



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

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Meeting Date: December 5, 2019

Agenda Item: Holter Reservoir Fishing Regulation Changes (R4)

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 Minutes

Background: Recently completed fisheries monitoring surveys on Holter Reservoir showed declines in yellow perch abundance and continued low abundance of walleye. Fisheries management decisions for Holter Reservoir are guided by the Upper Missouri River Reservoir Fisheries Management Plan 2010-2019. The current plan sunsets at the end of this year and a draft update of the plan is currently under public review. Yellow perch abundance reached record high levels in 2013, and following Plan strategy the yellow perch bag limits were increased from 25 daily to 50 daily. Since 2013 yellow perch abundance has declined steadily and a low abundance this year warrants management action. Walleye abundance in Holter has been below management goals the past 3 years, but with the decline detected this year the department has determined that additional management action is warranted. The department is proposing to lower the yellow perch limit on Holter from 50 fish daily, no possession limit to 25 fish daily and in possession. To maximize effectiveness, the department would prefer to implement this regulation January 1. For walleye, the department is proposing to lower the walleye limit from 10 fish daily, only 1 over 25 inches to 5 fish daily, only 1 over 25 inches. Possession is twice the daily bag limit. This change is not as time sensitive as perch, but approval by December would ensure a regulation change is included in the printing of the 2020 Fishing Regulations booklet.

Public Involvement Process & Results: The department received comments from 22 respondents during the Nov. 12 to Nov. 21 open comment period. Nineteen comments supported the proposed changes, and six of those preferred even more restrictive bag limits for perch. Three comments were not clear whether they supported or did not support the proposed changes.

Alternatives and Analysis: The department believes it is important to implement a more conservative perch fishing regulation prior to the winter ice fishing season. If approved, the department could implement the regulation by January 1 and the change would appear in the 2020 Fishing Regulations booklet. The change would need to be communicated via typical public outreach and signage prior to distribution of the new Fishing Regulations booklet in March. Adoption of a walleye regulation is not as critical since most walleye harvest occurs during the open water season; however, it would be helpful and improve compliance if a new regulation is included in the printed regulations booklet.

Proposed Motion: I move the commission approve the proposed changes to yellow perch and walleye bag limits for Holter Reservoir and implement on January 1.