



# MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

**Meeting Date:** Feb. 16, 2024

**Agenda Item:** Swan Lake Management, Lake Trout Removal

**Action Needed:** Final

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 5 minutes

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**Background:** Non-native lake trout represent a significant threat to the Swan Lake bull trout population. From 2009 to 2016, FWP and other state, federal, and NGO partners conducted an eight-year experimental lake trout removal project to examine if gillnetting efforts can reduce lake trout abundance to improve bull trout and kokanee salmon populations. Results from this study demonstrated that gillnetting increased mortality of age 3 and age 4 lake trout as well as adult lake trout on known spawning areas. Incidental bycatch of other species during the study was relatively low.

Since 2016, Swan Lake bull trout and kokanee abundances have declined while lake trout has increased considerably. Bull trout redd (spawning nests) counts in 2023 revealed the lowest number on record. Additional lake trout population assessment and modeling since 2016 has shown that increased gillnetting effort to remove lake trout could positively influence bull trout abundance. FWP intends to increase lake trout monitoring in 2024 before implementing a full management action in 2025. Management action includes substantially increased gillnetting efforts to remove multiple cohorts of lake trout with concurrent monitoring of bull trout and kokanee to ensure negative impacts to bull trout abundance is minimized and to improve kokanee abundance. Specific techniques and timing of removal efforts will be determined after MEPA compliance and analysis of data is complete.

**Public Involvement Process & Results:** FWP will complete MEPA compliance prior to any management action.

## **Alternatives and Analysis:**

- A. The commission could approve the removal of lake trout from Swan Lake. This would implement the management action to remove lake trout to benefit bull trout and kokanee salmon. FWP would proceed with MEPA compliance and increased monitoring in 2024 with plans to implement full management action in 2025.
- B. The commission could take no action or modify the proposed removal of lake trout from Swan Lake. Modifying the proposal could jeopardize the effectiveness of the management action to reduce lake trout and improve bull trout and kokanee populations. With no action bull trout numbers are expected to continue to decline while lake trout increase.

**Agency Rationale and Recommendation:** FWP recommends adopting the proposed management action to remove lake trout from Swan Lake.

**Proposed Motion:** I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission approve the removal of lake trout from Swan Lake.