



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

1400 South 19th Avenue
Bozeman, MT 59718

July 29, 2009

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 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
Bruce McLeod, Spear Lazy U. 2107 Highland Ct, Bozeman MT 59715
Jonathan Rennie Patrick, 1723 Shields River Road, Wilsall MT 59086
Sharon Ann Rennie, 1723 Shields River Road, Wilsall MT 59086
Muffie and Stephen Murray, PO Box 450, Green Farr CT 68380
Joe Poteat, PO Box 400, Davidson NC 28036
71 Ranch LP, 106 71 Ranch Road. Martinsdale MT 59053
Montana Ranch Corp, 7670 Woodway Drive Ste, Houston TX 77063
Michael Michelson, Porcupine Creek Ranch Corp, San Mateo CA 94403
Charles Hereim, 1535 Blue Marlin Drive, Billings MT 59106-4624

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The enclosed Decision Notice has been prepared for the Upper Shields River Watershed Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout Inventory and Brook Trout Suppression Project. This project proposes the mechanical removal of Eastern brook trout (*Salvelinus fontinalis*) that are encountered during an intensive inventory of the headwaters of the Shields River for distribution of Yellowstone cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarki bouvieri*). The objective of brook trout suppression is to reduce competition with Yellowstone cutthroat over the short term until a detailed conservation plan for Yellowstone cutthroat can be implemented. Only one public comment was received during a 30-day comment period ending July 24, 2009.

It is my decision to proceed with the proposed project, with no changes to the Draft EA.

Questions regarding this Decision Notice should be mailed to:

Scott Opitz
1400 S 19th Avenue
Bozeman, MT 59718
Or e-mailed to: sopitz@mt.gov

Thank you for your interest.

Sincerely,

Patrick J. Flowers
Region Three Supervisor

attachment

Upper Shields River Watershed Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout Inventory and Brook Trout Suppression

DECISION NOTICE

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Region Three, Bozeman
July 2009

Proposed Action

This proposed action is to conduct a fish community inventory of the upper Shields River watershed and determine the current distribution of Yellowstone cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarki bouvieri*). Fisheries workers will sample streams in the project area using standard electrofishing methodologies. All Yellowstone cutthroat trout captured will be measured, weighed, and returned to the stream. Tissue samples comprised of small fin clips may be taken from a subset of captured Yellowstone cutthroat trout to verify genetic status. Workers will identify other native fishes and note their relative abundance. The proposed project will include the mechanical removal of nonnative brook trout (*Salvelinus fontinalis*) that are encountered during the inventory. The objective of brook trout suppression is to reduce competition with Yellowstone cutthroat trout over the short term. The results of the fish community inventory will guide development of a more detailed conservation plan to promote long-term persistence of the upper Shields River basin's Yellowstone cutthroat trout population.

Montana Environmental Policy Act

FWP is required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) to assess significant 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 FWP and released for public comment June 24, 2009.

Public comments on the proposed action were taken for 30 days (through July 24, 2009). The EA was mailed to 29 individuals and groups, 9 of which were adjacent landowners. The EA was also posted on the FWP webpage: <http://fwp.mt.gov/publicnotices/>.

Summary of Public Comment

One public comment was received during the 30-day review period. The comment was received from a private citizen who did not want to see the removal of brook trout in the Upper Shields. They felt that competition with Yellowstone cutthroat trout was not an issue and that from an angling perspective brook trout are a superior fish to Yellowstone cutthroat trout.

FWP Response: This project proposes to suppress brook trout numbers to reduce competition with Yellowstone cutthroat trout until a more detailed conservation plan for

Yellowstone cutthroat trout can be implemented. Past survey work indicates that brook trout are encroaching into habitat previously only occupied by Yellowstone cutthroat trout and that in some areas they have completely replaced Yellowstone cutthroat trout. Brook trout are present in a number of streams in the Shield River Drainage. Angling and harvest opportunities for brook trout will be reduced in some of the headwater streams as part of this project, but opportunities will remain in a number of other streams in the Shields River Drainage.

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 preserve Yellowstone cutthroat trout in the upper Shields River drainage, it is my decision to proceed with the proposed 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.

Patrick J. Flowers
Region Three Supervisor
