1400 South 19th Avenue
Bozeman, MT 59718

May 22, 2012

To: Governor's Office, Mike Volesky, State Capitol, Room 204, P.O. Box 200801, Helena, MT 59620-0801
Environmental Quality Council, State Capitol, Room 106, P.O. Box 201704, Helena, MT 59620-1704
Dept. of Environmental Quality, Metcalf Building, P.O. Box 200901, Helena, MT 59620-0901
Dept. of Natural Resources & Conservation, P.O. Box 201601, Helena, MT 59620-1601
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks:
Director's Office Parks Division Lands Section FWP Commissioners
Fisheries Bureau Legal Unit Wildlife Bureau Design & Construction
MT Historical Society, State Historic Preservation Office, P.O. Box 201202, Helena, MT 59620-1202
MT State Parks Association, P.O. Box 699, Billings, MT 59103
MT State Library, 1515 E. Sixth Ave., P.O. Box 201800, Helena, MT 59620
James Jensen, Montana Environmental Information Center, P.O. Box 1184, Helena, MT 59624
Janet Ellis, Montana Audubon Council, P.O. Box 595, Helena, MT 59624
George Ochenski, P.O. Box 689, Helena, MT 59624
Jerry DiMarco, P.O. Box 1571, Bozeman, MT 59771
Montana Wildlife Federation, P.O. Box 1175, Helena, MT 59624
Wayne Hurst, P.O. Box 728, Libby, MT 59923
Jack Jones, 3014 Irene St., Butte, MT 59701

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The enclosed Decision Notice has been prepared for the Middle Madison Trumpeter Swan Reintroduction Project. A total of 1 comment was received during the 14-day comment period ending May 21, 2012. This Decision Notice and EA are available for review in Helena at FWP's Headquarters and the State Library. They also may be viewed on FWP's Internet website: http://www.fwp.mt.gov.

Fish, Wildlife & Parks has decided to proceed with the proposed project with no changes to the Draft EA. Thank you for your interest.

Sincerely,

Patrick J. Flowers
Region Three Supervisor

Attachment

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT DECISION NOTICE
for the
MADISON VALLEY TRUMPETER SWAN REINTRODUCTION PROJECT

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Region 3 - Bozeman
May 22, 2012

Preface

In 2005, Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) developed a Comprehensive Fish and Wildlife Conservation Strategy (CFWCS; 2005) that has been used to direct conservation efforts, and direct attention to specific geographic areas or species that are in greatest need of conservation. This strategy identifies southwest Montana's Intermountain Basins and Valleys as a geographic focus area and identifies Trumpeter Swans (*Cygnus buccinator*) as a Tier 1 species. Conservation concerns for trumpeter swans include: isolated breeding flocks; wetland loss and functional degradation; lack of information of current distribution and breeding effort/success; and vulnerability to power line collisions. MFWP has worked extensively in this area to address these conservation concerns. In addition, the Montana Wetlands Legacy Partnership has spearheaded the Madison Valley habitat protection and restoration work which has resulted in nationally recognized wetland projects which are now providing quality wetland habitat and offer the immediate potential to increase swan production in the region and enhance connectivity between flocks. The Madison Valley trumpeter swan restoration project, and the potential release of captive-reared birds to establish a breeding flock in the Madison, will therefore allow MFWP to implement the CFWCS and also to further implement the Pacific Flyway Council's Rocky Mountain Population Trumpeter Swan Implementation Plan's (TSIP) strategies that address conservation concerns for this iconic wetland species.

The proposed initial release site is the O'Dell Creek Headwaters wetlands south of Ennis, Madison County, Montana, between Quake and Ennis Lakes. O'Dell Creek Headwaters is an 8,000-acre area with extensive wetlands, spring creeks, streams, and riparian areas on the east side of the Madison River. The proposed release site is currently under perpetual protection by a MFWP conservation easement. The O'Dell Creek Headwaters has undergone habitat suitability evaluations by MT Natural Heritage Program ecologists and Department of Environmental Quality as well as biologists from the University of Montana Avian Science Center for six years. Results of these surveys show large increases in breeding waterfowl in the O'Dell Creek Headwaters since restoration began. In addition, the growth of aquatic vegetation to support breeding swans has been determined to be adequate to support the proposed releases beginning in 2012.

In summary, recent advances in the middle Madison protection and restoration work include continued planning and wetland restoration at O'Dell Creek since 2005, annual habitat and forage availability evaluations, advances in riparian and wetland protection through deployment of livestock exclosure fences, protection of woody plantings from wild ungulate browsing, and other intensive management.

MFWP presented the proposal to the FWP Commission for tentative approval on April 1, 2012, which then granted the Department permission to move forward with a formal EA and public comment period. The project was brought before the Commission because MFWP, when proposing the transplantation of any wildlife, must secure the Commission's approval while demonstrating that based upon scientific investigation and after a public hearing a species of wildlife poses no harm to native wildlife and plants or to agricultural production and that the transplantation of that species has significant public benefits [MCA 87-5-711(1)]. The Commission endorsed the project following its discussion of the proposal.

Proposed Action

FWP proposes to release a limited number of captive-reared trumpeter swans to establish a breeding flock of 5 established nesting pairs in the middle Madison Valley of southwest Montana. The Department aims to increase swan production in the region and to enhance connectivity between flocks within the Tri-state region of Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming. The first release of trumpeters would occur in September 2012. MFWP will obtain trumpeter swans for release from the Wyoming Wetlands Society facility in Jackson, Wyoming. The reintroduction of captive-reared trumpeter swans into suitable nesting areas is a proven management tool in use in other parts of Montana and neighboring states. Releases are proposed to continue until 5 breeding pairs are established in the Madison or until monitoring of the program indicates that the project should be discontinued.

Public Process and Comments

FWP is required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) to assess potential impacts of a proposed action to the human and physical environment. In compliance with MEPA, an Environmental Assessment (EA) was completed for the proposed project by MFWP and released for public comment on May 7, 2012.

Public comments on the proposed action were taken for 14 days (through May 21, 2012). Legal notices were printed in the *Madisonian* and *Bozeman Daily Chronicle*. The EA was also posted on the FWP webpage: http://fwp.mt.gov//publicnotices/.

A total of 1 written comment was received in response to the EA. This comment was in total support of the proposed action. No comments were received in opposition to the proposed action.

Below is a summary of the comments received and MFWP responses to the feedback:

1) Reintroduction of trumpeter swans to encourage a native species to nest in its historic range

   The one comment received made reference to the value of restoring a native species to its historic range and encouraging them to nest where they have not nested to date.
   FWP response: The Department concurs with this statement and believes that while Canadian trumpeters winter in small numbers in the area, there are no known records of breeding trumpeters in Montana's Madison Valley in recent years. The intention of this restoration effort is that this breeding flock be migratory, leaving the Madison Valley in winter. Public comment received to date regarding the proposed action is that residents and landowners are looking forward to the return of nesting trumpeters to the Madison Valley.

   No comments were received expressing any concern about the reintroduction project.

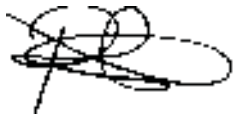
Final Environmental Assessment

There are no modifications necessary to the Draft Environmental Assessment based on public comment. The Draft Environmental Assessment, together with this Decision Notice, will serve as the final document for this proposal.

Decision

Based on the Environmental Assessment, public comment, and the need to meet the terms of MCA 87-5-711(1) for Commission approval of wildlife transplants in Montana, it is my decision to approve the proposed action for implementation of the Madison Valley Trumpeter Swan Reintroduction project.

I find there to be no significant impacts on the human and physical environments associated with this project. Therefore, I conclude that the Environmental Assessment is the appropriate level of analysis, and that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.



_____ 5/22/2012

Patrick J. Flowers Date
Region 3 Supervisor
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks