation redundant. In fact, one of the last shipments of rainbow eggs from the McCloud came to Missouri in 1887. State hatcheries or a federal hatchery like the one in Neosho have supplied rainbows for stocking ever since.

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If you are able to wet a line and catch this “most exotic fish,” take a moment to appreciate the fact that it all started 140 years ago with the crazy idea to relocate salmon and rainbows from Northern California to points east, including Missouri.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Rik Hafer is a Professor of Economics at Lindenwood University in St. Charles, Missouri, and the author of “From Northern California to the Ozarks of Missouri: How Rainbow Trout Came to the Show-Me State.”