

FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: May 12, 2011

Agenda Item: South Fork Flathead temporary waiver of daily and possession limits

Division: Fish and Wildlife (Fisheries) **Action Needed:** Approval of Proposed Rule

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

Background

FWP initiated the South Fork Flathead Cutthroat Conservation Plan to replace nonnative fish with pure westslope cutthroat in 21 lakes in the South Fork Flathead drainage to maintain genetic purity. Replacement involves either chemical treatment or genetic swamping (heavy stocking of pure westslope cutthroat to dilute the nonnative genes). Six lakes have been treated. In 2011, the Necklace Chain of Lakes (four lakes) is scheduled for treatment and six additional lakes are scheduled for continuation of genetic swamping (George, Woodward, Pyramid, Pilgrim, Upper and Lower Three Eagles) for a third year. For previous treatments, the public has asked for a limit waiver so they might maximize fish harvest before treatment. For lakes scheduled for genetic swamping, limit waivers have also been provided to remove as many nonnative and hybrid trout as possible before the stocked pure westslope cutthroat are large enough to catch and become sexually mature. Angler harvest of nonnative trout expedites genetic swamping.

Public Involvement Process & Results

The South Fork Plan underwent four years of review through an EIS. Each spring, FWP's offers public meetings to chart and share the plan's progress. FWP also maintains a website on the project. If approved, the proposal will undergo a 30-day public comment period, with final action set for July 14.

Alternatives and Analysis

- *No Action:* Leave the current regulations (3 trout/day and in possession) in place. This would simplify enforcement since drainages also have lakes where limits would not be waived. This would not allow the public to maximize fish harvest before treatment, which many view as wasting a resource. This also would not provide for the removal of many hybrid fish and could slow the rate at which swamping removes nonnative genes from the population.
- *Waive Limits on Necklace Lakes and 6 additional lakes:* This would maximize fish removal, satisfy the public's desire to minimize waste and maximize the effect of genetic swamping. This could create enforcement problems since other lakes would not have limit waivers.
- *Waive Limits on lakes to be chemically treated:* This would satisfy the public's desire to minimize waste. This would minimize enforcement issues. This would not maximize the efficiency of genetic swamping. This would focus angling on just Necklace Chain of Lakes.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale:

Although these lakes are remote, and the ability of the public to remove fish by angling is difficult, "limit waivers" create good will and support and enhance the project's goal of genetic purity. Waivers were successfully used the past two years and are being renewed annually.

Proposed Motion:

I move the daily and possession bag limits be removed effective immediately through October 1, 2010 for the Necklace Chain, George, Woodward, Pyramid, Pilgrim, and Upper and Lower Three Eagles lakes—including within 100 yards of the lakes for inlet and outlet streams in the South Fork Flathead drainage.