



February 6, 2019

To whom it may concern,

The Department of Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) is seeking comment on a proposed project to restore native Westslope Cutthroat Trout (WCT) to the headwaters of Tepee Creek. Comments on the proposed project will be used to guide the development of an Environmental Assessment under the Montana Environmental Policy Act

Tepee Creek is a tributary to Grayling Creek which originates in Yellowstone National Park approximately 20 Miles NNE of the town of West Yellowstone. Grayling Creek flows in a southerly direction and enters Hebgen Reservoir approximately 2.5 miles northwest of the junction of highways 287 and 291. (see attached map).

The proposed project is intended to restore genetically pure WCT to approximately seven miles of historically occupied stream habitat in the headwaters of Tepee Creek. Currently, Tepee creek is occupied by a highly hybridized population of fish 52% WCT x 27% Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout (YCT) x 21% Rainbow Trout (RBT). It is presumed that non-native YCT were historically stocked in the headwaters of Tepee Creek early in the 20th century while RBT moved upstream from Hebgen Lake and lower Grayling Creek. All hybridized trout would be removed upstream of the barrier using an EPA-registered fish toxicant before restocking.

Before such a removal, an upstream migration barrier would be blasted along lower Tepee Creek (see attached map) to prevent the re-invasion of nonnative trout into the proposed recovery area. Construction of the fish barrier has been authorized under a Categorical Exclusion by the Hebgen Lake Ranger District in a Decision Memo dated June 11, 2015. While alterations would be made to the naturally occurring features of the stream channel, the modifications would retain a natural appearance. Implementation of the Forest Service's Decision Memo is contingent on MFWP's authorization to remove non-native trout and restock with genetically pure WCT. Any construction activities would be permitted as required by State and Federal statutes.

Once treated waters are deemed fishless, MFWP proposes to reintroduce genetically pure WCT from neighboring populations within the upper Missouri River Basin. MFWP anticipates that

non-native fish removals would take two years and reintroduction of nearest neighbor WCT would take three years.

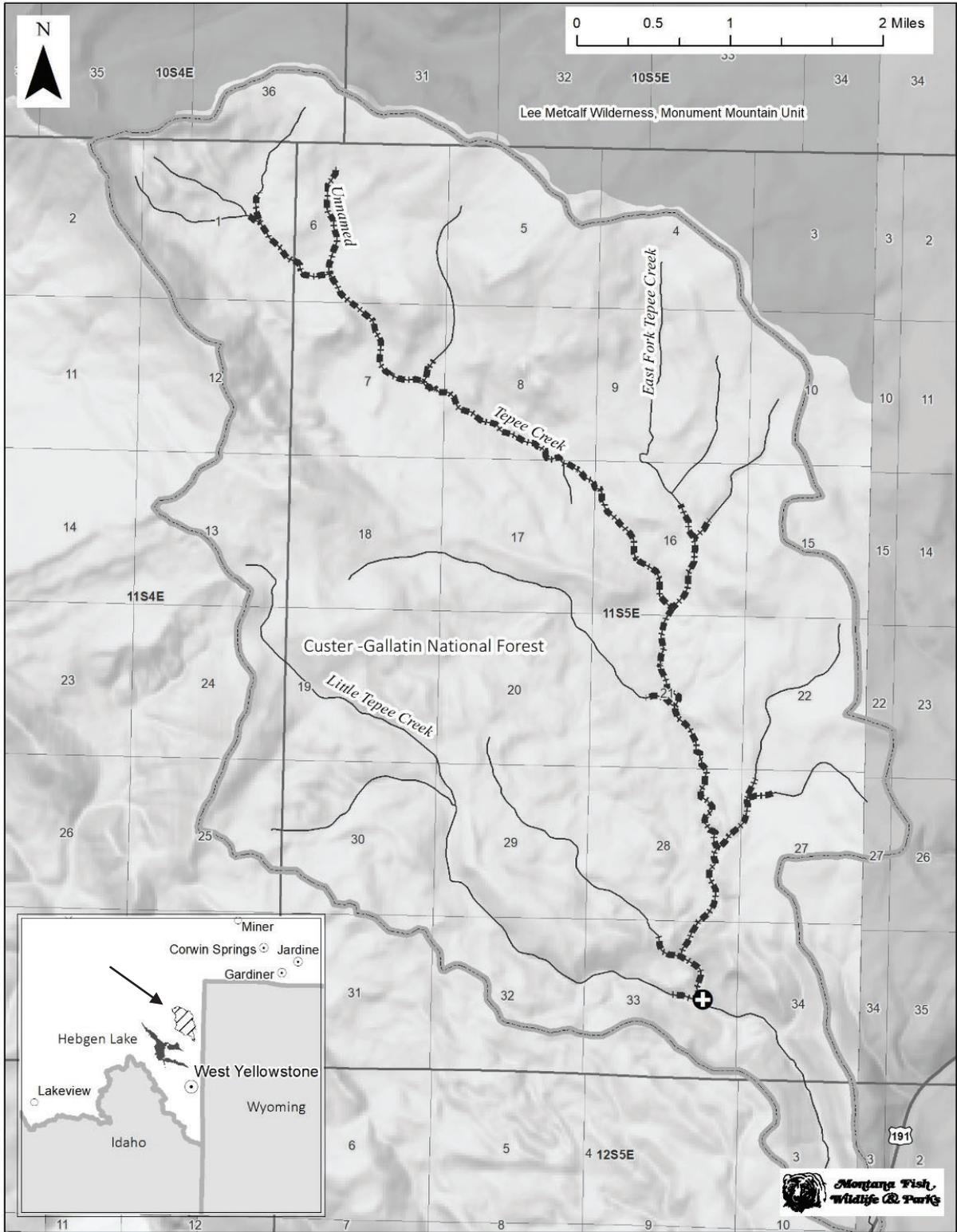
Westslope cutthroat trout are considered a species of concern by the State of Montana and a sensitive species by the U.S. Forest Service. Many similar projects have occurred within the upper Missouri River Basin in recent decades. Cumulatively, these projects help prevent the extinction of WCT and listing under the Endangered Species Act. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks is mandated through State of Montana statutes to conduct projects to improve the status of imperiled species. Additionally, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Statewide Fisheries Management Plan specifies a goal of 20% occupancy and security of WCT in their historic range.

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks is requesting public input and comments on the proposed project by March 15<sup>th</sup> of 2019. MFWP will determine the need for a public meeting(s) based on public interest. If you have any written comments regarding the proposed project, please mail them to Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, c/o Tepee Creek Restoration Comments, 1400 S. 19<sup>th</sup> Ave. Bozeman, MT 59718 or email [REDACTED]. If you have any questions regarding the proposed project, please call [REDACTED].

Thank you for your consideration of this proposed project to restore native fish to the waters of Montana.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]



Proposed project area and vicinity. The plus symbol represents the fish barrier location. Dashed lines represent approximate areas of non-native fish removals.