

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW OF FISH INTRODUCTION INTRODUCTION OF BROWN TROUT INTO ACKLEY LAKE

Proposed Action:

To stock brown trout (*Salmo trutta*) from hatchery brood stock into Ackley Lake.

Need for Action:

The intent of the stocking change is to attempt to control the sucker population through brown trout predation. Brown trout will diversify the species stocked in Ackley Lake.

Description of water body:

Name:	Ackley Lake	Location:	T14N R14E S22
Water Code:	16-4300	County:	Judith Basin

Drainage where pond is located:

Ackley Lake is an off-stream irrigation reservoir located near Hobson, MT in the Judith River drainage, approximately 5 miles southwest of Hobson, MT. The inlet canal is located about 3 miles upstream of Antelope Creek.

Species proposed for introduction and stocking history:

Brown trout are proposed for introduction into Ackley Lake. Historically, several different species were stocked into Ackley Lake. Rainbow trout *Oncorhynchus mykiss* were first stocked in 1932 and have been stocked annually since 1938. Currently 30,000 Eagle Lake strain and 10,000 Arlee strain rainbow trout are stocked annually. Undesignated cutthroat trout *Oncorhynchus clarki* sp., brook trout *Salvelinus fontinalis*, Yellowstone cutthroat trout *Oncorhynchus clarki bouvieri* and kokanee salmon *Oncorhynchus nerka* were all stocked at one point. Brown trout, white suckers *Catostomus commersoni*, longnose suckers *Catostomus catostomus* and mountain white fish *Prosopium williamsoni* are also found in the reservoir.

Is this species legally present in the drainage?

Yes, brown trout are the most common game fish in this reach of the Judith River. Brown trout often enter Ackley Lake through the supply canal and have been captured in small numbers during fall gill netting surveys during 10 of the last 18 years.

Species of Special Concern in the drainage

There are no known species of special concern in this section of the Judith River. FWP surveys indicate there are westslope cutthroat trout *Oncorhynchus clarki lewisi* in the Judith headwaters and blue suckers *Cycleptus elongatus* in the lowest 20 miles of the Judith.

RISKS:

Potential for impacts on genetic structure of existing fish populations:

None Minor Major

No significant impacts are expected. It is possible brown trout stocked in Ackley Lake may escape downstream and interbreed with wild brown trout in the Judith River. This should not have a negative impact on the genetics of these non-native fish

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

None Minor Major

Predation will occur on existing populations of fish in the reservoir. Brown trout are being stocked as an experimental predator to control the sucker population.

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

None Minor Major

Some aquatic invertebrates and amphibians may be consumed, but no population level impact is expected.

Potential for the proposed new species to reproduce in this location:

None Minor Major

There are no inflowing or out flowing streams associated with Ackley Lake that would provide adequate spawning habitat for brown trout. In the past, other trout species did not successfully spawn in Ackley Lake.

If necessary, would it be feasible to remove this species after it has been stocked? No.

Cessation of stocking would reduce the population over a period of several years as stocked fish die-off or are harvested. A few brown trout would continue to enter Ackley Lake through the canal. It may be possible to chemically treat Ackley Lake to remove introduced brown trout, but this would likely be cost prohibitive and brown trout would continue to reach Ackley Lake through the inlet canal.

Would this introduction result in impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? No.

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

- 1) **No Action:** Rainbow trout would continue to be stocked at existing levels. There would not be an opportunity to evaluate stocking of brown trout for sucker control in an off-stream storage reservoir.
- 2) **Preferred alternative is to stock brown trout.** Establishment of a brown trout fishery would diversify the stocked fish in Ackley Lake and perhaps help control the sucker population.
- 3) **Stock a different predator such as walleye or northern pike:** Ackley Lake has a long history as a popular and successful trout fishery. If these species were stocked, trout would likely have to be stocked at larger sizes or the fishery converted to a cool water non-trout fishery. There is a walleye fishery in Casino Creek Reservoir and a northern pike fishery in East Fork Reservoir, both of which are about 25 miles from Ackley Lake.

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

None are necessary beyond this EA.

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

Montana anglers

List all agencies and individuals who have been notified of this proposed introduction: Public notification via the State of Montana web site (<http://fwp.state.mt.us/publicnotices/>).

Steve Leathe, Fisheries Manager, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Great Falls

Is an EIS required? No the action is expected to be minor and beneficial.

EA prepared by:

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Date:

February 9, 2006

Comments will be accepted until:

April 1, 2006

Comments should be sent to:

Anne Tews

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