



**Montana Fish,
Wildlife & Parks**

2300 Lake Elmo Drive
Billings, MT 59105
August 29, 2005

TO: Environmental Quality Council
Director's Office, Dept. of Environmental Quality
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Director's Office	Wildlife Division
Resource Assessment	Design & Construction
Fisheries Division	Legal Unit
Parks Division	Lands Section
Regional Supervisors	Piscicide Committee

Montana Historical Society, State Preservation Office
Janet Ellis, Montana Audubon Council
Montana Wildlife Federation
Montana State Library
George Ochenski
Commissioner Shane Colton
Montana Environmental Information Center
Sharon Moore, DNRC Area Manager, Southern Land Office
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
American Fisheries Society, Montana Chapter
Yellowstone River Parks Association
Magic City Fly Fishers
Federation of Fly Fishers
Walleyes Unlimited, Billings Chapter
Montana Pike Masters, Billings Chapter
Adjacent Landowners

RECEIVED

AUG 31 2005

LEGISLATIVE ENVIRONMENTAL
POLICY OFFICE

Ladies and Gentlemen:

A draft Environmental Assessment (EA) proposing the introduction of Yellowstone cutthroat trout (YCT) into Miller and Sheep creeks was circulated to interested agencies, groups, and persons from July 9 through August 15, 2005. It was also posted on Montana's electronic bulletin board. Six people called or wrote letters or emails of support, along with the Beartooth Alliance, Montana Wildlife Federation, and US Fish and Wildlife Service.

One person supported the project, but expressed a concern about the addition of YCT's leading to restrictions on all-terrain vehicle (ATV) travel in the vicinity as part of the Gallatin National Forest Travel Plan. This and similar projects are intended to preclude listing the YCT as a threatened or endangered species. If it were listed, access to all areas supporting YCT could be restricted. Also, the fisheries in these small streams are not likely to attract anglers on ATV's.

Another person supported the proposed introductions to Miller and Sheep creeks, but opposed the on-going removal of non-native trout (in this case eastern brook trout (EB)) from Soda Butte Creek. Because the EB has proven the superior competitor in most sites where it coexists with YCT, the success of YCT in this creek and its tributaries requires EB removal. Many other healthy, self-sustaining EB populations remain throughout lakes and streams in the Absaroka-Beartooth Mountains.

One reviewer recommended introducing YCT into Miller and Sheep creeks as an initial stocking. We will review the proposed level in relation to available habitat to determine whether planting more would be beneficial.

The US Fish and Wildlife Service noted that bald eagles, grizzly bears, grey wolves, and Canada lynx might be present within the action area. Given the scope, location, and nature of the proposed work, however, they do not anticipate any project-related adverse impacts to listed species or critical habitat.

After reviewing this proposal and corresponding comments, it is my decision to proceed with this project to introduce YCT into Miller and Sheep creeks in an effort to establish self-sustaining YCT populations.

This project is subject to appeal, which must be submitted to the FWP Director in writing, and postmarked within 30 days of the date on this decision notice. The appeal must specifically describe the basis for the appeal, explain how the appellant has previously commented to the department or participated in the decision-making process, and lay out how FWP might address the concerns in the appeal. If you have questions regarding this decision notice, please address them to Jim Darling at jdarling@mt.gov, or call him at 247-2961.

Sincerely,



Harvey E. Nyberg
Regional Supervisor