Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
1420 E 6th Ave, PO Box 200701 Helena, MT 59620-0701

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

PART 1. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

Project Title: Wild sauger transfer from Missouri River to Jakes Reservoir
Date: July 12, 2013
Project Location: Fergus County

Description and Need for Project:

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) proposes to transfer wild sauger from the Fred Robinson Bridge area of the Missouri River to Jakes Reservoir. Sauger were stocked in Jakes Reservoir in 2003 and 2005 to reduce yellow perch numbers and stunting. It appears that sauger from the 2005 year class previously transferred had limited if any survival and the 2003 year class is getting old. Total length and condition of yellow perch improved through 2009. Condition of yellow perch has declined by 30% and mean length by nearly one inch in the past 2–3 years (through 2012). FWP would like to continue with the sauger predation program at Jakes. Missouri River sauger are only available as wild fish transfer from outside the hatchery system.

Under this proposal up to 100 sauger from 5–13 inches would be transferred annually for up to five years from the Missouri River to Jakes Reservoir. The stocking rate is based on the results obtained from the 400 5.8 inch sauger stocked in 2003. Sauger would be primarily captured with electrofishing but other river sampling methods such as, trammel netting and set lines may also be used.

To minimize impacts on the wild sauger population, sauger would be moved after the spawning season from a 37 mile reach of river between Cow Creek and the Rock Creek boat ramp and would be limited to 100 sauger each year.

Authority:

Section 87-1-201 (1) of the Montana Code Annotated (MCA) requires FWP to supervise all wildlife and fish in the state of Montana. The Department may spend money for the protection, preservation, management, and propagation of fish. Section 87-1-201(3), MCA

Other groups or agencies contacted or which may have overlapping jurisdiction:

This transfer will only take place if approved by the FWP fish health coordinator and if all FWP fish transfer protocols are followed. Montana anglers will be informed through the EA process.

PART 2. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

Table 1. Potential impact on physical environment.

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Provided
1. Unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources			X			1.
2. Terrestrial or aquatic life and/or habitats			X			2.
3. Introduction of new species into an area				X		3.
4. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality				X		
5. Water quality, quantity and distribution (surface or groundwater)				X		
6. Existing water right or reservation				X		
7. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture				X		
8. Air quality or objectional odors				X		
9. Historical and archaeological sites				X		
10. Demands on environmental resources of land, water, air & energy				X		
11. Aesthetics				X		

1 and 2. Sauger are a species of concern with a one fish angler limit in the proposed collection area. Sauger from the Missouri from Morony Dam to Fort Peck are known to migrate in the spring to this area for spawning but only resident fish are located in this area during the proposed fall sampling period. Fall electrofishing in the area routinely has sauger catch rates of at least 10/hour (≥ 6 inches). In 2012, 10 hours of electrofishing captured 164 sauger of all sizes. Eighty-four sauger were marked during the first 5 hours and only 2 were recaptured during the second 5 hours (a 2.3% re-capture rate). A simple recapture percentage indicates there are likely over 3,000 sauger in this 6 mile reach. Although this is not a population estimate, it seems reasonable to assume that proposal would remove far less than 1% of the sauger annually in the 37 mile reach.

Precautions will be taken to minimize impacts to this sensitive species including:

1) Sauger will not be collected during the spawning season.
2) Collection will be limited to 100 fish annually.
3) Sauger transferred will be less than 13 inches long; 8 – 10 inch fish will be preferred.
4) Electrofishing surveys in 2012 indicate that 2012 was an exceptional reproduction year, which may temporarily increase numbers.

3. Sauger are already present in Jakes Reservoir and introduced individuals will prey on the existing yellow perch community. This action will follow the FWP fish transfer protocols, which should insure that no unintended transfers of aquatic organisms will occur.

Table 2. Potential impacts on human environment.

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Provided
1. Social structures and cultural diversity				X		
2. Changes in existing public benefits provided by wildlife populations and/or habitat				X		
3. Local and state tax base and tax revenue				X		
4. Agricultural production				X		
5. Human health				X		
6. Quantity and distribution of community and personal income				X		
7. Access to and quality of recreational activities			X (benefit)			7.
8. Locally adopted environmental plans & goals (ordinances)				X		
9. Distribution and density of population and housing				X		
10. Demands for government services				X		10.
11. Industrial and/or commercial activity				X		

7. Stocking sauger in Jakes Reservoir should improve the yellow perch fishery in this body of water. The proposal should not impact sauger at the population level in the Missouri River.

10. This work will be undertaken as part of normal fisheries field operations.

Does the proposed action involve potential risks or adverse effects which are uncertain but extremely harmful if they were to occur? No

Does the proposed action have impacts that are individually minor, but cumulatively significant or potentially significant? No

Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives (including the no action alternative) to the proposed action when alternatives are reasonably available and prudent to consider. Include a discussion of how the alternatives would be implemented:

No Action; if the transfer is not completed sauger will soon die out of Jakes Reservoir and the yellow perch population will likely become increasingly stunted. There has been a decline in yellow perch condition and total length in the last 2 – 3 years.

Transfer northern pike; It would be challenging to transfer sufficient fish to increase yellow perch size; this species was previously transferred in 1996 and did not appear to increase yellow perch size. This alternative would also require a wild fish transfer.

Transfer walleye: Jakes pond is usually turbid, an environmental condition that is suited to sauger and not walleye. If hatchery raised walleye were stocked at 1–2 inches long, survival would likely be poor; the 1.7 inch sauger stocked two years after the first sauger plant do not appear to have survived.

The proposed alternative, transfer of wild sauger outside of the spawning season, should provide the most likely successful outcome with minimal (if any) impacts.

Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency:

The transfer will require that FWP disease, AIS and fish transfer protocols are followed.

Precautions that will be taken to prevent impacts to the sauger population:

1) Sauger will not be collected during the spawning season.
2) Collection will be limited to 100 fish annually.
3) Sauger transferred will be less than 13 inches long; 8–10 inch fish will be preferred.

Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency: No permits should be needed for this project.

Individuals or groups contributing to, or commenting on, this EA: FWP staff in Great Falls and Helena

EA prepared by: Anne Tews

Date Completed: July 12, 2013

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Comments due by: August 22, 2013