



2300 Lake Elmo Drive
Billings MT 59105

March 16, 2012

DECISION NOTICE

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/Our Montana (land acquisition projects)
Richard Moore, DNRC Area Manager, Southern Land Office
County Commissioners
Other Local Interested People or Groups
* (Sent electronically)

Ladies and Gentlemen:

A draft Environmental Assessment (EA) was prepared for a large multi-year project to establish a genetically pure, self-sustaining population of Yellowstone cutthroat trout in the large, interconnected upper Boulder River system off the Yellowstone River upstream of Big Timber. This project is designed to remove, as much as possible, all remaining sources of rainbow trout genetics from the upper Boulder River drainage through a combination of gill netting and limited chemical treatment. These treatments would be followed by heavy stocking of genetically pure Yellowstone cutthroat trout in an effort to eliminate remaining rainbow genetics over time using genetic swamping. The draft EA was circulated for 30 days to interested agencies, groups and persons, and a news release was sent to all regional media outlets (Billings television stations only). The EA was also posted on Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks' (FWP) website. Two people in addition to FWP and Forest Service biologists attended a public meeting held at the Carnegie Public Library in Big Timber on June 15, 2011.

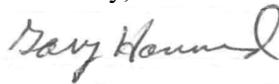
One participant at the public meeting expressed support for the project. Eight other comments were received via mail or email. Four of these comments were in favor of the project including letters of support from the local chapter of Trout Unlimited and the Beartooth Back County Horsemen. One angler was not against the project, but was against any use of rotenone in streams. One angler was against any project that favored one species of trout over another, and two anglers wanted FWP to liberalize limits and use anglers to remove unwanted rainbows and hybrids.

The rotenone treatments proposed in this project are limited to parts of two drainages in this large interconnected system. Because of the isolated locations of these drainages, attempts to remove rainbow via netting and/or electrofishing would be much more disruptive to the wilderness area and much less effective than short term chemical treatments. Once treatments are completed, the effected streams would be immediately restocked with genetically pure Yellowstone cutthroat trout to aid in genetic swamping and to quickly rebuild the recreational fishery that was lost.

The use of anglers to remove unwanted rainbow and hybrids would not be effective for this proposal. Even if all limits on rainbow trout were removed it would not be possible to draw enough anglers to these isolated locations to significantly impact fish populations in a short period of time. One major objective of this project is to remove as many rainbow X cutthroat hybrids as possible and it is often difficult to distinguish hybrids from pure fish. Anglers would likely miss many of these hybrids if they were trying to release cutthroat, or kill pure cutthroat if they were trying to make sure they were removing the hybrids they caught.

After reviewing this proposal and corresponding comments, it is my decision to proceed with this project to establish a genetically pure, self-sustaining population of Yellowstone cutthroat trout in the large, interconnected upper Boulder River. If you have any questions regarding this decision notice or wish a copy of the final EA, you may email me at ghammond@mt.gov, or call me at 247-2951.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gary Hammond".

Gary Hammond
Regional Supervisor