



2022 INDUCTEE

BRADLEY B. SHEPARD

1952-2022

Brad Shepard's family jokes that he found his life's passion by age 2 while fishing with his grandfather.

Straight out of high school, Brad left Dayton, Ohio, and headed to Montana to pursue that passion.

He earned degrees in fish and wildlife management and fisheries resources from Montana State University and the University of Idaho. He acquired a Ph.D. in fish and wildlife biology from MSU.

Brad's career was fixed on wild cutthroat trout native to Montana.

He worked for four decades as a Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks fisheries biologist, MSU professor, senior Wildlife Conservation Society aquatic scientist, and private consultant.

Brad's research was legend. His work brought together state and federal agencies, NGOs, tribes, national parks, and agricultural and timber industries throughout western North America. The product became the gold standard for cutthroat conservation in Montana and beyond.

His investigations resulted in conserving small, isolated cutthroat trout populations at risk of winking out upon the arrival of any harmful event—and in the expansion of cutthroat trout populations into larger drainages. He accomplished this by gathering and mixing cutthroats from several small populations to create genetically diverse—and thus more stable—larger populations.

There's no better example than the provocative plan to establish westslope cutthroat trout (WCT) to Cherry Creek, a tributary to the Madison River. At the time, Cherry Creek was full of wild trout, but none native to the area.

The controversy swirled about for years following the 1997 announcement that FWP would use common piscicides to remove nonnative fish from 60 miles of Cherry Creek above a 30-foot waterfall. After removing nonnative fish, biologists would restock the stream with WCT—the only trout native to the Upper Missouri River drainage.

While the effort aimed to establish a genetically pure WCT population in Cherry Creek, Brad and his colleagues theorized that in time some of the introduced fish would make their way down stream to eventually migrate out to the Madison River.

It was a rocky go, but the plan proceeded among protests, lawsuits, and missteps. Yet, as Brad surmised, by 2010 WCT began reproducing in Cherry Creek.

By 2015, Cherry Creek's WCT population ballooned to more than 25,000 fish, with enough finding their way to the lower Madison River to create a wild population there. Today, more than 60,000 WCT inhabit the Cherry Creek drainage.

For the first time in perhaps a century, anglers can expect to catch wild, native WCT—as well as rainbow trout/WCT hybrids—in the lower Madison River.

Brad Shepard died unexpectedly on Sept. 23, 2022, while fishing with his son Ben, his favorite river companion.

Young Ben bears the name of Brad's grandfather, the man who once placed a fishing rod in the hands of a 2-year-old boy. With a passion ignited, that boy would become one of the early 21st Century's most admired aquatic scientists.

