



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

1400 South 19th Avenue
Bozeman, MT 59718

July 6, 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 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

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The enclosed Decision Notice has been prepared for a proposal to introduce westslope cutthroat trout to a fishless reach of Twelvemile Creek, a tributary to Deep Creek in the Big Hole River Drainage. Non-hybridized westslope cutthroat trout are present in Twelvemile Creek, which is the last non-hybridized population in the Deep Creek drainage. The cutthroat are at low abundance and declining due to competition from non-native brook trout. Approximately three miles of fishless habitat is present in Twelvemile Creek upstream of a cascade fish barrier. FWP is proposing to capture the cutthroat trout in Twelvemile Creek using electrofishing and transport the fish upstream of the barrier with the hope of conserving this population before it is extirpated. Public comment

was received from 2 individuals during a 30-day comment period ending at 5:00 pm on June 18, 2012.

It is my decision to proceed with the proposed action of introducing westslope cutthroat trout upstream of the cascade fish barrier.

Questions regarding this Decision Notice should be mailed to:

Jim Olsen

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

1820 Meadowlark Lane

Butte, MT 59701

Or email at: jimolsen@mt.gov

Thank you for your interest.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Patrick J. Flowers". The signature is stylized with loops and a long horizontal stroke at the bottom.

Patrick J. Flowers

Region Three Supervisor



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

RANGE EXPANSION OF WESTSLOPE CUTTHROAT TROUT IN TWELVEMILE CREEK, BIG HOLE RIVER DRAINAGE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT DECISION NOTICE

**Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Region Three, Bozeman
July 6, 2012**

Proposed Action

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes to introduce westslope cutthroat trout (WCT), a native species to a fishless reach of Twelvemile Creek located upstream of a natural cascade fish barrier. WCT in Twelvemile Creek represent the last remaining non-hybridized population of native cutthroat trout in the Deep Creek drainage. However, the population is declining due to competition from non-native brook trout. The intent of this project is to conserve this local population of WCT by introducing them upstream of the cascade.

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. In compliance with MEPA, an Environmental Assessment (EA) was completed for the proposed project by FWP and released for public comment on May 18, 2012.

Public comments on the proposed project were taken for 30 days (through June 18, 2012). The EA was mailed to 27 individuals and groups, and a legal notice was printed in the Montana Standard (Butte) newspaper. A draft EA was posted on the FWP webpage: <http://fwp.mt.gov/publicnotices/>. A total of two comments on this project were received.

Summary of Public Comment

Comment: Skyline Sportsmen's Association: "With a natural barrier already in place and a viable WCT population already in stretches of Twelvemile Creek below the falls it would seem success of the proposed project would be very high, and with minimal costs."

Response: We agree that the most cost effective and immediate way to conserve WCT in Twelvemile Creek is to introduce them upstream of the barrier cascade.

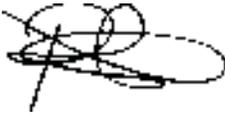
Comment: Jerry DiMarco: “This sounds like a good project, hope it is successful. Will fishing be restricted in the project area after completion of the project? Thank you.”

Response: The fishing regulations will be the same in Twelvemile Creek above the cascade as below which are the same across all streams in the central fishing district. These regulations are: catch and release only for cutthroat trout in rivers and streams. Our hope is that through projects like this and others that we'll eventually be able to change these regulations to allow some harvest of cutthroat trout streams, but this can only occur if we have healthy viable populations. However, for now in most cases cutthroat populations are in tough enough shape that angler harvest would be detrimental to the population. Harvest of cutthroat trout is still allowed in lakes and reservoirs.

Follow-up Comment: Jerry DiMarco: Thank you for your reply. For the record, I'm not asking for more fishing access. I think it would be best to bar access to these recovery areas to minimize the risk of tampering with the WCT habitat...

Decision

It is my decision to go forward with the proposed action of introducing WCT to the fishless reach of Twelvemile Creek upstream of the cascade fish barrier, based on the Environmental Assessment, public comment, and benefits and risks associated with this project. 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