



2300 Lake Elmo Drive  
Billings, MT 59105

## NOTICE OF DECISION

March 14, 2013

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

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

Mike Volesky, Governor's Office\*  
Sarah Elliott, Press Agent, Governor's Office\*  
Montana Historical Society, State Preservation Office  
Janet Ellis, Montana Audubon Council  
Montana Wildlife Federation  
Montana State Library\*  
George Ochenski  
Montana Environmental Information Center  
Wayne Hirst, Montana State Parks Foundation  
FWP Commissioner Shane Colton  
Montana Parks Association (land acquisition projects)  
Sharon Moore, DNRC Area Manager, Southern Land Office  
County Commissioners  
Other Local Interested People or Groups and:  
Bill Avey, USFS, Big Timber (wavey@fs.fed.us)  
Scott Barndt, USFS, Bozeman (sbarndt@fs.fed.us)  
Scot Shuler, USFS, Livingston (swshuler@fs.fed.us)  
Scott Bosse, GYC, Bozeman (sbosse@greateryellowstone.org)  
Coral Wilson, SG CD, Big Timber (coral.wilson@mt.nacdn.net)

Ladies and Gentlemen:

A draft Environmental Assessment (EA) was prepared for stocking Yellowstone cutthroat trout (YCT) into Great Falls Creek Lake #55 in the Boulder River drainage near Big Timber, Montana replacing previously planted, non-native rainbow trout that have all but disappeared. The draft EA was circulated to interested agencies, groups, and persons from July 11, 2006 through August 4, 2006, and was posted on the FWP website.

Comments were received from the Montana Historical Society, U.S. Forest Service, and Greater Yellowstone Coalition. Responses to these comments are provided in the attachment.

After reviewing this proposal and corresponding comments, it is my decision to proceed with this project to stock YCT into Great Falls Creek Lake #55 in place of rainbow trout. If you have questions regarding this decision notice or wish a copy of the final EA, you may e-mail me at [ghammond@mt.gov](mailto:ghammond@mt.gov), or call me at 247-2951.

Sincerely,

Gary Hammond  
Regional Supervisor

## RESPONSE TO COMMENTS ON GREAT FALLS CREEK LAKE # 55 EA

### Montana Historical Society

*Comment: We feel there is a low likelihood cultural properties will be impacted. We, therefore, feel that a recommendation for a cultural resource inventory is unwarranted at this time. However, should cultural materials be inadvertently discovered during this project we would ask that our office be contacted and the site investigated.*

Response: We will contact the MHS if we discover any cultural materials.

### US Forest Service, Gallatin National Forest

*Comment: The EA should state that stocking will occur by previously approved aerial methods.*

Response: The final EA has this language included.

### Greater Yellowstone Coalition

*Comment: This project does not appear to pose any controversial issues, as it does not involve the introduction of fish into a body of water that is in a naturally fishless state; it does not appear to require the use of piscicides or extensive gillnetting to eliminate an existing non-native fish population; and it will not result in diminished fishing opportunities for the general public. The only question we have is where will the Yellowstone cutthroat trout that will be stocked in Great Falls Creek Lake #55 come from? We would prefer that they would come from another lake or stream in the Boulder River drainage in order to maintain the genetic integrity of existing Yellowstone cutthroat populations in the drainage.*

Response: The Boulder River and its tributaries upstream of the Natural Bridge Falls were void of fish prior to the early 1900's. Yellowstone cutthroat trout (YCT) were introduced to the Boulder River upstream of the Natural Bridge in 1936. This stock of fish was likely from Yellowstone Lake. Later stockings in the 1970's were from the Yellowstone River stock of fish maintained at the Yellowstone River Trout Hatchery at Big Timber. No cutthroat trout have been stocked in the Boulder River since 1974; however, several of the lakes in the drainage continue to be stocked to this day. Six lakes in the main Boulder River drainage upstream of Natural Bridge are stocked with YCT. These lakes are stocked with the McBride Lake strain and will be stocked in the future with the Goose Lake strain of cutthroat. There are an additional 5 self-sustaining lakes with YCT in this area. None of these lakes have been genetically tested, but are suspected to be pure. The origin of these fish is either the Yellowstone River or McBride Lake stock. Four tributaries have self-sustaining populations of YCT (East Fork Boulder River, Upside Down Creek, Bridge Creek, Meatrack Creek, and Hawley Creek). The origin of many of these populations is fish from lakes upstream escaping to the creeks. Recent genetic testing (only available for Meatrack Creek) indicates that these fish are slightly hybridized (1%) with rainbow trout.

Because of the lack of genetic and disease testing on self-sustaining lakes in the Boulder River drainage, and the fact that all populations of fish are of stocked origin within the last 70 years, we have elected to use the current stock of fish maintained at the Big Timber hatchery to stock Great Falls Creek Lake #55. This stock is a mix of McBride Lake and Goose Lake YCT. Both are genetically pure YCT and originated within 50 miles of Great Falls Creek. Both sources are from high mountain lakes in the Beartooth Mountains and should thrive in Great Falls Creek Lake #55. There are few cutthroats in the Boulder River near the confluence of Great Falls Creek; rainbow trout in this area dominate the river. Further, the creek is currently fishless downstream of the lake, but it is possible that YCT could colonize the creek, establish a self-sustaining population, and become a source of YCT for the Boulder River.