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## **Environmental Review of Fish Introduction – Gartside Reservoir**

### **PART 1. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION**

**Project Title:** Introduction of Channel Catfish in Gartside Reservoir

**Application Date:** July 22, 2019

**Name, Address and Phone Number:** Montana Dept. Fish, Wildlife & Parks  
PO Box 1630  
Miles City, MT 59301  
(406) 234-0925

**Project Location:** Gartside Reservoir (S16 of T21N R58E) is located in the Yellowstone River drainage on Crane Creek in Richland County, Montana. The 40-acre reservoir is owned and operated by Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP). Gartside has a maximum depth of 19 feet and receives its water from spring water leaching from the Crane Aquifer located ¼ mile upstream of the reservoir or from annual runoff.

**Description of Project:** Channel Catfish from the Yellowstone River downstream of Intake Dam will be captured and transferred to Gartside Reservoir in September to October of 2019. The average size of existing prey fish species (mainly Bluegill and Yellow Perch) in Gartside Reservoir is small and anglers frequently complain that decent sized fish are rarely caught. The proposed fish transfer would be two-fold: 1-Channel Catfish will provide an additional angling opportunity within the reservoir, and 2- Channel Catfish will act as a biological control on the overabundant Bluegill and Yellow Perch through predation. The initial target fish transfer goal would be approximately 100 adult Channel Catfish. FWP annual standard survey (gill nets and seine hauls) and/or special Channel Catfish targeted efforts using baited trap nets will then be used to assess the success of the transfer. Subsequent years' Channel Catfish transfers to Gartside Reservoir will be dependent the initial transfer evaluation (e.g. Channel Catfish growth and survival, effect of Channel Catfish on other present species).

#### **Alternatives to Proposed Action:**

- 1- **No Action** – This action would leave Gartside Reservoir in its current state. The reservoir does currently receive moderate use by anglers and recreationalists. Bluegill and Yellow Perch are very abundant, but the size-structure is heavily skewed towards small individuals. Northern Pike are also relatively abundant with a moderate to small

size-structure. Largemouth Bass aren't captured well in the standard summer gill and seine hauls, but limited spring electrofishing and anecdotal angler reports suggest that the population is well balanced with most size groups (small to large) present. The no action alternative would not address the overabundant and stunted Bluegill and Yellow Perch. Channel Catfish would not be transferred, and no additional angling opportunity would be created.

- 2- **Stock alternative predator** – Past attempts to stock Tiger Muskellunge had little to no success. There was no evidence of size-structure changes in the Bluegill or Yellow Perch and the only reports of Tiger Muskellunge survival came from only a handful of angler reports. Very few other predator species options exist. Walleye would perhaps effectively predate on Yellow Perch. However, Channel Catfish are known to be very opportunistic feeders and are likely to prey upon both Bluegill and Yellow Perch. Evidence from Region 7 ponds suggest that Channel Catfish have the potential to grow to trophy-size. Castle Rock Reservoir, another reservoir with an abundant Bluegill population) near Colstrip has produced several state record Channel Catfish including the potential new state record individual over 30 lbs.

**Other groups or agencies contacted or which may have overlapping jurisdiction:**

None.

## **PART 2. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**

Table 1. Potential impact on physical environment.

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Provided
1. Unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources				X		
2. Terrestrial or aquatic life and/or habitats			X			a)
3. Introduction of new species into an area				X		
4. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality				X		
5. Water quality, quantity and distribution (surface or groundwater)				X		
6. Existing water right or reservation				X		
7. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture				X		
8. Air quality or objectional odors				X		
9. Historical and archaeological sites				X		
10. Demands on environmental resources of land, water, air & energy				X		
11. Aesthetics				X		

### **Comments**

A) One goal of the proposed fish transfer is to alter the existing size structure of Bluegill and Yellow Perch in Gartside Reservoir. Channel Catfish will likely predate on these two species with an overall objective of reducing abundance and increasing growth both Bluegill and Yellow Perch.

Table 2. Potential impacts on human environment.

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Provided
1. Social structures and cultural diversity				X		
2. Changes in existing public benefits provided by wildlife populations and/or habitat				X		
3. Local and state tax base and tax revenue			X			a)
4. Agricultural production				X		
5. Human health				X		
6. Quantity and distribution of community and personal income				X		
7. Access to and quality of recreational activities			X			b)
8. Locally adopted environmental plans & goals (ordinances)				X		
9. Distribution and density of population and housing				X		
10. Demands for government services				X		
11. Industrial and/or commercial activity				X		

**Comments**

A) Potential increase due to anglers visiting area that are seeking “unique” species.

B) May increase angler use in area, putting increased demands on public facilities, increasing bank erosion, and testing social tolerance between different recreational users. The expected increase in angler use is expected to be minimal.

**Does the proposed action involve potential risks or adverse effects which are uncertain but extremely harmful if they were to occur?**

None.

**Does the proposed action have impacts that are individually minor, but cumulatively significant or potentially significant?**

None.

**Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives (including the no action alternative) to the proposed action when alternatives are reasonably available and prudent to consider. Include a discussion of how the alternatives would be implemented:**

The “No Action” alternative will allow the stunted fishery to continue. Annual sampling and monitoring would occur under this alternative, but the quality of the fishery would not be expected to change. This will foster additional complaints from anglers that are frustrated by the lack of quality-sized fish. Anglers may also develop the opinion that Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks is doing nothing to improve or change the situation.

Since this project is not expected to be controversial or have cumulative or significant negative impacts on the environment, mitigation measures are not provide or stipulated. This Environmental Assessment is the appropriate level of review for this project and an Environmental Impact Statement is not warranted.

**EA prepared by: Mat Rugg**

**Date Completed: July 17, 2019**

**Email address for comments: mrugg@mt.gov**

**Mail comments to: MT FWP Region 7  
Attn: Mat Rugg  
PO Box 1630  
Miles City, MT 59301**

**Comments due by: August 30, 2019**

**DOES THE PROPOSED AGENCY ACTION HAVE TAKINGS IMPLICATIONS  
UNDER THE PRIVATE PROPERTY ASSESSMENT ACT?**

**YES**

**NO**

- \_\_\_\_\_  1. Does the action pertain to land or water management or environmental regulation affecting private real property or water rights?
- \_\_\_\_\_  2. Does the action result in either a permanent or indefinite physical occupation of private property?
- \_\_\_\_\_  3. Does the action deprive the owner of all economically viable uses of the property?
- \_\_\_\_\_  4. Does the action deny a fundamental attribute of ownership?
- \_\_\_\_\_  5. Does the action require a property owner to dedicate a portion of property or to grant an easement? [If the answer is **NO**, skip questions 5a and 5b and continue with question 6.]
- \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ 5a. Is there a reasonable, specific connection between the government requirement and legitimate state interests?
- \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ 5b. Is the government requirement roughly proportional to the impact of the proposed use of the property?
- \_\_\_\_\_  6. Does the action have a severe impact on the value of the property?
- \_\_\_\_\_  7. Does the action damage the property by causing some physical disturbance with respect to the property in excess of that sustained by the public generally? [If the answer is **NO**, do not answer questions 7a-7c.]
- \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ 7a. Is the impact of government action direct, peculiar, and significant?
- \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ 7b. Has government action resulted in the property becoming practically inaccessible, waterlogged, or flooded?
- \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ 7c. Has government action diminished property values by more than 30% and necessitated the physical taking of adjacent property or property across a public way from the property in question?

Taking or damaging implications exist if **YES** is checked in response to question 1 and also to any one or more of the following questions: 2, 3, 4, 6, 7a, 7b, 7c; or if **NO** is checked in response to questions 5a or 5b.

If taking or damaging implications exist, the agency must comply with Section 5 of the Private Property Assessment Act, to include the preparation of a taking or damaging impact assessment. Normally, the preparation of an impact assessment will require consultation with agency legal staff.