

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: January 14, 2016

Agenda Item: Little Prickly Pear Creek-Missouri River, Public Safety Closure - Rock Fall Abatement

Division: Fisheries

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

Background

The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) notified FWP in 2015 of its intent to conduct activities in early 2016 aimed at reducing rock fall hazards on Interstate 15 between Helena and Great Falls. Three work sites are identified in this phase; one near Wolf Creek at mile post 225.5, and two north of Craig at mile posts 242.5 and 244.5.

The project will modify existing rock slopes to improve traveler safety. Due to proximity with recreational areas, MDT is requesting that the Fish & Wildlife Commission authorize temporary access site and river closures to ensure public safety during explosives work. MDT anticipates up to 30 closures total for the entire project, each lasting approximately one hour. The contractor will be required to provide advance notification of all explosives work via a multi-media public awareness campaign, and signage at boat ramps and access sites near each blasting location. The contractor will be required to coordinate with FWP prior to each closure, and will be required to provide spotters within the appropriate work area to ensure public safety. In consultation with the local F&W Commissioner, MDT and FWP will briefly close the river, stream, or appropriate fishing access site during active explosives work as safety dictates between March 15 and Nov. 1, 2016.

Public Involvement Process & Results

MDT is required to develop a public involvement plan for this project. This plan begins at project nomination, continues throughout project development, and throughout construction. Public awareness requirements are included as a special provision in the contract bid package for this project.

Alternatives & Analysis

Environmental documentation has been prepared and the project qualifies as a Categorical Exclusion in compliance with the Administrative Rules of Montana and Federal Highway Administration requirements outlined in 23 CFR 771.117. MDT analyzed the No Action alternative; however, the No Action alternative does not meet the purpose and need of the project and would not enhance the safety of the traveling public through the I-15 corridor.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends that the Commission authorize the proposed closure rule. The rule would allow FWP to assess the contractor's request with input from MDT for a closure and determine if one is needed and if alternatives would have less impact on recreation without jeopardizing public safety.

Proposed Motion

I move that the Commission approve an annual rule authorizing FWP, in consultation with the local F&W Commissioner, to temporarily close a portion of Little Prickly Pear Creek, a portion of the Missouri River, and nearby fishing access sites to protect public safety during rock-fall hazard reduction work scheduled between March 15 and Nov. 1, 2016.