

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW OF FISH INTRODUCTIONS
PRIVATE POND APPLICATION

Name and address of applicant Wolfgang Kuhn
150 No Access Lane
Sula, MT 59871

Has the pond been approved for a private pond permit? Unknown

Location:

County Ravalli Township 2N Range 18W Section 33

Name of the drainage where the pond would be located East Fork Bitterroot River

Name(s) of fish species proposed for introduction
Rainbow, Cutthroat, Brook, and Brown Trout

Is this species legally present in the drainage? Yes, all of these species of trout are present in the drainage—some more common than others

Species of special concern present in the drainage yes

RISKS:

Potential for impacts on genetic structure of existing fish populations? None Minor Major X

Comments:

Escapement from pond looks to be highly likely. East Fork at the pond site has cutthroat, bull, rainbow and brown trout present, with rainbow and brown trout scarce. The predominant trout species are cutthroat and bull, and the upper East Fork drainage not far from the pond outlet is considered a core area for these two species by the Forest Service and other government agencies. The Cutthroat in the East Fork near the pond site have been found to be genetically pure, despite the presence of rainbow trout.

Escapement of rainbows and brook trout stocked in this pond could have a direct impact on the genetic structure of both the pure cutthroat and the bull trout populations.

Impacts to any life stage of existing fish populations due to competition and/or predation? None___ Minor__x___ Major

Comments:

Fish numbers are low in the East Fork, implying limited habitat availability. If escapement occurs competition between the introduced trout and the existing trout will most likely be a factor.

Impacts to other forms of aquatic life that may be caused by this introduction? None___ Minor__x___ Major

Comments:

Potential for the proposed new species to reproduce in this location? None___ Minor__x___ Major

Comments:

Not sure—could not see bottom of pond, or know about underground springs and substrate. Inlet did not have screen at time of inspection, and as such could be utilized by fish in pond to travel upstream and into spawnable water.

If necessary, would it be feasible to remove this species after it has been stocked?

Probably not. Looked like pond would be difficult to dry up, and it's close proximity to East Fork would make it difficult to poison. Fish that did escape into the East Fork would be impossible to remove.

Would this introduction result in impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable?

Possible. There are, however, numerous such ponds in the Bitterroot Valley, and the cumulative effects are unknown.

Describe reasonable and prudent alternatives to this action, if any (including no action).

The proposal to grant this private fish pond license includes the stocking of fish. The application is for several (4) species of trout. One of the most desirable alternative would be to transfer fish from the adjacent river, but no legal mechanism exists at this time to do that. Other alternatives would include limited stocking, rather than stocking all four species listed:

1. Stock just Rainbow trout -it is already widespread in the drainage thanks to earlier stocking efforts. It can, however, inter-breed with the native cutthroat, and this could pose a threat to existing cutthroat genetic structure. Additional rainbow trout in this drainage would therefore be undesirable.

2. Stock just Brook Trout—they are currently not allowed to be stocked according to FWP policy. Also, they commonly inter-breed with Bull trout, and would therefore also be an undesirable species to stock.

3. Stock just Westslope cutthroat trout—the westslope cutthroat that are commercially available do not originate from the Bitterroot and have a different genetic makeup than bitterroot fish, so they could pose a threat to the purity of the existing cutthroat genetic structure.

4. Stock just Brown Trout—Brown trout are presently not common in this area of the drainage, and are highly predatious, which makes them an undesirable species to stock. They are also potentially a source of competition with the bull trout population in the East Fork.

5. No action (no stocking). Since there are already 4 trout species in the pond, the threat of escapement of exotic fish is already present. Stocking of additional such species, however, would increase the likelihood of escapement. A NO ACTION alternative would keep the potential impacts to the adjacent waters at a minimum.

Describe and evaluate mitigation, stipulations, or other control measures enforceable by the agency, if any.

The outlets and inlet to the pond should be screened. But even with screens, escapement is likely. Current laws regarding the transfer of live fish from one water body to another govern the legality of movement of fish planted in this pond to other waters. This movement of fish to other waters would be enforceable under this regulation.

List any other agencies or individuals that may be affected by the proposed introduction:

Bitterroot National Forest

List all agencies and individuals who have been notified of this proposed introduction:

Bitterroot National Forest

Based on this evaluation, is an EIS required? Yes/No If no, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for the proposed action.

No. The proposed action occurs on private lands. This issue can be handled at the EA level.

EA prepared by Larry Javorsky—acting Fisheries Biologist 05/02/00

Comments will be accepted until June 02, 2000

Comments should be sent to: Larry Javorsky
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