



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

1400 South 19th Avenue
Bozeman, MT 59718

June 28, 2013

To: Governor's Office, Tim Baker, 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 Division	Legal Unit	Wildlife Division	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
Jack Atcheson, 2309 Hancock Avenue, Butte MT 59701
Beaverhead Conservation District, 420 Barrett Street, Dillon, MT 59725
U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Helena
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Helena
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 420 Barrett Street, Dillon, MT 59725
Big Hole Watershed Committee, P.O. Box 931, Butte, MT 59703
Montana Trout Unlimited, P.O. Box 7186, Missoula, MT 59807
Dan Vermillion, FWP Commissioner, Livingston MT
Earnest and Colleen Bacon, 2215 Fishtrap Creek Road, Wisdom, MT 59761
Dept. of Natural Resources and Conservation, 730 N. Montana Street, Dillon, MT 59725-9424
George Grant Chapter of Trout Unlimited, P.O. Box 563, Butte, MT 59703
Skyline Sportsmen, P.O. Box 173, Butte, MT 59703
Anaconda Sportsmen, 2 Cherry, Anaconda, MT 59711
Tom Anacker, Trout Unlimited, 422 Henderson Street, Bozeman, MT 59715
Jon Olsen, P.E., American Land Development, 106 East Babcock, Bozeman, MT 59715
Jerry Scott, Gallatin Associates, PO Box 160189, Big Sky, MT 59716
Blue Water Task Force, c/o Kristin Gardner, PO Box 160513, Big Sky, MT 59716
WYTANA Livestock Co., c/o James Taylor, 1045 Reeves Road East, Suite C, Bozeman, MT 59715
Mark Peterson, Madison-Gallatin Trout Unlimited, PO Box 52, Bozeman, MT 59771
Lisa Stoeffler, Bozeman Ranger District, 3710 Fallon Street, Suite C, Bozeman, MT 59718
Summit View Homeowner's Association, Attn: Patrick Miller, P.O. Box 161474, Big Sky, MT 59716
The Bozeman Chronicle
Lone Peak Lookout (Big Sky weekly paper)
Montana Standard

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The enclosed Decision Notice has been prepared proposing to conserve westslope cutthroat trout in the South Fork North Fork Divide Creek (Big Hole drainage), Bostwick Creek, and Beehive Basin Creek (Gallatin drainage) through the mechanical removal of non-native trout. Mechanical removal consists of electrofishing and/or netting and selectively removing non-native brook trout, hybridized rainbow-cutthroat trout, and Yellowstone cutthroat trout. Non-native trout would also be removed mechanically from South Fork Reservoir (South Fork North Fork Divide Creek) and an unnamed lake in the Beehive Basin Creek drainage (locally known as Egg Lake). Westslope cutthroat trout would be stocked into the unnamed lake in Beehive Basin Creek, and cutthroat trout would recolonize South Fork Reservoir naturally from the stream.

It is my decision to proceed with the proposed action of mechanically removing non-native and hybridized trout from the South Fork North Fork Divide Creek, Bostwick Creek, and Beehive Basin Creek.

Questions regarding these Decision Notices should be mailed to:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Mechanical Removal of Non-Native Trout
Attn: Jim Olsen
1820 Meadowlark Lane
Butte, MT 59701

Or e-mailed to: jimolsen@mt.gov

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'PJF', enclosed within a large, loopy oval shape.

Patrick J. Flowers
Region Three Supervisor

**WESTSLOPE CUTTHROAT TROUT CONSERVATION THROUGH
THE MECHANICAL REMOVAL OF NON-NATIVE TROUT IN
THREE STREAMS OF SOUTHWEST MONTANA
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
DECISION NOTICE**

**Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Region Three, Bozeman
June 28, 2013**

Proposed Action

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) is proposing to remove non-native trout by mechanical methods from the South Fork North Fork Divide Creek upstream of and including South Fork Reservoir, Bostwick Creek, and Beehive Basin Creek including Egg Lake. The removal of non-native trout would serve to secure several of the few remaining native westslope cutthroat trout (WCT) (*Oncorhynchus clarki lewisi*) populations in the Big Hole River and Gallatin River drainages by eliminating competition and hybridization from non-native trout. The mechanical means proposed for fish collection and removal include electrofishing the streams, netting the lakes, and draining of South Fork Reservoir.

Montana Environmental Policy Act

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks is required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) to assess significant potential impacts of a proposed action to the human and physical environment. An Environmental Assessment (EA), in compliance with MEPA, was completed for the proposed project by FWP and released for public comment on May 3, 2013.

Public comments on the proposed project were taken for 30 days (through June 4, 2013). The EA was mailed to 36 individuals and groups; legal notice was printed in the Montana Standard (Butte), Bozeman Chronicle, and Big Sky Weekly newspapers. A draft EA was posted on the FWP webpage: <http://fwp.mt.gov/publicnotices/>. A total of three comments were received. Additional information was also provided by the public that corrected some minor errors related to the Beehive Basin Creek section of the EA. The EA states, "The majority of WCT in the stream are located on private land downstream of the forest boundary within the Summit View Subdivision." There are actually two subdivisions on Beehive Basin Creek. The Beehive Subdivision additionally exists. Owners of property in Beehive Subdivision were also sent the public notice and contacted individually regarding the project. The EA also states that, "Land along most of the stream is managed under an existing Nature Conservancy conservation agreement." This statement is incorrect; the easement on the property is held by the Gallatin Valley Land Trust, not the Nature Conservancy.

Summary of Public Comment

Comment: "As a full time resident of the Summit View Subdivision and the President of the Board of the Summit View Owners Association (SVOA), I would like to offer the

support of our property owners for the EA to remove non native trout from the Beehive Creek and its source, Egg Lake, in favor of preserving an existing population of WCT.

Since most all of the property owners of the SVOA are here only part time, the association has given its Board of Directors broad authority to represent the owners. As President of that Board, I endorse the project and look forward to working with Bruce Roberts and Mike Vaughn on next steps once the decision to proceed is made.”

Response: None necessary.

Comment: “Once again I have to question the judgment of killing Yellowstone cutthroat (NATIVE) to reintroduce a species that is not 100% pure westslope. My information on westslope cutthroat is that all have had some hybridization with rainbows. Is this correct? Also, just leave it alone. If the westslopes didn't survive before, they are not going to later!”

Response: Yellowstone cutthroat trout is a native species in Montana but they are not native to any streams or lakes in the Missouri River drainage. Yellowstone cutthroat are native only to the Yellowstone River drainage in Montana but they were also the most widely stocked cutthroat trout across Montana in the early 1900's. There are many lakes in the Missouri River drainage that were historically fishless that now contain self-sustaining populations of Yellowstone cutthroat trout because of past stocking, (e.g., Egg Lake). There will be no management changes at the majority of these lakes unless they pose a hybridization threat to a native population of westslope cutthroat downstream.

Not all westslope cutthroats are hybridized with rainbows. There are still many remaining westslope populations that are not hybridized. All Montana populations that have at least 90% westslope genes are considered to be of conservation value while those that are non-hybridized are considered to have the highest conservation value. There are very few non-hybridized populations left in some drainages such as the Gallatin. Those that are even slightly hybridized, therefore, have conservation value because they are all that remain of the species in that area. Conservation efforts have been aimed primarily at conserving the remaining non-hybridized fish in other drainages where there are more of these populations. FWP's conservation efforts in general will continue to be focused on those streams that have non-hybridized westslope cutthroat, but in some areas where few if any such populations exist conservation will be focused on those populations that contain at least 90% westslope cutthroat.

The lake at the headwaters of Beehive Basin Creek (Egg Lake) was historically fishless. Natural fish barriers in the stream precluded native westslope cutthroat trout from accessing the lake. Yellowstone cutthroat trout were introduced to the lake sometime in the last century. FWP has no stocking record for the lake, but stocking records are scant prior to 1950. It was a common practice before this time to give fish to local sporting groups who would transport the fish to various lakes and streams to stock them. We have no record of where these fish went, but many of the formerly fishless alpine lakes that today have self-sustaining populations of fish are a result of these stockings. Egg Lake would likely not have been stocked with Yellowstone cutthroat trout if westslope cutthroat would have been historically present, as there would ensure a self-sustaining population of fish. The only reason the lake is being targeted for fish removal is that Yellowstone cutthroat trout pose a hybridization risk to the native westslope cutthroat in

the stream below. Restocking Egg Lake with westslope from the stream below will eliminate the hybridization risk and still provide a fishery for folks to enjoy.

Comment: “Thank you for the opportunity to comment. Targeted projects to recover and protect existing populations of westslope cutthroat are vitally important to the overall effort to conserve this native species. All projects covered by the EA are consistent with the goals and objectives of the Memorandum of Understanding and Conservation Agreement for WCT and the statewide fisheries management plan. Methods proposed are reasonable, and the chance of successful outcomes are high. I support each of the projects covered by the EA as listed in the preferred alternative for each.”

Response: None necessary.

Decision

Based on the Environmental Assessment, public comment, and benefits and risks associated with this project, it is my decision to go forward with the proposed action of removing non-native trout by mechanical methods from the South Fork North Fork Divide Creek upstream of and including: South Fork Reservoir, Bostwick Creek, and Beehive Basin Creek, including Egg Lake. I find there to be no significant impacts on the human and physical environments associated with this project. I therefore conclude that the Environmental Assessment is the appropriate level of analysis, and that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.



Patrick J. Flowers
Region Three Supervisor
