



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Helena Area Resource Office

June 20, 2005

TO: Governor's Office, Mike Volesky, Room 204, State Capitol, P.O. 200801, Helena, MT 59620-0801
Environmental Quality Council, Capitol Building, Room 106, P.O. Box 201704, Helena, MT 59620
Dept. Environmental Quality, Metcalf Building, P.O. Box 200901, Helena, MT 59620-0901
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks:

Director's Office
Parks Division
Fisheries Division
Wildlife Division
Enforcement Division
Lands Section
Design & Construction Bureau
Legal Unit
FWP Commissioners

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

Glen Hockett, 745 Doane Road, Bozeman, MT 59715

Thomas Mendyke, Helena IR, 317 Cruise Ave., Helena, MT 59601

Tom Sathers, Headwaters Fish & Game Assoc., P.O. Box 1941, Bozeman, MT 59771-1941

Broadwater County Commissioners, Broadwater County Courthouse, Townsend, MT 59644

Lewis and Clark County Commissioners, 316 N Park, Helena, MT 59601

Jefferson County Commissioners, Box H, Boulder, MT 59632

Bruce Farling, Montana Trout Unlimited, Box 7186, Missoula, MT 59807

Steve Luebeck, George Grant TU, Box 563, Butte, MT 59703

David Payne, Missouri River TU, 4620 Liberty, Helena, MT 59601

John Wilson, Montana Trout Unlimited, 405 Monroe, Helena, MT 59601

Jack Sautter, Broadwater Stream and Lake Comm., 41 River Road, Townsend, MT 59644

Virgil Binkley, Broadwater Rod and Gun, Box 641, Townsend, MT 59644

Prickly Pear Sportsman's Association, Box 48, East Helena, MT 59635

Tom Gannon, Backcountry Horsemen of Montana, Box 2106, Clancy, MT 59634

James Mahaer, Last Chance Backcountry Horsemen, Box 4008, Helena, MT 59601

Paul Updike, Box 460, Townsend, MT 59644

Dave Brown, Elkhorn Working Group, 4510 Harmony Lane, Helena, MT 59602

DECISION NOTICE

Introduction of Westslope Cutthroat Trout to Crazy Creek and the South Fork of Crow Creek in the Elkhorn Mountains

Project Proposal

The proposed action is to introduce native westslope cutthroat trout (WCT) into two currently fishless streams in the Elkhorn Mountains (Crazy and SF Crow creeks). The project is designed to increase the overall distribution of WCT, a rare species in the upper Missouri River drainage, and to create a genetic reserve for “at risk” populations within the local area.

Environmental Policy Act Process

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) is required to assess potential impacts of the proposal to the human and physical environment. In compliance with requirements of the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA), an Environmental Assessment was completed for the project by FWP and released for public comment in June 2005.

Public comment on the proposed project was taken for 30 days (June 10, 2005, to July 9, 2005), and included a public open house held in Townsend on June 22, 2005. The Environmental Assessment was mailed to over 60 individuals/ groups on the FWP MEPA mailing list, and from a list of those who had previously expressed interest in cutthroat trout restoration projects in the Elkhorn Mountains. News releases or Legal Notices, which announce the availability of the EA and information about the public meeting, were published in the *Townsend Star* and *Boulder Monitor*. Additionally, the EA was posted on the FWP web site.

Issues raised during the public comment period concerning the Environmental Assessment are addressed in the comment section of this Decision Notice. There are no modifications to the Draft Environmental Assessments based on public comment, and the Draft Environmental Assessment and this Decision Notice together serve as the final documents.

Summary of Issues Addressed in the Environmental Assessment

The Environmental Assessments list the issues in detail. These include:

- Threats to WCT in Montana, the Elkhorn Mountains, and proposed project streams.
- Current distribution of WCT in the Elkhorn Mountains.
- Goals and methodology for introducing WCT to fishless streams.

Summary of Public Comment

By the close of the comment period, July 9, 2005, FWP had received two written comments. Attendance at the public meeting was sparse with only two people attending.

Written Comments on the Proposal:

Comment 1. Prickley Pear Sportsman's Association sent a written comment stating they support "...your proposed action to introduce native Westslope Cutthroat Trout into two currently fishless streams in the Elkhorn Mountains", and "Westslope Cutthroat Trout introduction into any of our State waters is a welcome project."

Response: Noted

Comment 2. A local area resident stated, "I stand 100% behind the continued efforts to re-introduce Westslope Cutthroat Trout in the Elkhorn Mountains. The selection of 'fishless' stretches of streams (South Fork of Crow Creek and Crazy Creek in this case) is an excellent choice because it avoids the problem some have with the removal of other fish prior to the re-introduction of Westslope Cutts."

Response: Noted

Decision

Based on the Environmental Assessment, public comment, and the high risk of the permanent loss of genetically pure WCT in the Elkhorn Mountains, it is my decision to proceed with the introduction of WCT to the SF of Crow and Crazy creeks. This introduction effort is part of the larger *Elkhorn Mountains Westslope Cutthroat Trout Recovery Program* initiated in 1999, and is consistent with statewide conservation and restoration strategies, goals and objectives as outlined in the *Memorandum of Understanding and Conservation Agreement for Westslope Cutthroat Trout in Montana* (signed by multiple state and federal agencies, and organizations in May 1999).

This project will help secure pure WCT in the Elkhorn Mountains by increasing the species distribution in the mountain range and by creating "genetic reserves" for local at risk populations. I find there to be no significant impact on the human or physical environment associated with these projects, except to help ensure the long-term persistence of genetically pure, locally adapted WCT in the Elkhorn Mountain Range. Therefore, I conclude that the Environmental Assessments are the appropriate level of analysis, and that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

With this decision, the Draft EA will become the Final EA of record for the project. Copies of the EA are available at the Helena Area Resource Office, FWP, 930 Custer Ave. West, Helena, MT, 59620, (406) 495-3260.

July 19, 2005

Michael Korn
Helena Area Coordinator, FWP