



2027-2028 Fishing Regulation Public Scoping

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) uses a two-year fishing regulation cycle intended to reduce staff time needed for regulation evaluation while maintaining strong opportunities for public input. Under this process, the fishing regulations booklet is printed in odd-numbered years, and any changes made between printings are posted on the FWP website and shared through other outreach and public posting.

The regulation-setting process for the 2027–2028 fishing regulations begins with public input on changes the department is considering, as well as providing an opportunity for the public to propose new regulations for FWP to evaluate. The department will use this initial input to develop a regulation proposal package, which will be released for a second public comment period in August before being presented to the Fish and Wildlife Commission at its fall 2026 meeting for final approval.

FWP is scoping 41 proposals, each with information on biological rationale, regulation type, and associated references to the [Statewide Fisheries Management Plan](#) (SFMP). New language is *in italics*. Deleted language is indicated by a ~~striketrough~~. All changes are highlighted in **yellow**. Page numbers refer to the 2026 Fishing Regulations booklet. Comments on individual proposals can be submitted through the FWP website at <https://fwp.mt.gov/aboutfwp/public-comment-opportunities/fishing-regulations> or by emailing fwpfishcomments@mt.gov. Members of the public can submit regulation proposals via the website, or by mail to:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks – 2027/28 Fishing Regulation Scoping
 P.O. Box 200701
 Helena, MT 59620

Comments for this scoping effort will be collected through May 2026. FWP will host public meetings at the locations listed below, and additional meetings may be scheduled based on public interest.

Region	Date	Location
1	May 14, 5:30	Kalispell, 490 North Meridian Road
2	May 21, 6:30	Missoula, 3201 Spurgin Road
3	May 19, 6:00	Bozeman, 1400 South 19 th Street
4	May 13, 6:00	Great Falls, 4600 Giant Springs Road
5	May 11, 6:00	Billings, 510 North Broadway
6	May 6, 6:00	Glasgow, 1 Airport Road
7	May 7, 6:00	Miles City, 352 I-94 Business Loop
Statewide Virtual Meetings	May 26, 12:00	Link provided on website
	May 26, 6:00	

Contents

Statewide and District Standard Regulations	4
Proposal 1: Definitions of Hook and Bait (Clarification)	4
Proposal 2: Western District Standard Lake Trout Harvest.....	16
Proposal 3: Western District Standard Smallmouth Bass Harvest Limit	18
Proposal 4: Eastern District Standard Smallmouth Bass Limits	20
Proposal 5: Central District Standard Smallmouth Bass Limits	23
Proposal 6: Transportation of Live Fish in the Eastern District	26
Proposal 7: Crayfish Transportation for Consumption.....	28
Proposal 8: Including Tiger Trout to Combined Trout for Central and Eastern District Standard Limits.....	30
Proposal 9: Flathead Lake Northern Pike Limits	31
Proposal 10: Flathead Lake Rainbow Trout Limits	32
Proposal 11: Flathead Lake Smallmouth Bass Limits.....	34
Proposal 12: Fishtrap Creek and Tributaries Bait Restriction.....	36
Proposal 13: Hungry Horse Reservoir Bull Trout Length Restriction and Season Change	38
Proposal 14: Little Bitterroot Lake Kokanee Harvest Limit.....	41
Proposal 15: Little Bitterroot Lake Rainbow Trout Length Restriction.....	42
Proposal 16: Graves Creek Gear Restriction	43
Proposal 17: Graves Creek Bait Restriction	45
Proposal 18: Vermillion River Bait Restriction	47
Proposal 19: Vermillion River Gear Restriction.....	49
Proposal 20: Vermillion River Bait Restriction	51
Proposal 21: West Fork Thompson River and Tributaries Bait and Gear Restrictions.....	53
Proposal 22: McGregor Lake Crayfish Harvest Restriction.....	55
Proposal 23: Racetrack Pond Youth Angler Bait Restriction.....	57
Proposal 24: Warm Springs WMA Season Length.....	59
Proposal 25: Baker Creek Season Length	61
Proposal 26: Ben Hart Creek Season Length	62
Proposal 27: Camp Creek Season Length	63
Proposal 28: East Gallatin River Pike Harvest	64
Proposal 29: Gallatin River Pike Harvest	66
Proposal 30: Jefferson River Pike Harvest.....	68
Proposal 31: Madison River Pike Harvest and Side Channel Closure	70
Proposal 32: Miner Lake Arctic Grayling Catch-and-Release and Burbot Harvest Restrictions	73

Proposal 33: Missouri River-Big Spring Confluence Season Length75
Proposal 34: O’Dell Creek Season Length.....77
Proposal 35: Pintler Lake Arctic Grayling Catch-and-Release79
Proposal 36: Rae Creek Season Length80
Proposal 37: Randall Creek Season Length.....81
Proposal 38: Red Rock Creek Hybrid Cutthroat Harvest Limit82
Proposal 39: Thompson Creek Season Length84
Proposal 40: Missouri River - Cow Creek to Beachamp Creek Setlines Limit and Season Length86
Proposal 41: Castle Rock Lake Bluegill Harvest Limit88

Statewide and District Standard Regulations

Proposal 1: Definitions of Hook and Bait (Clarification)

Proposed change, addition, or deletion (for existing regs, include District Standard or Exception to the District Standard. Indicate new language in *italics*, deleted language with a ~~strikethrough~~):

Page 4:

~~ARTIFICIAL LURE: Strike the entire definition from the 2026 regulation booklet~~

BAIT

- **ARTIFICIAL BAIT:** *Unless noted in exceptions. Artificial Bait includes any natural or synthetic food such as sausage, corn or marshmallows, any products that are derivatives of natural foods or any other creations like doughs and pastes. Artificial bait also includes all soft plastic imitations including unscented, infused, brined or salted. Scents that are applied are not considered artificial bait.*
- **DEAD BAIT:** *See District Specific Regulations (Pages 21-22 [Western], 48-49 [Central], 73-74 [Eastern])*
- **LIVE BAIT:** *See District Specific Regulations (Pages 21-22 [Western], 48-49 [Central], 73-74 [Eastern])*

Page 5:

HOOK: A hook is a single, double, or treble point attached to a single shank or ~~an artificial lure.~~

SINGLE-POINTED HOOK: *Means no treble or double hooks. Anglers may remove treble or double hooks from the lure and replace them with a single hook, or the shanks may be cut off the other hook points to leave a single hook. Lures with multiple hook attachments may still be used but any treble or double hook must be replaced with a single hook.*

~~LIVE BAIT:~~ Remove current definition

LURE: *Any item designed to attract fish. These include, but are not limited to flies, hard plastic or wood lures (stick baits, plugs, crankbaits, etc.), metal spoons, lead head jigs/lures, bladed lures, spinners, and spinner baits. Lures are considered single devices regardless of the number of hooks. For Western and Central Fishing District Streams and Rivers, unless otherwise noted in exceptions, a lure with multiple hooks may not be connected to another lure that has multiple hooks,*

Page 21

Hook and Line Limits

Open Water

Rivers and Streams

- 1 line with 2 hooks *or lures* per line, **2nd lure must have only 1 hook**, with or without a rod. The rod or line must be attended and, in the angler's, immediate control.

Lakes and Reservoirs

- 2 lines with 2 hooks *or lures* per line, with or without a rod. Each line must be attended and, in the angler's, immediate control.

Ice Fishing

Lakes and Reservoirs

- 2 lines with 2 hooks **or lures** per line on all lakes and reservoirs open to fishing. When a line is used through the ice, the angler need not be in immediate control but must be in the vicinity and in visual contact with the line.

Page 22

Dead Bait

- **Unless prohibited in District exceptions.** Dead crayfish (whole, parts, or pieces) and other invertebrates may be used as bait on all waters. ~~not restricted to artificial lures only~~

Live Bait

- **Unless prohibited in District exceptions.** Live animals such meal worms, red worms, night crawlers, leeches, maggots, and insects may be used as bait on all waters ~~not restricted to artificial lures only~~

Page 24:

BELMONT CREEK (tributary to Blackfoot River)

- Catch-and-release for cutthroat trout.
- Combined trout: 3 daily and in possession, only 1 rainbow trout over 14 inches, any size brown trout.
- ~~Artificial lures only.~~ **No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed** within 100-yard radius of **the** mouth.

BITTERROOT RIVER (note: river flows south to north)

2nd bullet

- ~~Artificial lures, no live, dead, or artificial baits allowed except aquatic insects and maggots. maggots and/or aquatic insects only. All other live/dead bait prohibited.~~

Page 26

North Boundary of Woodside Bridge FAS to Florence Bridge. During General Season (third Saturday in May through Nov. 30)

- Catch-and-release for all trout
- ~~Artificial lures only.~~ **No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed.**
- ~~Live/dead bait prohibited.~~

Page 28

BLACKFOOT RIVER AND TRIBUTARIES

Mainstem and all tributaries except the Clearwater River. During the General Season (third Saturday in Many through Nov. 30)

3rd bullet

- ~~Artificial lures only.~~ **No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed** within 100-yard radius of the mouths of Belmont Creek, Copper Creek, Gold Creek, monture Creek and North Fork Blackfoot River.

Mainstem only during the Extended Season (Dec. 1 to the third Saturday in May)

- ~~Artificial lures and/or maggots only~~ **No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed except maggots.**

BOOTJACK LAKE (near Whitefish)

- Combined trout: 1 daily and in possession, must be over 22 inches

- ~~Artificial lures only.~~ **No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed.**

CEDAR CREEK (tributary to Clark Fork River)

- ~~Artificial lures,~~ **No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed**, including within a 100-yard radius of the mouth

Page 29

CLARK FORK RIVER

Upstream from Perkins Lane Bridge, near Warm Springs

3rd bullet

- ~~Artificial lures,~~ **No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed**

Perkins Lane Bridge, near Warm Springs, to mouth of the Flathead River

During the General Season (third Saturday in May through Nov. 30)

4th bullet

- ~~Artificial lures only,~~ **No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed** within 100-yard radius of the mouths of Rattlesnake Creek, Petty Creek, Fish Creek, Cedar Creek, Dry Creek, Trout Creek and St. Regis River.

During the Extended Season (Dec. 1 to the third Saturday in May)

2nd bullet

- ~~Artificial lures and/or maggots only~~ **No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed except maggots**
- ~~All other live/dead bait prohibited~~

Page 30

COPPER CREEK (tributary to Blackfoot River)

3rd bullet

- ~~Artificial lures only,~~ **No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed**, including within a 100-yard radius of the mouth.

Page 31

DRY CREEK (tributary to Clark Fork River)

- ~~Artificial lures only,~~ **No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed** within 100-yard radius of the mouth.

DUNHAM CREEK (tributary to Monture Creek, Blackfoot drainage)

Third bullet

- **no live, dead, or artificial baits allowed**

Page 31

EAST FORK BITTERROOT RIVER DOWNSTREAM FROM STAR FALLS

- Catch-and-release for cutthroat trout.
- Brown Trout: 3 daily and in possession.
- Extended season for northern pike and whitefish and catch-and-release for trout from Dec. 1 to third Saturday in May ~~with aquatic insect, maggots and/or artificial lures only.~~ **No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed except aquatic insects and maggots.**

FISH CREEK AND TRIBUTARIES (Clark Fork River drainage)

Entire drainage

- Artificial lures only. Including within 100-yard radius of the mouth. **No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed**

Page 32

FLATHEAD RIVER

Mainstem Flathead River From the confluence of North and Middle Forks to Flathead Lake

- Open entire year.
- Catch-and-release for cutthroat trout
- Rainbow trout: 5 daily and in possession
- From Dec. 1 to third Saturday in May, maggots and artificial lures only, no live, dead, or artificial baits allowed, except maggots. No artificial lures can be scented (infused, saturated, or applied)

Page 33

FLINT CREEK

Downstream from Georgetown Lake

- Extended season for whitefish and catch-and-release for trout open Dec. 1 to third Saturday in May with artificial lures and/or maggots only. **No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed, except maggots**

Page 34

GOLD CREEK (tributary to Blackfoot River)

3rd bullet

- Artificial lures only **No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed** within 100-yard radius of the mouth.

Page 35

JOB CORPS PONDS (deer Lodge County)

3rd bullet

- ~~Artificial lures only,~~ **No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed**

Page 37

LANDERS FORK (tributary to Blackfoot River)

3rd bullet

- Downstream from Silver King Falls: ~~Artificial lures only,~~ **No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed**, including within 100-yards of the mouth.

LITTLE BLACKFOOT RIVER AND TRIBUTARIES

Mainstem River

- Catch-and release for cutthroat trout.
- Extended whitefish season and catch-and-release for trout open Dec. 1 to third Saturday in May with artificial lures and/or maggots only. **No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed, except maggots**

MARSHAL CREEK (tributary to West Fork Clearwater River)

- ~~Artificial lures only,~~ **No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed.**

Page 38

MILL CREEK (tributary to Blackfoot River)

Downstream from the Stewart Street Bridge in Opportunity

- Catch-and-release only
- **Artificial lures only, No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed.**

MONTURE CREEK (tributary to Blackfoot River)

3rd bullet

- **Artificial lures only No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed** including within 100-yard radius of the mouth.

MORRELL CREEK AND TRIBUTARIES (tributary to Clearwater River)

Entire drainage

- **Artificial lures only, No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed.**

Page 38

NORTH FORK BLACKFOOT RIVER (tributary to Blackfoot River)

Downstream from the North Fork Falls

- **Artificial lures only No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed** including within 100-yard radius of the mouth.

From North Fork Falls downstream to Highway 200 bridge

- **Artificial lures with single point barbless hooks only, No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed.**
- **Single point barbless hooks only**

Page 39

NORTH FORK FLATHEAD RIVER

North Fork Flathead River including headwaters to confluence with Middle Fork Flathead River (near Blankenship Bridge)

- **Single-pointed hook only. See page 5 for description. Hooks/Lures must have single points, no double or treble hooks (See Hook definition on Page 5).**

PETTY CREEK (tributary to Clark Fork River)

2nd bullet

- **Artificial lures only No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed** within 100-yard radius of the mouth.

RACETRACK POND

Second bullet

- **Artificial lures only No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed,** except **by** anglers 14 years of age or younger **may use bait** during the general season.

Page 40

RATTLESNAKE CREEK AND TRIBUTARIES (near Missoula)

Entire Creek

3rd bullet

- **Artificial lures only No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed** including within 100-yard radius of the mouth.

ROCK CREEK (near Missoula)

2nd bullet

From the confluence of the Middle and West Forks, near Phillipsburg, to the mouth

- Artificial lures only **No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed**, except **by** anglers 14 years of age or younger **may use bait**
- Closed to fishing from boats/vessels July 1 through Nov. 30.
- Extended season for whitefish and catch-and-release for trout open Dec. 1 to third Saturday in May, **No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed, except maggots**

SILVERBOW CREEK AND TRIBUTARIES

Mainstem and Tributaries

- Artificial lures only **No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed** in Silver Bow Creek and German Gulch.
- ...

Page 41

SNOWBANK CREEK (tributary to Copper Creek, Blackfoot drainage)

- Artificial lures only **No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed.**
- Catch-and-release for cutthroat trout

ST REGIS RIVER

3rd bullet

- Artificial lures only **No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed** within 100-yard radius of the mouth.

Page 42

THOMPSON RIVER

Entire river

4th bullet

- Artificial lures only **No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed**, except **by** anglers 14 years of age or younger **may use bait**

TROUT CREEK (tributary to Clark Fork River)

- Artificial lures only **No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed** within 100-yard radius of the mouth.

Page 44

WARM SPRINGS CREEK (near Anaconda)

Upstream of Myers Dam

- ...

Myers Dam to Warm Springs Wildlife Management Area (WMA)

2nd bullet

- Extended season: catch-and-release for trout Dec 1. To third Saturday in May. **with artificial lures only** **No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed**

WARMSPRINGS WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA (WMA)

All waters

3rd bullet

- Artificial lures only **No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed.** See Kid's Pond and Gravel Pit Pond for exceptions).
- Motorized boats/vessels prohibited.

Job Corps Ponds (Deer Lodge County)

3rd bullet

- Artificial lures only **No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed.**

Page 45

WEST FORK BITTERROOT RIVER DOWNSTREAM OF PAINTED ROCKS DAM

Fishing Regulations

3rd bullet

- Extended season for northern pike and whitefish and catch-and-release for trout from Dec 1. To third Saturday in May with aquatic insects, maggots and/or artificial lures only. **No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed, except aquatic insects and maggots.**

WEST FORK CLEARWATER RIVER AND TRIBUTARIES

Entire drainage

- Artificial lures only **No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed.**

WEST FORK THOMPSON RIVER AND TRIBUTARIES

- ~~Artificial lures only.~~ **No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed.**
- Catch-and-release for cutthroat trout

Page 46

Hook and Line Limits

Open Water

Rivers and Streams

- **Unless noted in District exceptions,** 1 line with 2 hooks **or lures** per line, **2nd lure must have only 1 hook,** with or without a rod. The rod or line must be attended and in the angler's immediate control.

Lakes and Reservoirs

- **Unless noted in District exceptions,** 2 lines with 2 hooks **or lures** per line, with or without a rod. Each line must be attended and in the angler's immediate control.

Ice Fishing

Lakes and Reservoirs

- **Unless noted in District exceptions,** 2 lines with 2 hooks **or lures** per line on all lakes and reservoirs open to fishing. When a line is used through the ice, the angler need not be in immediate control but must in the vicinity and in visual contact with the line.

Pages 47-48

Bait Regulations (8th bullet)

- **Unless prohibited in District exceptions,** on waters within the Central Fishing District that do not allow the use of live bait ~~and are not restricted to artificial flies and lures,~~ sculpins may be collected and used as dead bait. Collection screens or nets may not exceed four (4) feet in length on any side. Sculpins must be killed immediately upon collection and may not be used as live bait. [Note: sculpins may not be used for bait in the Western Fishing District.]

Dead Bait (1st bullet)

- **Unless prohibited in District exceptions.** Non-game fish (see “Collection methods” above) that are freshly killed or have been preserved by freezing, salting, or pickling may be used as bait on all waters ~~not restricted to artificial lures only~~. Heads and entrails of non-game fish may also be used as bait.

Live Bait (4th bullet)

- **Unless prohibited in District exceptions.** Live animals such as meal worms, red worms, night crawlers, leeches, maggots, crayfish, reptiles, amphibians, and insects may be used as bait on all waters ~~not restricted to artificial lures only~~. Transport of invasive species is unlawful.

Page 51

BEAVERHEAD RIVER

Fishing Regulations

...

Clark Canyon Dam to High Bridge FAS

- Catch and release for brown trout
- **Artificial lures only with *No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed.*** Single-pointed hooks only. Anglers may remove treble or double hooks from the lure and replace them with a single hook, or the shanks may be cut off the other hook points to leave a single hook. Lures with multiple hook attachments may still be used but any treble hook must be replaced by a single hook.

Page 53

BIGHOLE RIVER

Dickie Bridge to Brownes Bridge FAS

3rd bullet

- **Artificial lures only *No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed.***

Page 55

BIGHORN LAKE

6th bullet

- Hook and Line: 2 lines with 2 hooks **or lures** per line on open water and 6 lines with 1 hook **or lure** per line through the ice

BIGHORN RIVER

...

Cable 600 feet below Afterbay Dam to Bighorn FAS

- **Artificial lures only *No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed.***

CANYON FERRY RESERVOIR

6th bullet

- Hook and Line/Setlines: 6 lines with 2 hooks **or lures** per line through the ice only.

Page 56

CLARKS FOR YELLOWSTONE RIVER AND TRIBUTARIES

Mainstem downstream from the bridge ad Bridger

- Hook and Line: 2 lines with 2 hooks **or lures** per line all year.

CULVER POND (Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge)

- Closed to angling from Nov. 30 to April 15
- Artificial lures only **No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed.**

Page 57

EAST FORK RESERVOIR (near Lewistown)

- Hook and Line/Setlines: 6 lines with 2 hooks **or lures** per line through the ice.

ELK SPRINGS CREEK (Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge)

- Open entire year except May 1 through June 14.
- Artificial lures only **No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed.**

EYRAUD LAKES aka Arod Lakes

- Hook and Line/Setlines: 6 lines with 2 hooks **or lures** per line through the ice only.

Page 58

HAUSER RESERVOIR

Including Canyon Ferry Dam Tailwater and Lake Helena

6th bullet

- Hook and Line/Setlines: 6 lines with 2 hooks **or lures** per line through the ice only.

HOLTER RESERVOIR

Up to American Bar Gulch (approximately 4.6 miles downstream from Hauser Dam)

6th bullet

- Hook and Line/Setlines: 6 lines with 2 hooks **or lures** per line through the ice only.

Page 59

LAKE ELWELL

2nd bullet

- Hook and Line/Setlines: 6 lines with 2 hooks **or lures** per line through the ice only.

LAKE FRANCIS

2nd bullet

- Hook and Line/Setlines: 6 lines with 2 hooks **or lures** per line through the ice only.

LAKE HELENA

6th bullet

- Hook and Line/Setlines: 6 lines with 2 hooks **or lures** per line through the ice only.

Page 60

MADISON RIVER

Yellowstone National Park boundary to Hebgen Reservoir

- ...

Quake Lake outlet to Lyons Bridge

2nd bullet

- Artificial lures only **No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed.**
- ...

Lyons Bridge to Varney Bridge

2nd bullet

- Artificial lures only **No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed**

Varney Bridge to Ennis Bridge

2nd bullet

- Artificial lures only with **No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed.** Barbless single-pointed hooks only. No treble or double hooks. Anglers may remove treble or double hooks from the lure and replace them with a single hook, or the shanks may be cut off the other hook points to leave a single hook. Lures with multiple hook attachments may still be used but any treble hook must be replaced by a single hook.

Ennis Bridge to Ennis Lake

2nd bullet

- Artificial lures only with **No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed.** Barbless single-pointed hooks only. No treble or double hooks. Anglers may remove treble or double hooks from the lure and replace them with a single hook, or the shanks may be cut off the other hook points to leave a single hook. Lures with multiple hook attachments may still be used but any treble hook must be replaced by a single hook.

Page 63

MISSOURI RIVER

Canyon Ferry Reservoir

5th bullet

- Hook and Line/Setlines: 6 lines with 2 hooks **or lures** per line through the ice only.

Canyon Ferry Dam to Hauser Dam (includes Hauser Reservoir, Lake Helena and Canyon Ferry

Tailwaters

6th bullet

- Hook and Line/Setlines: 6 lines with 2 hooks **or lures** per line through the ice only.

Holter Reservoir (American Bar Gulch downstream to Holter Dam)

6th bullet

- Hook and Line/Setlines: 6 lines with 2 hooks **or lures** per line through the ice only.

Morony Dam to Fort Benton

2nd bullet

- Hook and Line/Setlines: 6 lines with 2 hooks **or lures** per line all year.

Page 64

PISHKUN RESERVOIR

2nd bullet

- Hook and Line/Setlines: 6 lines with 2 hooks **or lures** per line through the ice only.

REDROCK CREEK (Beaverhead River drainage)

- Open entire year except May 1 through June 14
- Artificial lures only **No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed.**

Page 66

SMITH RIVER

....

Camp Baker Bridge to Eden Bridge

2nd bullet

- Artificial lures only **No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed,** except anglers 14 years of age or younger ~~may use bait~~

Page 67

SPLIT ROCK LAKE

- Hook and Line/Setlines: 6 lines with 2 hooks **or lures** per line through the ice only.

TIBER RESERVOIR aka Lake Elwell

2nd bullet

- Hook and Line/Setlines: 6 lines with 2 hooks **or lures** per line through the ice only.

Page 68

WIDGEON POND (Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge)

- Closed to angling from Nov. 30 to April 15.
- **Artificial lures only No live, dead, or artificial baits allowed.**

Page 72

Hook and Line Limits

Open Water

Rivers and Streams

- 6 lines with 6 hooks **or lures** per line. The line(s) must be attended and in the angler’s immediate control unless they are used as setlines. See regulations for setlines on page 17

Lakes and Reservoirs

- 2 lines with 2 hooks **or lures** per line, or as noted under Exceptions to Standard Regulations. All lines must be attended and in the angler’s immediate control unless they are used as setlines. See regulations for Setlines on page 17.

Ice Fishing

Lakes, Reservoirs and Streams

- 6 lines with 2 hooks **or lures** per line through the ice. When a line is used through the ice, the angler need not be in immediate control but must in the vicinity and in visual contact with the line unless they are used as setlines. See regulations for Setlines

Page 73

Dead Bait (1st bullet)

- **Unless prohibited in District exceptions.** Non-game fish (see “Collection Methods” above) that are freshly killed or have been preserved by freezing, salting, or pickling may be used as bait on all waters **not restricted to artificial lures only.** Heads and entrails of non-game fish may be used as bait.

Live Bait (second bullet)

- **Unless prohibited in District exceptions.** Live animals such as meal worms, red worms, night crawlers, leeches, maggots, crayfish, reptiles, amphibians, and insects may be used as bait on all waters **not restricted to artificial lures only.** Transport of invasive species is unlawful.

Page 80

FORT PECK DREDGE CUTS (west of Park Grove Bridge and Nelson Dredge)

4th bullet

- Hook and Line/Setlines: 2 lines with 2 hooks **or lures** per line on open water and 6 lines with 6 hooks **or lures** per line through the ice.

Page 82

MISSOURI RIVER

...

Fort Peck Dam to the mouth of the Milk River

2nd bullet

- Hook and Line/Setlines: 2 lines with 2 hooks **or lures** per line on open water and 6 lines with 6 hooks **or lures** per line through the ice.

Tongue River

Twelve Mile Dam Fishing Access Site (T&Y Dam)

- Hook and Line/Setlines: 2 lines with 2 hooks **or lures** per line all year.

Page 83

YELLOWSTONE RIVER

...

Intake Fishing Access Site

- Hook and Line/Setlines: 2 lines with 2 hooks **or lures** per line all year.

Rationale (biological justification for proposing this change. Include how this change addresses a fisheries management problem): Changing definition of “Artificial Lure” and removal of “A lure with multiple hooks is still considered a single hook” left confusing regulations/exceptions/other definitions in the regulations.

Management Plan Reference (drainage, waterbody, language directly from the plan):

SFMP Part I; 1.4.2: “Fishing regulations must balance simplicity to facilitate public understanding while achieving the desired biological outcome.”

“The goal of fishing regulations is to make them effective but also as simple as possible to improve public understanding and angler compliance.”

Regulation Type (clarification, enforcement, conservation, relevancy, management plan, other):

Clarification

Public Engagement (summary of any public scoping or outreach that has been completed as it relates to this change. Includes public meetings, sporting group meetings, surveys, etc.): Will be introduced at R1 public meeting () and statewide public meeting ()

Interdivisional Review (most likely input from Enforcement, but input from Com Ed, Legal, Wildlife may also be appropriate. Multiple divisions will review in Helena via RRAM): Has been reviewed by all fish division regions, R1 and R2 Enforcement, R1 Com Ed. Will be reviewed by RRAM.

Nonbiological Information (is there an organized advocacy for this change, controversy, other information about which decision makers should be aware, relevant MCA or ARM to justify this change):

Identified an understanding of local anglers for need to create simple and understandable regulations and exceptions.

Proposal 2: Western District Standard Lake Trout Harvest

Proposed change, addition, or deletion (for existing regs, include District Standard or Exception to the District Standard. Indicate new language in *italics*, deleted language with a ~~strikethrough~~):

Page 23. Western District Standard Daily and Possession Limits
Lake Trout: 20 daily and ~~40 in~~ **no** possession **limit**.

Rationale (biological justification for proposing this change. Include how this change addresses a fisheries management problem):

From SFMP Part I; 1.6.14 (3) Lake Trout

In lakes where *Mysis diluviana* were introduced, “Lake trout have altered the abundances and size structures of native and sport fish populations, especially in western Montana. For example, in Flathead and Swan lakes, lake trout have altered threatened bull trout populations to the point where active removal of lake trout may be needed to reduce impacts to bull trout. Prevention of additional unauthorized introductions and associated impacts is a management priority in western Montana.” A District standard allows for additional possession in the freezer and reduces the need for additional exceptions in the regulations.

Management Plan Reference (drainage, waterbody, language directly from the plan):

SFMP Part I; 1.4.2: “Fishing regulations must balance simplicity to facilitate public understanding while achieving the desired biological outcome.”

“The goal of fishing regulations is to make them effective but also as simple as possible to improve public understanding and angler compliance.”

SFMP Part I; 1.47: Illegal and Unauthorized Fish Introductions.

FWP’s action plan for responding to a confirmed unauthorized introduction may include the following management strategies:

Modify angling regulations for the immediate and connected waterbodies, which may include:

- liberalizing or removing daily angling limits.
- enacting catch-and-release fishing.
- extending or removing the angling season.
- allowing capture methods other than hook and line.
- mandatory catch-and-kill or catch-kill-and-report regulations.
- closing the water to all fishing.

Regulation Type (clarification, enforcement, **conservation**, relevancy, **management plan**, other):

Public Engagement (summary of any public scoping or outreach that has been completed as it relates to this change. Includes public meetings, sporting group meetings, surveys, etc.): Will be introduced at R1 public meeting () and statewide public meeting ()

Interdivisional Review (most likely input from Enforcement, but input from Com Ed, Legal, Wildlife may also be appropriate. Multiple divisions will review in Helena via RRAM):

Nonbiological Information (is there an organized advocacy for this change, controversy, other information that decision makers should be aware of, relevant MCA or ARM to justify this change):

Proposal 3: Western District Standard Smallmouth Bass Harvest Limit

Proposed change, addition, or deletion (for existing regs, include District Standard or Exception to the District Standard. Indicate new language in *italics*, deleted language with a ~~strikethrough~~):

Page 23 Western District Standard Daily and Possession Limits
Smallmouth Bass: 15 daily and ~~in~~ **no** possession **limit**, no size limit all year

Rationale (biological justification for proposing this change. Include how this change addresses a fisheries management problem):

From SFMP Part I; 1.6.2 Black Bass (Largemouth Bass and Smallmouth Bass)

“Over 20 (Now greater than 40) illegal introductions of smallmouth bass have occurred in western and northwest Montana, and several illegal smallmouth introductions have been documented in southwest Montana. In some waters these introductions have had impacts to existing fisheries through increased predation of other fish, decreased fish quality due to high fish densities, or have thwarted efforts to maintain quality of existing sport fisheries or threatened conservation efforts for native species.” A District standard allows for additional possession in the freezer and reduces the need for additional exceptions in the regulations.

Management Plan Reference (drainage, waterbody, language directly from the plan):

SFMP Part I; 1.4.2: “Fishing regulations must balance simplicity to facilitate public understanding while achieving the desired biological outcome.”

“The goal of fishing regulations is to make them effective but also as simple as possible to improve public understanding and angler compliance.”

SFMP Part I; 1.47: Illegal and Unauthorized Fish Introductions.

FWP’s action plan for responding to a confirmed unauthorized introduction may include the following management strategies:

Modify angling regulations for the immediate and connected waterbodies, which may include:

- liberalizing or removing daily angling limits.
- enacting catch-and-release fishing.
- extending or removing the angling season.
- allowing capture methods other than hook and line.
- mandatory catch-and-kill or catch-kill-and-report regulations.
- closing the water to all fishing.

Regulation Type (clarification, enforcement, **conservation**, relevancy, **management plan**, other):

Public Engagement (summary of any public scoping or outreach that has been completed as it relates to this change. Includes public meetings, sporting group meetings, surveys, etc.): Will be introduced at R1 public meeting () and statewide public meeting ()

Interdivisional Review (most likely input from Enforcement, but input from Com Ed, Legal, Wildlife may also be appropriate. Multiple divisions will review in Helena via RRAM): Reviewed and agreed upon by Region One and Two.

Nonbiological Information (is there an organized advocacy for this change, controversy, other information that decision makers should be aware of, relevant MCA or ARM to justify this change):

Proposal 4: Eastern District Standard Smallmouth Bass Limits

Waterbody or Fishing District: Eastern Fishing District

Proposed change, addition, or deletion (for existing regs, include District Standard or Exception to the District Standard. Indicate new language in *italics*, deleted language with a strikethrough):

Page xx add/change/delete:

Page 79 add/delete:

Eastern District Standard Daily and Possession Limits

~~**Bass:** 5 daily and in possession~~

Largemouth bass: 5 daily and in possession

Smallmouth bass: 10 daily and 20 in possession

Page 82 – ~~Smallmouth bass: 10 daily and in possession~~

Page 79 add/delete:

Eastern District Standard Daily and Possession Limits

~~**Bass:** 5 daily and in possession~~

Largemouth bass: 5 daily and in possession

Smallmouth bass: 10 daily and 20 in possession

Page 80 add:

Fort Peck Reservoir

Smallmouth bass: 5 daily and in possession

Page 82 delete:

Tongue River Reservoir

~~Smallmouth bass: 10 daily and in possession.~~

Page 83 delete:

YELLOWSTONE RIVER

~~**Springdale Bridge FAS to the North Dakota Border**~~

- ~~• Smallmouth bass: 10 daily and in possession.~~

Rationale (biological justification for proposing this change. Include how this change addresses a fisheries management problem):

This change would allow increased harvest of smallmouth bass in rivers and streams where the species overlaps with susceptible native fishes, including sauger, burbot, numerous nongame species, and popular trout fisheries. Recent surveys have documented range expansion of smallmouth bass in the middle Missouri and Yellowstone rivers, as well as in tributary streams of the Musselshell and Judith rivers, where increased abundance has been associated with considerable impacts on native species assemblages. Increasing the daily and possession limits on smallmouth bass is intended to maintain

recreational opportunity while liberalizing harvest to help reduce impacts on native species and important sport fisheries. Higher harvest in tributary systems is expected to lessen acute predation impacts in these smaller, more vulnerable streams, while including the large mainstem rivers in the regulation focuses effort on source populations and the chronic risk they pose across the landscape. Several waterbodies (e.g., Missouri River upstream of Fort Benton and Yellowstone River downstream of Springdale) already have higher daily smallmouth bass limits in response to increasing abundance and distribution, and the addition of a possession limit set at twice the daily limit would align smallmouth bass with other abundant game fish (e.g., channel catfish, walleye, sauger) and allow anglers to retain multi-day harvests. Splitting limits for largemouth bass (LMB) and smallmouth bass (SMB) allows for more conservative limits on LMB, which often depend on stocking to support angling opportunity, while managing SMB with higher allowable harvest to help curb continued population expansion.

Adverse effects of SMB on native fish assemblages in Fort Peck Reservoir have not been documented to the same degree as in river systems, and the population currently supports a popular, high-quality sport fishery. Therefore, maintaining a more conservative daily and possession limit specific to Fort Peck Reservoir balances the desire to provide continued angling opportunity for SMB with the need to remain cautious about potential long-term impacts on native species.

Management Plan Reference (drainage, waterbody, language directly from the plan):

Section 2.25 – Judith River Drainage

“Missouri River: Maintain a recreational fishery with liberal harvest to minimize impacts to native species.”

“Judith River: Smallmouth bass: Manage as a recreational fishery with consumptive harvest.”

“Big Spring Creek: Smallmouth bass: Consider suppression and removal efforts when encountered to minimize negative impacts to recreational trout fishery.”

“Warm Spring Creek: Smallmouth bass: Maintain a recreational fishery with liberal harvest to minimize impacts to native species.”

Section 2.30 – Musselshell River Drainage

“The relative wet period of the 2010’s resulted in smallmouth bass distribution extending 40 miles up the Box Elder Creek drainage and there is concern regarding impacts to native minnow assemblages. Maintaining and improving native fish assemblages in Flatwillow Creek, McDonald Creek, and Box Elder Creek drainages are management goals.”

“Lower Musselshell River: Smallmouth bass: Manage as a recreational fishery for consumptive harvest. Monitor for potential negative impacts to native species assemblage.”

2.35 Middle Yellowstone River Drainage (page 4) - *The introduction of several non-native sportfish species, like smallmouth bass and walleye, are challenging the management of native and small-bodied fish populations. Smallmouth bass numbers have recently increased in this section of the river. FWP surveys have found their range expanding upstream in the Yellowstone River to the boundary with Yellowstone National Park, as well as into Pryor Creek, a major tributary to the Yellowstone River in this section. Although they provide a very popular fishery, the influence of this relatively new predator is poorly understood. In 2022, the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) evaluated the distribution and expansion*

of smallmouth bass into the colder reaches of the upper Yellowstone River. Results suggest smallmouth bass are not constrained by water temperature alone and will likely continue to increase their population and distribution throughout the Yellowstone River. FWP increased the smallmouth bass bag limits to allow anglers to capitalize on this abundant fishery and slow down the upstream migrations; however, it is unlikely angler harvest will suppress the population and thus increase total annual mortality.

2.4 Lower Yellowstone River – “One threat to maintaining the sauger population in the Yellowstone River is the expanding population of non-native smallmouth bass. The smallmouth bass population has the potential to outcompete and displace sauger in some reaches of its historic range.”

Regulation Type (clarification, enforcement, conservation, relevancy, management plan, other):

Public Engagement (summary of any public scoping or outreach that has been completed as it relates to this change. Includes public meetings, sporting group meetings, surveys, etc.): **NOT YET**

Interdivisional Review (most likely input from Enforcement, but input from Com Ed, Legal, Wildlife may also be appropriate. Multiple divisions will review in Helena via RRAM): **NOT YET**

Nonbiological Information (is there an organized advocacy for this change, controversy, other information that decision makers should be aware, relevant MCA or ARM to justify this change):

Proposal 5: Central District Standard Smallmouth Bass Limits

Waterbody or Fishing District: Central Fishing District

Proposed change, addition, or deletion (for existing regs, include District Standard or Exception to the District Standard. Indicate new language in *italics*, deleted language with a strikethrough):

Page 49 add/delete:

Central District Standard Daily and Possession Limits

Bass: 5 daily and in possession

Largemouth bass: 5 daily and in possession

Smallmouth bass: 10 daily and 20 in possession

Page 69 – ~~Smallmouth Bass: 10 Daily and in Possession~~

Page 63 – ~~Smallmouth Bass: 10 daily and in possession~~

Page xx add/change/delete:

Rationale (biological justification for proposing this change. Include how this change addresses a fisheries management problem):

This change would allow increased harvest of smallmouth bass in rivers and streams where the species overlaps with susceptible native fishes, including sauger, burbot, numerous nongame species, and popular trout fisheries. Recent surveys have documented range expansion of smallmouth bass populations in the middle Missouri River, and long-term monitoring on the Yellowstone River in the Central Fishing District indicates that smallmouth bass are increasing in abundance and expanding their distribution. Similar expansions have been observed in tributary streams of both the Musselshell and Judith rivers and have been associated with considerable impacts on native species assemblages, impacts that are likely wherever smallmouth bass become abundant. Increasing the daily and possession limits on smallmouth bass is intended to maintain recreational opportunity while liberalizing harvest to reduce impacts on native species and important sport fisheries. Higher harvest in tributary systems would help reduce acute predation impacts in these more vulnerable streams, while including the large mainstem rivers would address source populations on the landscape and the chronic risk they pose to native and sport fisheries. Several waterbodies (e.g., Missouri River upstream of Fort Benton and Yellowstone River downstream of Springdale) already have higher daily smallmouth bass limits in response to growing abundance and distribution, and adding a possession limit set at twice the daily limit would be consistent with regulations for other abundant game fish (e.g., channel catfish, walleye, sauger) and allow anglers to retain multi-day harvests.

Expansion of nonnative smallmouth bass have caused concern for trout fisheries in the Shields and Yellowstone watersheds. Smallmouth bass have occupied the lower Yellowstone River for decades but have colonized the upper Yellowstone River in recent years. Anglers have reported catching smallmouth bass at the Highway 89 bridge downstream of Livingston, near Emigrant, and the Gardner River near the confluence with the Yellowstone River, just outside of Yellowstone National Park. Special fishing regulations were developed to address the threat smallmouth bass pose to the wild trout fisheries in the upper Yellowstone and Shields rivers. A special management regulation for mandatory kill and reporting of smallmouth bass was implemented from Springdale to the Yellowstone National Park boundary. Over the next four years, FWP will assess if expanded catch-kill-reporting or liberalized harvest regulations downstream to Reed Point are warranted. New emergency regulations could be proposed by FWP if

smallmouth bass abundance, especially juveniles, increases significantly near Reed Point in the next several years. A similar regulation is in place for the Shields River basin. Smallmouth bass in the upper Yellowstone drainage will be evaluated through angler reports, fish sampling, and eDNA. However, low population abundance and difficulty capturing smallmouth bass using electrofishing make angler harvest and reporting the best tool to monitor smallmouth bass currently.

Adopting this as the Central District standard would allow removal of several current exceptions and create a consistent liberal limit for this abundant non-native game fish, reducing confusion for anglers while aligning regulations with current distribution and management objectives.

Management Plan Reference (drainage, waterbody, language directly from the plan):

Section 1.6.2 – Black Bass (Largemouth Bass and Smallmouth Bass)

“...their (bass) prolific and predatory nature can lead to management challenges.”

“In some waters (smallmouth bass) have had impacts to existing fisheries through increased predation of other fish, decreased fish quality due to high fish densities, or have thwarted efforts to maintain quality of existing sport fisheries or threatened conservation efforts for native species.”

“Generally, fishing regulations for bass are conservative for largemouth bass and more liberal for smallmouth bass.”

Section 2.25 – Judith River Drainage

“Missouri River: Maintain a recreational fishery with liberal harvest to minimize impacts to native species.”

“Judith River: Smallmouth bass: Manage as a recreational fishery with consumptive harvest.”

“Big Spring Creek: Smallmouth bass: Consider suppression and removal efforts when encountered to minimize negative impacts to recreational trout fishery.”

“Warm Spring Creek: Smallmouth bass: Maintain a recreational fishery with liberal harvest to minimize impacts to native species.”

Section 2.26 – Marias River Drainage

“Marias River: Maintain existing population levels if no observed impacts to native species.”

Section 2.30 – Musselshell River Drainage

“The relative wet period of the 2010’s resulted in smallmouth bass distribution extending 40 miles up the Box Elder Creek drainage and there is concern regarding impacts to native minnow assemblages.

Maintaining and improving native fish assemblages in Flatwillow Creek, McDonald Creek, and Box Elder Creek drainages are management goals.”

“Lower Musselshell River: Smallmouth bass: Manage as a recreational fishery for consumptive harvest. Monitor for potential negative impacts to native species assemblage.”

“Flatwillow Creek: Smallmouth bass: Manage as a recreational fishery for consumptive harvest. Monitor for potential negative impacts to native species assemblage.”

“Box Elder Creek: Smallmouth bass: Consider suppression and removal efforts to minimize competition with and predation of native species.”

2.34 Upper Yellowstone River Drainage (page 9):

Regulation Type (clarification, enforcement, conservation, relevancy, management plan, other): Conservation

Public Engagement (summary of any public scoping or outreach that has been completed as it relates to this change. Includes public meetings, sporting group meetings, surveys, etc.): **NOT YET**

Interdivisional Review (most likely input from Enforcement, but input from Com Ed, Legal, Wildlife may also be appropriate. Multiple divisions will review in Helena via RRAM): **NOT YET**

Nonbiological Information (is there an organized advocacy for this change, controversy, other information that decision makers should be aware, relevant MCA or ARM to justify this change):
Region 5 is unaware of any nonbiological information related to the proposed regulation change at this time.

Proposal 6: Transportation of Live Fish in the Eastern District

Proposed change, addition, or deletion (for existing regs, include District Standard or Exception to the District Standard. Indicate new language in *italics*, deleted language with a ~~strikethrough~~):

Page 47 delete:

Transporting Live Fish: An import permit is required to bring live fish of any kind into Montana (see page 15). It is unlawful to possess or transport any live fish away from the body of water in which the fish were taken with the following exceptions:

- 1) Possession and transport of live fish for authorized commercial purposes (e.g. Commercial Bait Seining Permit, Commercial Fish Ponds, Commercial Fishing, permitted Fishing Contests);
- 2) Use of live bait subject to restrictions for the taking, possession, transport and use of live bait (see "Bait Regulations" on page 48);
- 3) ~~It is unlawful to possess or transport live fish, other than live nongame bait fish, on roadways that form the boundary between the Eastern and Central fishing districts.~~

Page 71 delete:

Transporting Live Fish

An import permit is required to bring live fish of any kind into Montana (see page 15). It is unlawful to possess or transport any live fish away from the body of water in which the fish were taken with the following exceptions:

- 1) Possession and transport of live fish for authorized commercial purposes (e.g. Bait Seining Permit, Commercial Fish Ponds, Commercial Fishing, permitted Fishing Contests).
- 2) Use of live bait subject to restrictions for the taking, possession, transport and use of live baitfish (see "Bait Regulations" on page 73);
- 3) ~~Within the boundaries of the Eastern Fishing District. It is unlawful to possess or transport live fish, other than live nongame bait fish, on roadways that form the boundary between the Eastern and Central fishing districts; or~~
- 4) ~~3) Possession and transport of live nongame bait fish to and from areas contaminated with Eurasian watermilfoil (Fort Peck Reservoir, Fort Peck Dredge Cut Ponds, and the Missouri River from Fort Peck Dam to the mouth of the Milk River) is allowed ONLY in clean water (e.g. transport bait fish in well water).~~

Rationale (biological justification for proposing this change. Include how this change addresses a fisheries management problem):

This change would remove the exception allowing the transfer of live fish within the boundaries of the Eastern Fishing District except as described in the remaining exceptions (e.g., authorized commercial purposes, live bait subject to restrictions). This would decrease the risk of illegal introductions of fish within and outside of the Eastern Fishing District by no longer allowing the transport of live fish within the Eastern Fishing District other than for authorized commercial purposes and live bait subject to restrictions. Transport of live fish is not permitted in the Western or Central Fishing districts other than for authorized commercial purposes and live bait in the Central district. The same risks of illegal introduction of fish (e.g., predation, competition, and hybridization with other species, disease, AIS) exist in the Eastern Fishing District (described in Section 1.4.7 of the Statewide Fisheries Management Plan) and this exception also increases the risk of transport outside the district.

This change follows direction from the Statewide Fisheries Management Plan and Administrative Rules (ARM 12.7.1501 - 1505) adopted in 2014 to make prevention of, and response to, unauthorized species

introduction a top priority.

Furthermore, “transport of surface water is prohibited unless authorized by the department” as described in ARM 12.5.706 (e) and adopted in 2017 to prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species. Thus, the only current legal means of transporting live fish is using non-surface water, which is unlikely for transport of live fish other than commercial or bait fish (e.g., game fish or other non-bait fish).

Management Plan Reference (drainage, waterbody, language directly from the plan):

Section 1.4.7 – Illegal and Unauthorized Fish Introductions

From Section 1.4.7 – More than 600 illegal or unauthorized fish introductions into more than 250 waters across the state have been documented, involving every drainage in the state. Once established, most illegally introduced fish species are nearly impossible to eliminate and their impacts are irreversible, especially in larger waterbodies. Unauthorized fish introductions are likely to have many adverse impacts, including but not limited to adverse impacts associated with competition with and hybridization of native, wild, and stocked fish populations, degradation of water quality, degradation of aquatic habitat, increased fishery management costs, loss of angling opportunities and quality, and harm to local and regional tourism economies.

Section 1.2.1 (3) – AIS Prevention

“Watercraft are the primary source of AIS transport among waterbodies and across state lines.

Watercraft inspection is the primary tool to address that pathway, ensuring boats are clean, drained of all standing water, and dry prior to launching in another waterbody.”

Regulation Type (clarification, enforcement, conservation, relevancy, management plan, other):

Conservation.

Public Engagement (summary of any public scoping or outreach that has been completed as it relates to this change. Includes public meetings, sporting group meetings, surveys, etc.):

This public scoping effort is the first public outreach on this topic.

Interdivisional Review (most likely input from Enforcement, but input from Com Ed, Legal, Wildlife may also be appropriate. Multiple divisions will review in Helena via RRAM):

Appropriate regional and headquarters staff have reviewed this proposal.

Nonbiological Information (is there an organized advocacy for this change, controversy, other information that decision makers should be aware of, relevant MCA or ARM to justify this change):

None.

Proposal 7: Crayfish Transportation for Consumption

Waterbody or Fishing District: *Laws and Rules*

Proposed change, addition, or deletion (for existing regs, include District Standard or Exception to the District Standard. Indicate new language in *italics*, deleted language with a ~~strike through~~):

Pages 16 & 17 add/change/delete:

Pg. 16

Handling and Transporting Legally Taken Fish *and Crayfish*

It is required that before transporting legally taken fish:

While a person is fishing, or while on the water, or on the ice:

- All fish in possession must be visibly identifiable to species.
- Unless size limits apply, fish may be cleaned prior to transport, so long as the entire skin remains attached to the fish or fillet for identification (see Disposal of Dead Fish and Fish Entrails above). Two fillets will be counted as one fish.
- If the catch is frozen prior to transport, each fish or fillet must be packaged so it can be counted.
- This does not prohibit the consumption of fish on the ice or water. However, the fish consumed are part of your daily limit.

Pg. 17

Once off the water, fish may be dressed, filleted, and skin removed for transport to your permanent residence, unless size limits apply, under the following conditions:

- All fish can be counted and identified. Two fillets will be counted as one fish. If the catch is frozen prior to transport, each fish or fillet must be packaged so it can be counted.
- Salmonids (trout, salmon, arctic grayling, char and whitefish): the entire skin must be attached to the fillet for identification.

in the Western

In the Western Fishing District, Transport of any live fish ~~or crayfish~~ without a permit is unlawful ~~in the Western Fishing District~~.

In the Western Fishing District, Live crayfish may be transported for personal consumption only. Crayfish may not be transported in lake water; it must be from a well or treated water supply. All crayfish must be killed and consumed.

Rationale (biological justification for proposing this change. Include how this change addresses a fisheries management problem): No native crayfish exist in the Western Fishing District. Virile and Signal crayfish are nonnative and currently widespread in the Western Fishing District and as such the risks associated with spread of these crayfish species are minimal.

Management Plan Reference (drainage, waterbody, language directly from the plan):

Part I, pg. 92 - 93 acknowledges the popularity of recreational crayfish harvest for personal consumption.

Regulation Type (clarification, enforcement, conservation, **relevancy**, management plan, other):

Public Engagement (summary of any public scoping or outreach that has been completed as it relates to this change. Includes public meetings, sporting group meetings, surveys, etc.):

Interdivisional Review (most likely input from Enforcement, but input from Com Ed, Legal, Wildlife may also be appropriate. Multiple divisions will review in Helena via RRAM):

Enforcement may have input/experience. Maybe AIS staff/boat check stations.

Nonbiological Information (is there an organized advocacy for this change, controversy, other information that decision makers should be aware, relevant MCA or ARM to justify this change):

Crayfish are traditionally (almost exclusively) prepared for consumption from live status. Transport of dead crayfish for personal consumption is not a practicable or desirable approach. Furthermore, it is often recommended to keep crayfish alive in clean water for 12 to 24 hours to allow gut purging (Montana Outdoors, July-August 2021, page 3).

Other laws/regulations prohibit using live crayfish for bait, moving live invertebrates from one waterbody to another, transporting surface water), etc.

Proposal 8: Including Tiger Trout to Combined Trout for Central and Eastern District Standard Limits

Waterbody or Fishing District: Central and Eastern Fishing Districts

Proposed change, addition, or deletion (for existing regs, include District Standard or Exception to the District Standard. Indicate new language in *italics*, deleted language with a ~~strickethrough~~):

Page 50 add:

Combined Trout

includes brown trout, rainbow trout, golden trout, cutthroat trout, **tiger trout**, and arctic grayling

Page 79 add:

Combined Trout

includes brown trout, cutthroat trout, rainbow trout, golden trout, **tiger trout**, and arctic grayling

Rationale (biological justification for proposing this change. Include how this change addresses a fisheries management problem):

Tiger trout have been added to some waterbodies in the Central and Eastern Fishing districts and need to be added to the regulations to regulate harvest. Daily and possession limits can be managed as part of the standard limits for Combined Trout for the Central and Eastern Fishing districts.

Management Plan Reference (drainage, waterbody, language directly from the plan):

Several waterbodies have been stocked with tiger trout. Specific reference to tiger trout and/or reference to management of ponds and reservoirs through trout stocking is referenced throughout the Statewide Fish Management Plan.

Regulation Type (clarification, enforcement, conservation, relevancy, management plan, other):

Clarification. Tiger trout is a new species that has been stocked in Montana and needs to be added to the fishing regulations.

Public Engagement (summary of any public scoping or outreach that has been completed as it relates to this change. Includes public meetings, sporting group meetings, surveys, etc.):

Environmental Assessments and Decision Notices were issued for each waterbody prior to stocking.

Interdivisional Review (most likely input from Enforcement, but input from Com Ed, Legal, Wildlife may also be appropriate. Multiple divisions will review in Helena via RRAM):

Appropriate regional and headquarters staff have reviewed this proposal.

Nonbiological Information (is there an organized advocacy for this change, controversy, other information that decision makers should be aware of, relevant MCA or ARM to justify this change):

None.

Proposal 9: Flathead Lake Northern Pike Limits

Proposed change, addition, or deletion (for existing regs, include District Standard or Exception to the District Standard. Indicate new language in *italics*, deleted language with a ~~strikethrough~~):

Page xx add/change/delete:

Page 31 of the 2026 regulations.

- *Northern pike: no limit.*

Rationale (biological justification for proposing this change. Include how this change addresses a fisheries management problem):

The districtwide standard harvest limit for northern pike is 15 daily and no possession limit. This change would lift the daily harvest limit and allow anglers to harvest unlimited numbers of northern pike. It's anticipated that few anglers will harvest more than 15 northern pike per day and measurable changes to the population are unlikely. Northern pike in Flathead Lake are the result of an illegal introduction.

Management Plan Reference (drainage, waterbody, language directly from the plan):

SFMP Part ii; 2.04: "The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) and FWP share fisheries management authority on Flathead Lake. The CSKT has jurisdiction over the south half of the lake and FWP manages the north half. The two groups cooperate on fisheries monitoring, management, education, and other resource issues as they arise."

"Both FWP and CSKT have an interest in consistent lake wide regulations."

Regulation Type (clarification, enforcement, conservation, relevancy, management plan, other):

Clarification, Management Plan.

Public Engagement (summary of any public scoping or outreach that has been completed as it relates to this change. Includes public meetings, sporting group meetings, surveys, etc.): This proposal will be presented to the public at the R1 and Statewide regulations meeting.

Interdivisional Review (most likely input from Enforcement, but input from Com Ed, Legal, Wildlife may also be appropriate. Multiple divisions will review in Helena via RRAM):

Nonbiological Information (is there an organized advocacy for this change, controversy, other information that decision makers should be aware, relevant MCA or ARM to justify this change):

Many anglers have expressed confusion and displeasure with inconsistent Flathead Lake regulations and their desire to have lake wide regulations. Our comanagers at CSKT have also expressed interest in consistent lake-wide regulations and have changed some of their regulations to match FWP regulations. Although adding exceptions, this change would simplify regulations on Flathead Lake.

Proposal 10: Flathead Lake Rainbow Trout Limits

Proposed change, addition, or deletion (for existing regs, include District Standard or Exception to the District Standard. Indicate new language in *italics*, deleted language with a ~~strikethrough~~):

Page xx add/change/delete:

Page 31 of the 2026 regulations.

- **Rainbow trout: no limit.**

Rationale (biological justification for proposing this change. Include how this change addresses a fisheries management problem):

The districtwide standard harvest limit for rainbow trout is five daily and ten in possession, only one over 22 inches daily and in possession. This change would lift the daily harvest and possession limit and allow anglers to harvest unlimited numbers of rainbow trout. It's anticipated that few anglers will harvest more than five rainbow trout per day and measurable changes to the population are unlikely.

Management Plan Reference (drainage, waterbody, language directly from the plan):

SFMP Part ii; 2.04: "The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) and FWP share fisheries management authority on Flathead Lake. The CSKT has jurisdiction over the south half of the lake and FWP manages the north half. The two groups cooperate on fisheries monitoring, management, education, and other resource issues as they arise."

"Both FWP and CSKT have an interest in consistent lake wide regulations."

Regulation Type (clarification, enforcement, conservation, relevancy, management plan, other):

Clarification, Management Plan.

Public Engagement (summary of any public scoping or outreach that has been completed as it relates to this change. Includes public meetings, sporting group meetings, surveys, etc.): This proposal will be presented to the public at the R1 and Statewide regulations meeting.

Interdivisional Review (most likely input from Enforcement, but input from Com Ed, Legal, Wildlife may also be appropriate. Multiple divisions will review in Helena via RRAM):

Nonbiological Information (is there an organized advocacy for this change, controversy, other information that decision makers should be aware, relevant MCA or ARM to justify this change):

Many anglers have expressed confusion and displeasure with inconsistent Flathead Lake regulations and their desire to have lake wide regulations. Our comanagers at CSKT have also expressed interest in consistent lake-wide regulations and have changed some of their regulations to match FWP regulations. Although adding exceptions, this change would simplify regulations on Flathead Lake.

Proposal 11: Flathead Lake Smallmouth Bass Limits

Proposed change, addition, or deletion (for existing regs, include District Standard or Exception to the District Standard. Indicate new language in *italics*, deleted language with a ~~strikethrough~~):

Page xx add/change/delete:

Page 31 of the 2026 regulations.

- *Smallmouth bass: no limit.*

Rationale (biological justification for proposing this change. Include how this change addresses a fisheries management problem):

The districtwide standard harvest limit for smallmouth bass is 15 daily and in possession. This change would lift both the daily and possession limit and allow anglers to harvest unlimited numbers of smallmouth bass. It's anticipated that few anglers will harvest more than 15 smallmouth per day and measurable changes to the population are unlikely. Smallmouth bass in Flathead Lake are the result of an illegal introduction.

Management Plan Reference (drainage, waterbody, language directly from the plan):

SFMP Part ii; 2.04: "The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) and FWP share fisheries management authority on Flathead Lake. The CSKT has jurisdiction over the south half of the lake and FWP manages the north half. The two groups cooperate on fisheries monitoring, management, education, and other resource issues as they arise."

"Both FWP and CSKT have an interest in consistent lake wide regulations."

Regulation Type (clarification, enforcement, conservation, relevancy, management plan, other):

Clarification, Management Plan.

Public Engagement (summary of any public scoping or outreach that has been completed as it relates to this change. Includes public meetings, sporting group meetings, surveys, etc.):

This proposal will be presented to the public at the R1 and Statewide regulations meeting.

Interdivisional Review (most likely input from Enforcement, but input from Com Ed, Legal, Wildlife may also be appropriate. Multiple divisions will review in Helena via RRAM):

Nonbiological Information (is there an organized advocacy for this change, controversy, other information that decision makers should be aware, relevant MCA or ARM to justify this change):

Many anglers have expressed confusion and displeasure with inconsistent Flathead Lake regulations and their desire to have lake wide regulations. Our comanagers at CSKT have also expressed interest in consistent lake-wide regulations and have changed some of their regulations to match FWP regulations. Although adding exceptions, this change would simplify regulations on Flathead Lake.

Proposal 12: Fishtrap Creek and Tributaries Bait Restriction

Proposed change, addition, or deletion (for existing regs, include District Standard or Exception to the District Standard. Indicate new language in *italics*, deleted language with a ~~strikethrough~~):

Page xx add/change/delete:

FISHTRAP Creek AND TRIBUTARIES (Thompson River drainage)

- Catch and release for cutthroat trout
- ***No live, dead or artificial baits allowed.***

Rationale (biological justification for proposing this change. Include how this change addresses a fisheries management problem):

This regulation was accidentally deleted in 2024-2025 regulation cycle but occurred prior. Fishtrap Creek is a stronghold for bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout in the Thompson River drainage. This regulation change is intended to decrease mortality from deep hooking associated with bait fishing, especially for sensitive fish species like trout and char.

Bull trout are especially imperiled in the Lower Clark Fork River drainage and have comparably small population sizes due to the presence of three mainstem dams, their associated reservoir environments which are poor-quality trout habitats and comprised of several non-native predators (smallmouth bass, northern pike, walleye). Non-native trout are becoming more abundant and moving further upstream in tributary streams that are strongholds for native trout (bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout). Westslope Cutthroat Trout occupy approximately 25% of their historic stream distribution in the Thompson River drainage, and Fishtrap Creek harbors both resident and migratory life histories. Fishtrap Creek is designated as critical habitat for Bull Trout under the ESA.

Management Plan Reference (drainage, waterbody, language directly from the plan):

SWFMP Part I; 1.6.3 pg. 69-70: “Although bull trout remain widespread in northwest Montana, the numbers of populations and individuals within populations have declined. Many populations are small and at risk of extirpation due to declining abundances.”

“FWP is mandated to provide recreational fisheries for native and non-native fish while protecting and establishing viable populations of bull trout in drainages where they co-occur”.

SWFMP Part I; 1.6.8(1) pg. 75: “The conservation goal for westslope cutthroat trout west of the Continental Divide is to maintain viable populations with diverse life histories throughout their existing distributions in all drainages. Identified “conservation” populations west of the Continental Divide include isolated resident populations and populations with a migratory life-form that provide connectivity among populations and angling opportunity for large fish. Westslope cutthroat trout are primarily managed through angling regulations and habitat protection and restoration.”

Regulation Type (clarification, enforcement, conservation, relevancy, management plan, other):

Conservation

Public Engagement (summary of any public scoping or outreach that has been completed as it relates to this change. Includes public meetings, sporting group meetings, surveys, etc.):

Will be introduced at R1 public meeting () and statewide public meeting ()

Interdivisional Review (most likely input from Enforcement, but input from Com Ed, Legal, Wildlife may also be appropriate. Multiple divisions will review in Helena via RRAM):

R-1 enforcement approves of this proposed regulation change.

Nonbiological Information (is there an organized advocacy for this change, controversy, other information that decision makers should be aware, relevant MCA or ARM to justify this change):

None that are known

Proposal 13: Hungry Horse Reservoir Bull Trout Length Restriction and Season Change

Proposed change, addition, or deletion (for existing regs, include District Standard or Exception to the District Standard. Indicate new language in *italics*, deleted language with a ~~strikethrough~~):

Page 34 add/change/delete:

Dam to Crossover Boat Ramp

- Bull trout: 1 fish per license year, *28-inch minimum length*, from ~~the third Saturday in May through Aug. 15~~ *July 1-September 1*, Catch-and-release the rest of the year with a Hungry Horse/ South Fork Flathead permit validation on Fishing License. A Hungry Horse/South Fork Flathead Bull Trout Catch Card must be in possession when fishing for bull trout. See bull trout page 13. Bull trout must be released without delay or be killed and counted as your limit when harvest is allowed. It is unlawful to possess a live bull trout for any reason.

Rationale (biological justification for proposing this change. Include how this change addresses a fisheries management problem):

Adult bull trout numbers are monitored by counting the redds (spawning nests) in 8 tributaries to the South Fork Flathead River (4 direct tributaries to Hungry Horse Reservoir and 4 tributaries to the South Fork Flathead River). Redd counts in all 8 tributaries were last completed in 2024. The 2024 redd count survey revealed the lowest number of redds on record (Figure 1). This was the second consecutive year of lowest redd count totals and a trend since 2006. Redd count totals were 48% of the long-term average. During that same period, participation in the Hungry Horse/South Fork bull trout catch-card fishery has been increasing since its inception in 2004. Estimated bull trout angling pressure in the South Fork Flathead River has tripled since 2014 (Figure 2), and FWP suspects that angling could be partially responsible for the decline in redd numbers. In 2025, FWP determined that reducing the amount of angler harvest in the reservoir will likely help stabilize the downward trend in adult bull trout numbers. To further protect this vulnerable population, FWP is proposing to change the beginning of the harvest season in Hungry Horse Reservoir to July 1. This change will be consistent with the beginning of the catch and release season in the South Fork Flathead River and will allow migrating bull trout the opportunity to proceed upriver without being targeted in the transitional zone where the river enters the reservoir. Additionally, FWP is recommending a change to allow only bull trout greater than 28" to be harvested. FWP recognizes and supports the desire to harvest bull trout, and this regulation change will still allow the harvest of a true trophy fish. Using 28" as the regulation will be consistent with other trophy regulations in the Western District.

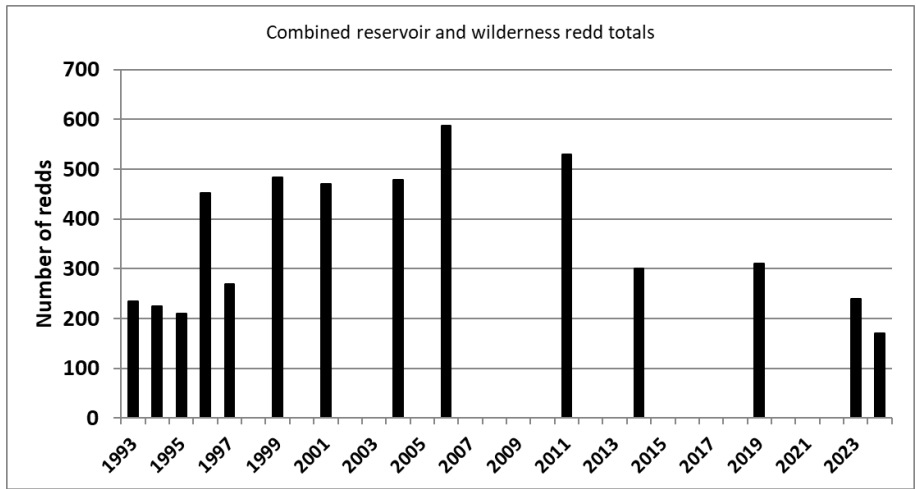


Figure 1: Bull trout redd numbers for the Hungry Horse/South Fork population 1993-2024.

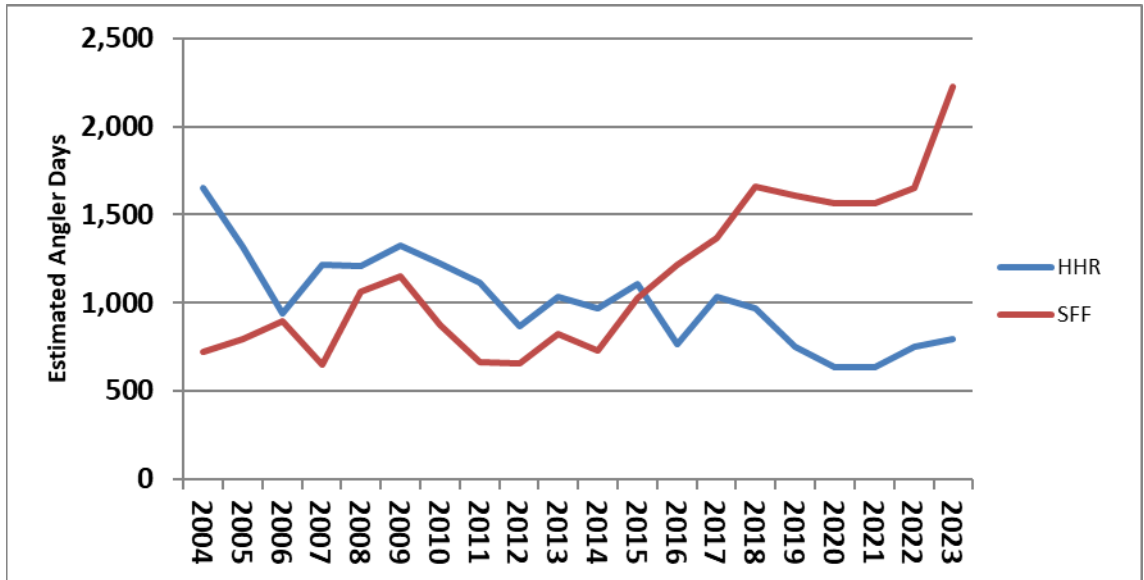


Figure 2: Estimated bull trout angling pressure for Hungry Horse Reservoir and the South Fork Flathead River 2004-2024.

Management Plan Reference (drainage, waterbody, language directly from the plan):

Part II; South Fork Flathead River drainage, section 2.02, page 5 under “South Fork Flathead Bull Trout Fishery”.

Regulation Type (clarification, enforcement, conservation, relevancy, management plan, other):

Conservation

Public Engagement (summary of any public scoping or outreach that has been completed as it relates to this change. Includes public meetings, sporting group meetings, surveys, etc.):

Interdivisional Review (most likely input from **Enforcement**, but input from Com Ed, Legal, Wildlife may also be appropriate. Multiple divisions will review in Helena via RRAM):

R-1 Enforcement has reviewed and concurred with the proposal.

Nonbiological Information (is there an organized advocacy for this change, controversy, other information that decision makers should be aware, relevant MCA or ARM to justify this change):

Proposal 14: Little Bitterroot Lake Kokanee Harvest Limit

Proposed change, addition, or deletion (for existing regs, include District Standard or Exception to the District Standard. Indicate new language in *italics*, deleted language with a ~~strikethrough~~):

Page xx add/change/delete:

- *Kokanee salmon: 10 daily and 20 in possession.*

Rationale (biological justification for proposing this change. Include how this change addresses a fisheries management problem):

FWP intends to shift its kokanee brood source from Lake Mary Ronan to Little Bitterroot Lake. Due to warm fall temperatures, egg quality from Lake Mary Ronan has been poor. Little Bitterroot Lake maintains a wild population of kokanee that would likely be impacted by harvesting large numbers of eggs each fall. This regulation is intended to minimize impacts to the existing population by reducing angler harvest, assuring eggs and milt are available for harvest annually.

Management Plan Reference (drainage, waterbody, language directly from the plan):

SFMP Part ii; 2.04: Evaluate harvest limits to increase the average size at harvest without noticeably reducing catch rates in Ashley Lake. Maintain Little Bitterroot Lake and Ashley Lake as backup brood sources.

Regulation Type (clarification, enforcement, conservation, relevancy, management plan, other):

Conservation, management plan.

Public Engagement (summary of any public scoping or outreach that has been completed as it relates to this change. Includes public meetings, sporting group meetings, surveys, etc.):

This proposal will be presented to the public at the R1 and Statewide regulations meeting.

Interdivisional Review (most likely input from Enforcement, but input from Com Ed, Legal, Wildlife may also be appropriate. Multiple divisions will review in Helena via RRAM):

Nonbiological Information (is there an organized advocacy for this change, controversy, other information that decision makers should be aware, relevant MCA or ARM to justify this change):

There is no known organized advocacy or controversy to this regulation change.

Proposal 15: Little Bitterroot Lake Rainbow Trout Length Restriction

Proposed change, addition, or deletion (for existing regs, include District Standard or Exception to the District Standard. Indicate new language in *italics*, deleted language with a ~~strikethrough~~):

Page xx add/change/delete:

- *Rainbow trout: 1 daily and in possession, 28-inch minimum length.*

Rationale (biological justification for proposing this change. Include how this change addresses a fisheries management problem):

The trophy rainbow trout fishery in Little Bitterroot Lake has been sustained by wild fish and the stocking of Gerrard strain rainbow trout. Stocking ceased in 2024; abundance of large fish is expected to decline. Limiting harvest of rainbow trout in Little Bitterroot Lake would help assure the wild population persists and angler catch rates do not decline.

Management Plan Reference (drainage, waterbody, language directly from the plan):

SFMP Part ii; 2.04: Evaluate stocking and/or harvest limits to produce trophy size fish and improved angler catch rates. Continue stocking triploid Gerrard rainbow trout in Little Bitterroot Lake to produce a trophy fishery.

Regulation Type (clarification, enforcement, conservation, relevancy, management plan, other):

Conservation, management plan.

Public Engagement (summary of any public scoping or outreach that has been completed as it relates to this change. Includes public meetings, sporting group meetings, surveys, etc.):

This proposal will be presented to the public at the R1 and Statewide regulations meeting.

Interdivisional Review (most likely input from Enforcement, but input from Com Ed, Legal, Wildlife may also be appropriate. Multiple divisions will review in Helena via RRAM):

Nonbiological Information (is there an organized advocacy for this change, controversy, other information that decision makers should be aware, relevant MCA or ARM to justify this change):

There is no known organized advocacy or controversy to this regulation change.

Proposal 16: Graves Creek Gear Restriction

Proposed change, addition, or deletion (for existing regs, include District Standard or Exception to the District Standard. Indicate new language in *italics*, deleted language with a ~~striethrough~~):

Page xx add/change/delete:

Graves Creek (tributary to Clark Fork River-Noxon Rapids Reservoir)

Mouth to Graves Creek Falls

- *Hooks/lures must have single points, no double or treble hooks*

Rationale (biological justification for proposing this change. Include how this change addresses a fisheries management problem):

Protect bull trout in a drainage that has high vehicle traffic and easy road access (USFS Rd. 367) while still allowing angling. The road closely follows the stream across the species distribution (~ 3 miles) and prime spawning habitat. Avista Utilities operates a permeant weir just above the mouth to capture juvenile bull trout to physically transport to Lake Pend Orielle, Idaho as a fisheries mitigation action associated with the Clark Fork Settlement Agreement. Large-bodied adults that are captured below Cabinet Gorge Dam that were transported downstream or have a genetic assignment to the stream are returned to this stream to carry out their spawning migration.

Bull trout are especially imperiled in the Lower Clark Fork River drainage and have comparably small population sizes due to the presence of three mainstem dams, their associated reservoir environments which a poor-quality trout habitats and comprised of several non-native predators (smallmouth bass, northern pike, walleye). Non-native trout are becoming more abundant and moving further upstream in tributary streams that are strongholds for native trout (bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout). Graves Creek is designated as critical habitat for Bull Trout under the ESA.

Management Plan Reference (drainage, waterbody, language directly from the plan):

SWFMP Part I; 1.6.3 pg. 69-70: "Although bull trout remain widespread in northwest Montana, the numbers of populations and individuals within populations have declined. Many populations are small and at risk for extirpation due to declining abundances."

"FWP is mandated to provide recreational fisheries for native and non-native fish while protecting and establishing viable populations of bull trout in drainages where they co-occur".

Regulation Type (clarification, enforcement, conservation, relevancy, management plan, other):

Conservation

Public Engagement (summary of any public scoping or outreach that has been completed as it relates to this change. Includes public meetings, sporting group meetings, surveys, etc.):

Will be introduced at R1 public meeting () and statewide public meeting ()

Interdivisional Review (most likely input from Enforcement, but input from Com Ed, Legal, Wildlife may also be appropriate. Multiple divisions will review in Helena via RRAM):

R-1 enforcement approves of this proposed regulation change.

Nonbiological Information (is there an organized advocacy for this change, controversy, other information that decision makers should be aware, relevant MCA or ARM to justify this change):

None that are known

Proposal 17: Graves Creek Bait Restriction

Waterbody or Fishing District: **Graves Creek**

Proposed change, addition, or deletion (for existing regs, include District Standard or Exception to the District Standard. Indicate new language in *italics*, deleted language with a ~~strikethrough~~):

Page xx add/change/delete:

Graves Creek (tributary to Clark Fork River-Noxon Rapids Reservoir)

Mouth to Graves Creek Falls

- **No live, dead or artificial baits allowed**

Rationale (biological justification for proposing this change. Include how this change addresses a fisheries management problem):

Protect bull trout in a drainage that has high vehicle traffic and easy road access (USFS Rd. 367) while still allowing angling. The road closely follows the stream across the species distribution (~ 3 miles) and prime spawning habitat. Avista Utilities operates a permeant weir just above the mouth to capture juvenile bull trout to physically transport to Lake Pend Orielle, Idaho as a fisheries mitigation action associated with the Clark Fork Settlement Agreement. Large-bodied adults that are captured below Cabinet Gorge Dam that were transported downstream or have a genetic assignment to the stream are returned to this stream to carry out their spawning migration.

Bull trout are especially imperiled in the Lower Clark Fork River drainage and have comparably small population sizes due to the presence of three mainstem dams, their associated reservoir environments which are poor-quality trout habitats and comprised of several non-native predators (smallmouth bass, northern pike, walleye). Non-native trout are becoming more abundant and moving further upstream in tributary streams that are strongholds for native trout (bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout). Graves Creek is designated as critical habitat for Bull Trout under the ESA.

Management Plan Reference (drainage, waterbody, language directly from the plan):

SWFMP Part I; 1.6.3 pg. 69-70: "Although bull trout remain widespread in northwest Montana, the numbers of populations and individuals within populations have declined. Many populations are small and at risk for extirpation due to declining abundances."

"FWP is mandated to provide recreational fisheries for native and non-native fish while protecting and establishing viable populations of bull trout in drainages where they co-occur".

Regulation Type (clarification, enforcement, conservation, relevancy, management plan, other):

Conservation

Public Engagement (summary of any public scoping or outreach that has been completed as it relates to this change. Includes public meetings, sporting group meetings, surveys, etc.):

Will be introduced at R1 public meeting () and statewide public meeting ()

Interdivisional Review (most likely input from Enforcement, but input from Com Ed, Legal, Wildlife may also be appropriate. Multiple divisions will review in Helena via RRAM):

R-1 enforcement approves of this proposed regulation change.

Nonbiological Information (is there an organized advocacy for this change, controversy, other information that decision makers should be aware, relevant MCA or ARM to justify this change):

None that are known

Proposal 18: Vermillion River Bait Restriction

Waterbody or Fishing District: Vermillion River

Proposed change, addition, or deletion (for existing regs, include District Standard or Exception to the District Standard. Indicate new language in *italics*, deleted language with a ~~strikethrough~~):

Page xx add/change/delete:

VERMILION RIVER AND TRIBUTAIRES

- Catch and release for cutthroat trout

Canyon Creek to Vermilion Falls

- *No live, dead or artificial baits allowed*

Rationale (biological justification for proposing this change. Include how this change addresses a fisheries management problem):

Protect bull trout and non-hybridized westslope cutthroat trout in a drainage that has high vehicle traffic and easy road access (USFS Rd. 367) while still allowing angling. Significant stream restoration work has been conducted in this reach of stream and may further concentrate both native trout species. Avista Utilities captures juvenile bull trout in the Vermillion River to physically transport to Lake Pend Orielle, Idaho as a fisheries mitigation action associated with the Clark Fork Settlement Agreement. Large-bodied adults that are captured below Cabinet Gorge Dam that were transported downstream or have a genetic assignment to the stream are returned to this stream to carry out their spawning migration.

Bull trout are especially imperiled in the Lower Clark Fork River drainage and have comparably small population sizes due to the presence of three mainstem dams, their associated reservoir environments which are poor-quality trout habitats and comprised of several non-native predators (smallmouth bass, northern pike, walleye). Non-native trout are becoming more abundant and moving further upstream in tributary streams that are strongholds for native trout (bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout). The Vermillion River is designated as critical habitat for Bull Trout under the ESA.

Management Plan Reference (drainage, waterbody, language directly from the plan):

SWFMP Part I; 1.6.3 pg. 69-70: "Although bull trout remain widespread in northwest Montana, the numbers of populations and individuals within populations have declined. Many populations are small and at risk for extirpation due to declining abundances."

"FWP is mandated to provide recreational fisheries for native and non-native fish while protecting and establishing viable populations of bull trout in drainages where they co-occur".

SWFMP Part I; 1.6.8(1) pg. 75: "The conservation goal for westslope cutthroat trout west of the Continental Divide is to maintain viable populations with diverse life histories throughout their existing distributions in all drainages. Identified "conservation" populations west of the Continental Divide include isolated resident populations and populations with a migratory life-form that provide connectivity among populations and angling opportunity for large fish. Westslope cutthroat trout are primarily managed through angling regulations and habitat protection and restoration."

Regulation Type (clarification, enforcement, conservation, relevancy, management plan, other):

Conservation

Public Engagement (summary of any public scoping or outreach that has been completed as it relates to this change. Includes public meetings, sporting group meetings, surveys, etc.):

Will be introduced at R1 public meeting () and statewide public meeting ()

Interdivisional Review (most likely input from Enforcement, but input from Com Ed, Legal, Wildlife may also be appropriate. Multiple divisions will review in Helena via RRAM):

R-1 enforcement approves of this proposed regulation change.

Nonbiological Information (is there an organized advocacy for this change, controversy, other information that decision makers should be aware, relevant MCA or ARM to justify this change):

None that are known

Proposal 19: Vermillion River Gear Restriction

Waterbody or Fishing District: Vermillion River

Proposed change, addition, or deletion (for existing regs, include District Standard or Exception to the District Standard. Indicate new language in *italics*, deleted language with a ~~strike through~~):

Page xx add/change/delete:

VERMILION RIVER AND TRIBUTAIRES

- Catch and release for cutthroat trout

Canyon Creek to Vermilion Falls

- *Hooks/lures must have single points, no double or treble hooks.*

Rationale (biological justification for proposing this change. Include how this change addresses a fisheries management problem):

Protect bull trout and non-hybridized westslope cutthroat trout in a drainage that has high vehicle traffic and easy road access (USFS Rd. 367) while still allowing angling. Significant stream restoration work has been conducted in this reach of stream and may further concentrate both native trout species. Avista Utilities captures juvenile bull trout in the Vermilion River to physically transport to Lake Pend Orielle, Idaho as a fisheries mitigation action associated with the Clark Fork Settlement Agreement. Large-bodied adults that are captured below Cabinet Gorge Dam that were transported downstream or have a genetic assignment to the stream are returned to this stream to carry out their spawning migration.

Bull trout are especially imperiled in the Lower Clark Fork River drainage and have comparably small population sizes due to the presence of three mainstem dams, their associated reservoir environments which are poor-quality trout habitats and comprised of several non-native predators (smallmouth bass, northern pike, walleye). Non-native trout are becoming more abundant and moving further upstream in tributary streams that are strongholds for native trout (bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout). The Vermilion River is designated as critical habitat for Bull Trout under the ESA.

Management Plan Reference (drainage, waterbody, language directly from the plan):

SWFMP Part I; 1.6.3 pg. 69-70: "Although bull trout remain widespread in northwest Montana, the numbers of populations and individuals within populations have declined. Many populations are small and at risk of extirpation due to declining abundances."

"FWP is mandated to provide recreational fisheries for native and non-native fish while protecting and establishing viable populations of bull trout in drainages where they co-occur".

SWFMP Part I; 1.6.8(1) pg. 75: "The conservation goal for westslope cutthroat trout west of the Continental Divide is to maintain viable populations with diverse life histories throughout their existing distributions in all drainages. Identified "conservation" populations west of the Continental Divide include isolated resident populations and populations with a migratory life-form that provide connectivity among populations and angling opportunity for large fish. Westslope cutthroat trout are primarily managed through angling regulations and habitat protection and restoration."

Regulation Type (clarification, enforcement, conservation, relevancy, management plan, other):

Conservation

Public Engagement (summary of any public scoping or outreach that has been completed as it relates to this change. Includes public meetings, sporting group meetings, surveys, etc.):

Will be introduced at R1 public meeting () and statewide public meeting ()

Interdivisional Review (most likely input from Enforcement, but input from Com Ed, Legal, Wildlife may also be appropriate. Multiple divisions will review in Helena via RRAM):

R-1 enforcement approves of this proposed regulation change.

Nonbiological Information (is there an organized advocacy for this change, controversy, other information that decision makers should be aware, relevant MCA or ARM to justify this change):

None that are known

Proposal 20: Vermilion River Bait Restriction

Waterbody or Fishing District: Waterbody

Proposed change, addition, or deletion (for existing regs, include District Standard or Exception to the District Standard. Indicate new language in *italics*, deleted language with a ~~strike through~~):

Page xx add/change/delete:

VERMILION RIVER AND TRIBUTAIRES

- Catch and release for cutthroat trout

Canyon Creek to Vermilion Falls

- No live, dead or artificial baits allowed

Rationale (biological justification for proposing this change. Include how this change addresses a fisheries management problem):

Protect bull trout and non-hybridized westslope cutthroat trout in a drainage that has high vehicle traffic and easy road access (USFS Rd. 367) while still allowing angling. Significant stream restoration work has been conducted in this reach of stream and may further concentrate both native trout species. Avista Utilities captures juvenile bull trout in the Vermilion River to physically transport to Lake Pend Orielle, Idaho as a fisheries mitigation action associated with the Clark Fork Settlement Agreement. Large-bodied adults that are captured below Cabinet Gorge Dam that were transported downstream or have a genetic assignment to the stream are returned to this stream to carry out their spawning migration.

Bull trout are especially imperiled in the Lower Clark Fork River drainage and have comparably small population sizes due to the presence of three mainstem dams, their associated reservoir environments which are poor-quality trout habitat and are comprised of several non-native predators (smallmouth bass, northern pike, walleye). Non-native trout are becoming more abundant and moving further upstream in tributary streams that are strongholds for native trout (bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout). The Vermilion River is designated as critical habitat for Bull Trout under the ESA.

Management Plan Reference (drainage, waterbody, language directly from the plan):

SWFMP Part I; 1.6.3 pg. 69-70: "Although bull trout remain widespread in northwest Montana, the numbers of populations and individuals within populations have declined. Many populations are small and at risk of extirpation due to declining abundances."

"FWP is mandated to provide recreational fisheries for native and non-native fish while protecting and establishing viable populations of bull trout in drainages where they co-occur".

SWFMP Part I; 1.6.8(1) pg. 75: "The conservation goal for westslope cutthroat trout west of the Continental Divide is to maintain viable populations with diverse life histories throughout their existing distributions in all drainages. Identified "conservation" populations west of the Continental Divide include isolated resident populations and populations with a migratory life-form that provide connectivity among populations and angling opportunity for large fish. Westslope cutthroat trout are primarily managed through angling regulations and habitat protection and restoration."

Regulation Type (clarification, enforcement, conservation, relevancy, management plan, other):

Conservation

Public Engagement (summary of any public scoping or outreach that has been completed as it relates to this change. Includes public meetings, sporting group meetings, surveys, etc.):

Will be introduced at R1 public meeting () and statewide public meeting ()

Interdivisional Review (most likely input from Enforcement, but input from Com Ed, Legal, Wildlife may also be appropriate. Multiple divisions will review in Helena via RRAM):

Feedback solicited from R-1 Enforcement, waiting for response.

Nonbiological Information (is there an organized advocacy for this change, controversy, other information that decision makers should be aware, relevant MCA or ARM to justify this change):

None that are known

Proposal 21: West Fork Thompson River and Tributaries Bait and Gear Restrictions

Waterbody or Fishing District: West Fork Thompson River and Tributaries

Proposed change, addition, or deletion (for existing regs, include District Standard or Exception to the District Standard. Indicate new language in *italics*, deleted language with a ~~strikethrough~~):

Page xx add/change/delete:

WEST FORK THOMPSON RIVER AND TRIBUTAIREs

- *Hooks/lures must have single points, no double or treble hooks.*
- ~~Artificial Lures only~~ *No live, dead or artificial baits allowed.*
- Catch-and-release for cutthroat trout

Rationale (biological justification for proposing this change. Include how this change addresses a fisheries management problem):

Protect bull trout in a drainage that has high vehicle traffic and easy road access (USFS Rds. 603 & 7669) while still allowing angling. The roads closely follow the stream across the species distribution.

Bull trout are especially imperiled in the Lower Clark Fork River drainage and have comparably small population sizes due to the presence of three mainstem dams, their associated reservoir environments which are poor-quality trout habitat and are comprised of several non-native predators (smallmouth bass, northern pike, walleye). Non-native trout are becoming more abundant and moving further upstream in tributary streams that are strongholds for native trout (bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout). The West Fork Thompson River is designated as critical habitat for Bull Trout under the ESA.

Management Plan Reference (drainage, waterbody, language directly from the plan):

SWFMP Part I; 1.6.3 pg. 69-70: "Although bull trout remain widespread in northwest Montana, the numbers of populations and individuals within populations have declined. Many populations are small and at risk of extirpation due to declining abundances."

"FWP is mandated to provide recreational fisheries for native and non-native fish while protecting and establishing viable populations of bull trout in drainages where they co-occur".

Regulation Type (clarification, enforcement, conservation, relevancy, management plan, other):

Conservation

Public Engagement (summary of any public scoping or outreach that has been completed as it relates to this change. Includes public meetings, sporting group meetings, surveys, etc.):

Will be introduced at R1 public meeting () and statewide public meeting ()

Interdivisional Review (most likely input from Enforcement, but input from Com Ed, Legal, Wildlife may also be appropriate. Multiple divisions will review in Helena via RRAM):

R-1 enforcement approves of this proposed regulation change.

Nonbiological Information (is there an organized advocacy for this change, controversy, other information that decision makers should be aware, relevant MCA or ARM to justify this change):

None that are known

Proposal 22: McGregor Lake Crayfish Harvest Restriction

Waterbody or Fishing District: McGregor Lake, (Region 1)

Proposed change, addition, or deletion (for existing regs, include District Standard or Exception to the District Standard. Indicate new language in *italics*, deleted language with a ~~strikethrough~~):

Page 38 add/change/delete:

McGREGOR LAKE

- Crayfish: ~~20~~ 100 daily and in possession; females with egg clusters or attached juveniles must be released.

Rationale (biological justification for proposing this change. Include how this change addresses a fisheries management problem):

The native status/designation of Signal Crayfish *Pacifastacus leniusculus* in McGregor Lake has been refuted.

Management Plan Reference (drainage, waterbody, language directly from the plan):

(From 2023-2026 Statewide Fisheries Management Plan, section 2.10, page 12. Will be revised in new Management Plan to reflect non-native designation)

Lower Clark Fork River Drainage

McGregor Lake Crayfish

Signal crayfish in McGregor Lake have provided a historically popular fishery. This putative native population draws high levels of interest and fishing effort due to the abundance and large individual size of the crayfish. Concerns about alleged illegal commercial harvest, wanton waste of smaller crayfish, decreased abundance and individual size, and the presence of an expanding illegally introduced smallmouth bass population prompted FWP to initiate a targeted monitoring strategy for crayfish in McGregor Lake in 2019.

Beginning in 2021, FWP instated a special regulation for crayfish limiting harvest to 20 daily and requiring that females with eggs be released to prevent overharvest while assessing the impacts of the evolving aquatic community. Continued monitoring will be used to evaluate the McGregor Lake crayfish population and the appropriateness and effectiveness of the special regulation.

Regulation Type (clarification, enforcement, conservation, **relevancy**, management plan, other):

Public Engagement (summary of any public scoping or outreach that has been completed as it relates to this change. Includes public meetings, sporting group meetings, surveys, etc.):

Interdivisional Review (most likely input from Enforcement, but input from Com Ed, Legal, Wildlife may also be appropriate. Multiple divisions will review in Helena via RRAM):

Nonbiological Information (is there an organized advocacy for this change, controversy, other information that decision makers should be aware, relevant MCA or ARM to justify this change):

The McGregor Lake crayfish fishery has been historically very popular due to the abundance and large individual size of signal crayfish. While continued concerns about alleged illegal commercial harvest, wanton waste of smaller crayfish, decreased abundance and individual size, and the presence of an expanding illegally introduced smallmouth bass population warrant continued special regulations, liberalizing the daily and possession limits will allow more opportunity for harvest of this non-native species while promoting sustainability of the fishery.

FWP began targeted crayfish population monitoring in 2019. No clear trend is apparent regarding crayfish size and abundance. Targeted monitoring will continue.

Proposal 23: Racetrack Pond Youth Angler Bait Restriction

Waterbody or Fishing District: Racetrack Pond

Proposed change, addition, or deletion (for existing regs, include District Standard or Exception to the District Standard. Indicate new language in *italics*, deleted language with a ~~strikethrough~~):

Page 40 add/delete: Racetrack Pond

- Catch-and-release for trout, except anglers 14 years of age or younger may take 3 combined trout, including cutthroat trout, daily and in possession
- Artificial lures only, except *maggots may be used Nov. 15 to March 31.* ~~anglers 14 years of age or younger may use bait.~~
- *Anglers 14 years of age and younger may use bait.*

Rationale (biological justification for proposing this change. Include how this change addresses a fisheries management problem):

There is concern from enforcement that the current regulation is inconsistent with traditional ice-fishing techniques and therefore causing inadvertent regulation violations. This proposed change simply clarifies the regulation to allow maggots for the ice fishing season while still restricting bait use to anglers 14 and under during the open water season. There is no biological justification for not allowing maggots to be used while ice fishing. The proposed change will allow for a regulation that is consistent with typical ice fishing practices, is more desirable for enforcement, and will be compatible biologically with fisheries management objectives at the pond.

Management Plan Reference (drainage, waterbody, language directly from the plan):

The Upper Clark Fork River Drainage section of the Management Plan calls for a focus on family fishing and quality at Racetrack Pond. Specifically, it says “Encourage youth angling through special regulations. Manage stocking densities and trout harvest to promote quality angling opportunity for stocked trout.” This proposed change will maintain a family friendly, quality, and kids focused fishery at the pond by having regulations that balance opportunity for anglers 14 and younger and quality catch and release for all other anglers.

Regulation Type (clarification, enforcement, conservation, relevancy, management plan, other):

Enforcement

Public Engagement (summary of any public scoping or outreach that has been completed as it relates to this change. Includes public meetings, sporting group meetings, surveys, etc.):

This proposed change will be scoped at local sportsmen’s meetings in May 2026.

Interdivisional Review (most likely input from Enforcement, but input from Com Ed, Legal, Wildlife may also be appropriate. Multiple divisions will review in Helena via RRAM):

This proposed change has been made in coordination with Enforcement.

Nonbiological Information (is there an organized advocacy for this change, controversy, other information that decision makers should be aware, relevant MCA or ARM to justify this change):

This regulation is not expected to be controversial and intends to make the regulation easier for the public to follow.

Proposal 24: Warm Springs WMA Season Length

Waterbody or Fishing District: Warm Springs WMA

Proposed change, addition, or deletion (for existing regs, include District Standard or Exception to the District Standard. Indicate new language in *italics*, deleted language with a ~~strikethrough~~):

Page 45 add/delete:

All waters

- All ponds and canals open *the third Saturday in May through Nov. 30 unless otherwise stated.* ~~Aug-15 through Sept. 30 including Job Corps Ponds and Ducks Unlimited Ponds.~~

- Catch-and-release only. (See Kid's Pond and Gravel Pit Pond for exceptions.)
- Artificial lures only. (See Kid's Pond and Gravel Pit Pond for exceptions.)
- Motorized boats/vessels prohibited.

Job Corps Ponds (Deer Lodge County)

- Open Aug. 15 through Sept. 30.
- Catch-and-release only.
- Artificial lures only.
- Motorized boats/vessels prohibited.

Kids Pond at WSWMA Headquarters

- Open entire year.
- Combined trout: 2 daily and in possession.
- Bait may be used.
- Open to fishing by anglers 14 years of age or younger only. One rod per child.

Gravel Pit Pond adjacent to Highway 48

- ~~Open second Friday in June at 5 p.m. through Nov. 30.~~
- Combined trout: 2 daily and in possession.
- Bait may be used.

~~Hog Hole~~

- ~~Open May 25 through Sept. 30. No trespassing on islands.~~

~~Pond 3~~

- ~~Open May 25 through Nov. 30 to fishing from non-motorized vessels.~~

Mill-Willow Bypass, Warm Springs Creek and Clark Fork River

- Open entire year.
- Closed to fishing from boats/vessels.

Rationale (biological justification for proposing this change. Include how this change addresses a fisheries management problem):

This change is being made to simplify regulations across the various waterbodies on the Warm Springs WMA and standardize the opening date to the general season. The current opening day for two of these waterbodies was a set date (May 25) that generally fell within one week of the general season opening day. The other waterbody had a specific date and time for opening that corresponded with a kid's fishing event, wardens and hatchery staff feel this exception is no longer needed. Waterbodies on the WMA have various closing dates, some of those dates were to avoid conflict with waterfowl hunting and those dates were not changed. The open dates for the Hog Hole were different than the waterbody it

sits within (separated by a thin dyke), making for a challenging enforcement situation. These date changes are insignificant to biological concerns and fisheries management in these two waterbodies. Fisheries in the WMA waters effected by this change are managed through stocking, we will continue monitoring fisheries and can adjust stocking if necessary.

Management Plan Reference (drainage, waterbody, language directly from the plan):

These changes are being proposed to simplify unnecessarily complex and antiquated regulations on the WMA and make the regulations easier to enforce. There is no specific reference in the management plan for these changes. The management direction in the Upper Clark Fork River Drainage portion of the plan specifies that we will manage for “quality” for most waters on the WMA and “family fishing water” on the Gravel Pit Pond adjacent to Highway 48. None of these proposed changes are anticipated to impact the quality or family friendly nature of fishing on the WMA.

Regulation Type (clarification, enforcement, conservation, relevancy, management plan, other):

Relevancy/Other- Simplification of regulations

Public Engagement (summary of any public scoping or outreach that has been completed as it relates to this change. Includes public meetings, sporting group meetings, surveys, etc.):

This proposed change will be scoped at local sportsmen’s meetings in May 2026.

Interdivisional Review (most likely input from Enforcement, but input from Com Ed, Legal, Wildlife may also be appropriate. Multiple divisions will review in Helena via RRAM):

This proposed change has been made in coordination with Enforcement and Parks and Rec.

Nonbiological Information (is there an organized advocacy for this change, controversy, other information that decision makers should be aware, relevant MCA or ARM to justify this change):

This regulation change is not expected to be controversial and intends to make the regulation easier for the public to follow.

Proposal 25: Baker Creek Season Length

Page 51 add:

BAKER CREEK and tributaries (Gallatin County)

- *Open third Saturday in May through Sept. 30*

Rationale (biological justification for proposing this change. Include how this change addresses a fisheries management problem):

This regulation is being proposed to seasonally protect rainbow and brown trout in Baker Creek: a tributary to the Gallatin River that provides high-quality spawning and rearing habitat for salmonids. The regulation is intended to reduce angler-induced stress and mortality on spawning brown and rainbow trout and angler trampling of incubating embryos. Baker Creek is a spring creek that has relatively consistent flows and temperatures throughout the year. Instituting angling closures during the spawning and rearing life-stages of brown and rainbow trout will improve recruitment to the Baker Creek, mainstem Gallatin River, and surrounding fisheries.

Regulation Type (clarification, enforcement, conservation, relevancy, management plan, other):

Conservation: to provide conservation of sport fish in high-quality spawning and rearing habitats.

Statewide Management Plan (how is the regulation proposal supported by the Management Plan):

This proposal directly follows regulations prescribed in the Statewide Management Plan.

Public Engagement (summary of any public scoping or outreach that has been completed as it relates to this change. Includes public meetings, sporting group meetings, surveys, etc.):

The proposed regulation changes were scoped during meetings with the Region 3 Citizens Advisory Council, Madison Gallatin Trout Unlimited, Fishing Outfitters Association of Montana, Montana Trout Unlimited, Madison River Foundation, the Madison Conservation District, and adjacent landowners, which encompassed between 100 and 200 individuals and included state legislators and county commissioners.

There was good support for the proposed changes during all the meetings. No changes were suggested during the public scoping process.

Interdivisional Review (most likely input from Enforcement, but input from CommEd, Legal, Wildlife may also be appropriate. Multiple divisions will review in Helena via RRAM):

Region 3 Enforcement had no concerns with the proposed regulation change.

The proposal has had broad Department review.

Nonbiological Information (is there an organized advocacy for this change, controversy, other information that decision makers should be aware, relevant MCA or ARM to justify this change):

Proposal 26: Ben Hart Creek Season Length

Page 53 add:

BEN HART CREEK (Gallatin County)

- *Open third Saturday in May through Sept. 30*

Rationale (biological justification for proposing this change. Include how this change addresses a fisheries management problem):

This regulation is being proposed to seasonally protect rainbow and brown trout in Ben Hart Creek: a tributary to the East Gallatin River that provides high-quality spawning and rearing habitat for salmonids. The regulation is intended to reduce angler-induced stress and mortality on spawning brown and rainbow trout and angler trampling of incubating embryos. Ben Hart Creek is a spring creek that has relatively consistent flows and temperatures throughout the year. Instituting angling closures during the spawning and rearing life-stages of brown and rainbow trout will improve recruitment to the Ben Hart Creek, mainstem East Gallatin River, and surrounding fisheries.

Regulation Type (clarification, enforcement, conservation, relevancy, management plan, other):

Conservation: to provide conservation of sport fish in high-quality spawning and rearing habitats.

Statewide Management Plan (how is the regulation proposal supported by the Management Plan):

This proposal directly follows regulations prescribed in the Statewide Management Plan.

Public Engagement (summary of any public scoping or outreach that has been completed as it relates to this change. Includes public meetings, sporting group meetings, surveys, etc.):

The proposed regulation changes were scoped during meetings with the Region 3 Citizens Advisory Council, Madison Gallatin Trout Unlimited, Fishing Outfitters Association of Montana, Montana Trout Unlimited, Madison River Foundation, the Madison Conservation District, and adjacent landowners, which encompassed between 100 and 200 individuals and included state legislators and county commissioners.

There was good support for the proposed changes during all the meetings. No changes were suggested during the public scoping process.

Interdivisional Review (most likely input from Enforcement, but input from CommEd, Legal, Wildlife may also be appropriate. Multiple divisions will review in Helena via RRAM):

Region 3 Enforcement had no concerns with the proposed regulation change.

The proposal has had broad Department review.

Nonbiological Information (is there an organized advocacy for this change, controversy, other information that decision makers should be aware of, relevant MCA or ARM to justify this change):

Proposal 27: Camp Creek Season Length

Page 56 add:

CAMP CREEK and tributaries (Gallatin County)

Downstream from Churchill Road

- **Open third Saturday in May through Sept. 30**

Rationale (biological justification for proposing this change. Include how this change addresses a fisheries management problem):

This regulation is being proposed to seasonally protect rainbow and brown trout in Camp Creek: a tributary to the Gallatin River that provides high-quality spawning and rearing habitat for salmonids. The regulation is intended to reduce angler-induced stress and mortality on spawning brown and rainbow trout and angler trampling of incubating embryos. The lower reaches of Camp Creek function similarly to a spring creek that has relatively consistent flows and temperatures throughout the year, making it a popular fishery. Instituting angling closures during the spawning and rearing life-stages of brown and rainbow trout will improve recruitment to the Camp Creek and mainstem Gallatin River fisheries.

Regulation Type (clarification, enforcement, conservation, relevancy, management plan, other):

Conservation: to provide conservation of sport fish in high-quality spawning and rearing habitats.

Statewide Management Plan (how is the regulation proposal supported by the Management Plan):

This proposal directly follows regulations prescribed in the Statewide Management Plan.

Public Engagement (summary of any public scoping or outreach that has been completed as it relates to this change. Includes public meetings, sporting group meetings, surveys, etc.):

The proposed regulation changes were scoped during meetings with the Region 3 Citizens Advisory Council, Madison Gallatin Trout Unlimited, Fishing Outfitters Association of Montana, Montana Trout Unlimited, Madison River Foundation, the Madison Conservation District, and adjacent landowners, which encompassed between 100 and 200 individuals and included state legislators and county commissioners.

There was good support for the proposed changes during all the meetings. No changes were suggested during the public scoping process.

Interdivisional Review (most likely input from Enforcement, but input from CommEd, Legal, Wildlife may also be appropriate. Multiple divisions will review in Helena via RRAM):

Region 3 Enforcement had no concerns with the proposed regulation change.

The proposal has had broad Department review.

Nonbiological Information (is there an organized advocacy for this change, controversy, other information that decision makers should be aware of, relevant MCA or ARM to justify this change):

Proposal 28: East Gallatin River Pike Harvest

Page 57 add/delete:

EAST GALLATIN RIVER

- ~~Northern pike: no limit.~~
- *Closed to fishing from boats/vessels.*

Rationale (biological justification for proposing this change. Include how this change addresses a fisheries management problem):

In the early 2000s there were occasional northern pike detections in the waterbodies near Headwaters State Park because of an unauthorized introduction in the Missouri River headwaters area. A “no limit” regulation for the East Gallatin River was imposed on northern pike in 2011 to help prevent establishment of the invading population.

There were two possible northern pike source populations. One was in pond near Manhattan that has since been eradicated. The other source population was in Toston Reservoir. In 2005, Northern pike presence in Toston Reservoir was confirmed. The population increased until 2009. High-water years in 2010 and 2011, followed by a bladder failure at the dam in 2012, created consecutive flushing events that contributed to a significant reduction in pike abundance in Toston Reservoir. No pike have been captured in Toston Reservoir since 2012.

This proposal is meant to remove a regulation that is no longer biologically relevant. Northern pike have not been detected in the East Gallatin River or nearby waterbodies upstream of Toston Dam for nearly 15 years. Therefore, a special regulation is no longer necessary for the East Gallatin River.

The East Gallatin River is located in the Gallatin Valley, which has experienced the fastest rate of population growth in Montana. The East Gallatin River is a popular fishery, but it also provides spawning habitat for trout from the Gallatin and upper Missouri rivers. Human population densities in Gallatin County have increased both commercial and noncommercial angling pressure in the Gallatin River watershed. The regulation is intended to reduce angler-induced stress and mortality on brown and rainbow trout and angler trampling of incubating embryos in the East Gallatin River. Boat/vessel hulls can disturb incubating brown and rainbow trout eggs by scouring trout redds. The relatively narrow width of the East Gallatin increases the likelihood of encountering redds with a boat/vessel hull. Although wade angling also poses threats of trampling, boats/vessels can cause these disturbances over a larger area, potentially disturbing several miles of redds.

Regulation Type (clarification, enforcement, conservation, relevancy, management plan, other):

Relevancy: northern pike are not thought to exist in the East Gallatin River.

Conservation: to provide conservation of sport fish in an area where habitat enhancement projects have been completed.

Statewide Management Plan (how is the regulation proposal supported by the Management Plan):

This proposal directly follows regulations prescribed in the Statewide Management Plan.

Public Engagement (summary of any public scoping or outreach that has been completed as it relates to this change. Includes public meetings, sporting group meetings, surveys, etc.):

No scoping for this regulation proposal has occurred.

Interdivisional Review (most likely input from Enforcement, but input from CommEd, Legal, Wildlife may also be appropriate. Multiple divisions will review in Helena via RRAM):

Region 3 Enforcement had no concerns with the proposed regulation change.

The proposal has had broad Department review.

Nonbiological Information (is there an organized advocacy for this change, controversy, other information that decision makers should be aware, relevant MCA or ARM to justify this change):

Proposal 29: Gallatin River Pike Harvest

Page 58 delete:

GALLATIN RIVER

Entire river

- Northern pike: no limit.

Yellowstone National Park to East Gallatin River

- Closed to fishing from boats/vessels.

Porcupine Creek Road to West Fork Gallatin River

- Open third Saturday in May through Nov. 30.

Rationale (biological justification for proposing this change. Include how this change addresses a fisheries management problem):

In the early 2000s there were occasional northern pike detections in the Gallatin River because of an unauthorized introduction in the Missouri River headwaters area. A “no limit” regulation for the Gallatin River was imposed on northern pike in 2011 to help prevent the establishment of the invading population.

There were two possible northern pike source populations. One was in pond near Manhattan that has since been eradicated. The other source population was in Toston Reservoir. In 2005, Northern pike presence in Toston Reservoir was confirmed. The population increased until 2009. High-water years in 2010 and 2011, followed by a bladder failure at the dam in 2012, created consecutive flushing events that contributed to a significant reduction in pike abundance in Toston Reservoir. No pike have been captured in Toston Reservoir since 2012.

This proposal is meant to remove a regulation that is no longer biologically relevant. Northern pike have not been detected in the Gallatin River or nearby waterbodies upstream of Toston Dam for nearly 15 years. Therefore, a special regulation is no longer necessary for the Gallatin River.

Regulation Type (clarification, enforcement, conservation, relevancy, management plan, other):

Relevancy: northern pike are not thought to exist in the Gallatin River.

Statewide Management Plan (how is the regulation proposal supported by the Management Plan):

This proposal directly follows regulations prescribed in the Statewide Management Plan.

Public Engagement (summary of any public scoping or outreach that has been completed as it relates to this change. Includes public meetings, sporting group meetings, surveys, etc.):

The proposed regulation changes were scoped during meetings with the Region 3 Citizens Advisory Council, Madison Gallatin Trout Unlimited, Fishing Outfitters Association of Montana, Montana Trout Unlimited, Gallatin Watershed Council, and the Gallatin Conservation District, which encompassed between 100 and 200 individuals and included state legislators and county commissioners.

There was good support for the proposed changes during all the meetings. No changes were suggested during the public scoping process.

Interdivisional Review (most likely input from Enforcement, but input from CommEd, Legal, Wildlife may also be appropriate. Multiple divisions will review in Helena via RRAM):

Region 3 Enforcement had no concerns with the proposed regulation change.

The proposal has had broad Department review.

Nonbiological Information (is there an organized advocacy for this change, controversy, other information that decision makers should be aware, relevant MCA or ARM to justify this change):

Proposal 30: Jefferson River Pike Harvest

Page 60 add/delete:

JEFFERSON RIVER

Entire River

~~Northern Pike: no limit.~~

· Combined trout: 3 daily and in possession, only 1 over 18 inches and only 1 may be a rainbow.

Hells Canyon Creek, Parsons Slough, and Willow Springs Creek

· Seasonal spawning closure at tributary mouths: Closed to fishing 100 yards upstream and downstream from the creek mouths from April 1 through April 30 and from Sept. 30 through Nov. 30.

Rationale (biological justification for proposing this change. Include how this change addresses a fisheries management problem):

Jefferson Pike

In the early 2000s there were occasional northern pike detections in the Jefferson River because of an unauthorized introduction in the Missouri River headwaters area. A “no limit” regulation for the Jefferson River was imposed on northern pike in 2011 to help prevent the further establishment of the invading population.

There were two possible northern pike source populations. One was in pond near Manhattan that has since been eradicated. The other source population was in Toston Reservoir. In 2005, Northern pike presence in Toston reservoir was confirmed. The population increased until 2009. High-water years in 2010 and 2011, followed by a bladder failure at the dam in 2012, created consecutive flushing events that contributed to a significant reduction in pike abundance in Toston Reservoir. No pike have been captured in Toston Reservoir since 2012.

This proposal is meant to remove a regulation that is no longer biologically relevant. Northern pike have not been detected in the Jefferson River or Toston Reservoir for 17 and 14 years, respectively. Therefore, a special regulation is no longer necessary for the Jefferson River. The “no limit” regulation will remain in effect for the Missouri River from the headwaters area to Holter Dam.

Parsons Spawning Closure

Trout populations in the Jefferson River have limited access to high quality tributary habitats. Hells Canyon Creek, Parsons Slough, and Willow Springs have been identified as important tributaries. Long-term monitoring of trout redds and juvenile trout production indicate these three streams are important juvenile recruitment sources to the Jefferson River trout populations. Fish staging near the mouths of Hells Canyon Creek and Willow Springs are already protected through a seasonal fishing closure. The recommended regulation would also protect fish at the mouth of Parsons Slough.

Parsons Slough is a major spawning location for rainbow and brown trout in the Jefferson River. On average, the stream has more brown trout redds per year than it does rainbow trout redds. It is thought that the Parsons Slough temperature regime might be more advantageous to brown trout rearing than it

is for rainbow trout. Given the recent decline in brown trout abundances in southwest Montana, places that attract concentrated spawning activity should be protected.

Regulation Type (clarification, enforcement, conservation, relevancy, management plan, other):

Relevancy and Conservation: to remove a regulation that is no longer relevant, and provide additional protection/conservation of spawning sport fish.

Statewide Management Plan (how is the regulation proposal supported by the Management Plan):

This proposal directly follows regulations and practices prescribed in the Statewide Management Plan.

Public Engagement (summary of any public scoping or outreach that has been completed as it relates to this change. Includes public meetings, sporting group meetings, surveys, etc.):

The proposed regulation change was informally scoped with Jefferson River Watershed Council, Montana Trout Unlimited, local landowners, and Jefferson Valley Sportsman's Association.

There was good support for the proposed changes. No alternatives were suggested during the public scoping process.

Interdivisional Review (most likely input from Enforcement, but input from CommEd, Legal, Wildlife may also be appropriate. Multiple divisions will review in Helena via RRAM):

These regulations were scoped with Region 3 Enforcement, who delivered no concerns.

The proposal has had Department review.

Nonbiological Information (is there an organized advocacy for this change, controversy, other information that decision makers should be aware of, relevant MCA or ARM to justify this change):

The Parsons Slough proposal is an adjustment to an existing regulation, so interest and controversy are expected to be minimal. However, support for protecting Parsons Slough and the associated spawning trout is expected to be high. The proposal coincides with ongoing instream flow improvement and water right leasing projects in the area. Fisheries and Water Program personnel have spent significant time and resources understanding Parsons Slough and Willow Springs creeks. In 2004 to 2007 major habitat rehabilitation took place in both streams. In 2025, the appropriate water right changes were made to change the point of diversion from the cold-spring tributaries to the warmer Jefferson River. In 2026, the infrastructure needed to pump from the Jefferson River will be implemented. The project is intended to increase water quantity, decrease water temperature, and eliminate fish loss to open ditches.

Proposal 31: Madison River Pike Harvest and Side Channel Closure

Page 62 add/delete:

MADISON RIVER

Yellowstone National Park boundary to Hebgen Reservoir

- Catch-and-release for rainbow trout, except anglers 14 years of age or younger may take 1 rainbow trout daily and in possession, any size.

Quake Lake outlet to Lyons Bridge

- Catch-and-release for trout, except anglers 14 years of age or younger may take 1 trout daily and in possession, any size.
- Artificial lures only.
- Close to fishing from boats/vessels.

Lyons Bridge to Varney Bridge

- *Hyde Creek and Morgan Gulch side channels closed entire year to fishing and wading as posted.*
- Catch-and-release for trout, except anglers 14 years of age or younger may take 1 trout daily and in possession, any size.
- Artificial lures only.

Varney Bridge to Ennis Bridge

- Catch-and-release for trout, except anglers 14 years of age or younger may take 1 trout daily and in possession, any size.
- Artificial lures only with barbless, single-pointed hooks. No treble or double hooks. Anglers may remove treble or double hooks from the lure and replace them with a single hook, or the shanks may be cut off the other hook points to leave a single hook. Lures with multiple hook attachments may still be used but any treble hook must be replaced by a single hook.

Ennis Bridge to Ennis Lake

- Catch-and-release for trout, except anglers 14 years of age or younger may take 1 trout daily and in possession, any size.
- Artificial lures only with barbless, single-pointed hooks. No treble or double hooks. Anglers may remove treble or double hooks from the lure and replace them with a single hook, or the shanks may be cut off the other hook points to leave a single hook. Lures with multiple hook attachments may still be used but any treble hook must be replaced by a single hook.
- Close to fishing from boats/vessels.

Ennis Bridge to Ennis Lake

- Northern pike: no limit

Upstream from Highway 84 Bridge

- *Closed entire year to fishing and wading in side channels and areas around islands immediately upstream of bridge as posted.*

Rationale (biological justification for proposing this change. Include how this change addresses a fisheries management problem):

In the early 2000s there were occasional northern pike detections near Headwaters State Park because of an unauthorized introduction in the Missouri River headwaters area. A “no limit” regulation for the

Madison River was imposed on northern pike in 2011 to help prevent the establishment of the invading population.

There were two possible northern pike source populations. One was in pond near Manhattan that has since been eradicated. The other source population was in Toston Reservoir. In 2005, Northern pike presence in Toston Reservoir was confirmed. The population increased until 2009. High-water years in 2010 and 2011, followed by a bladder failure at the dam in 2012, created consecutive flushing events that contributed to a significant reduction in pike abundance in Toston Reservoir. No pike have been captured in Toston Reservoir since 2012.

This proposal is meant to remove a regulation that is no longer biologically relevant. Northern pike have not been detected in the Madison River or nearby waterbodies upstream of Toston Dam for nearly 15 years. Therefore, a special regulation is no longer necessary for the Madison River.

This regulation is being proposed to seasonally protect Madison River trout in constructed side channel and island habitats that were designed to improve spawning and rearing conditions and overall trout abundances. The regulation is intended to reduce angler-induced stress and mortality on spawning Brown and Rainbow trout and angler trampling of incubating embryos in these vulnerable habitats. Complex habitat features such as side channels and islands serve as reservoirs of gravel that directly provide or replenish and create spawning habitat. Additionally, the passive edges of islands and side channels provide areas of reduced velocity and complex habitat where juvenile fish can find summer and winter refugia from predators. Consequently, these shallow-water, or slow-velocity areas are particularly susceptible to angling pressure because of their accessibility and seasonal concentrations of spawning fish. Instituting angling closures during the spawning and rearing life-stages of brown and rainbow trout will increase the likelihood of successful project outcomes and improve recruitment to the mainstem fishery. The proposed closure window will span the spawning and incubation period for rainbow and brown trout in the Madison River.

Regulation Type (clarification, enforcement, conservation, relevancy, management plan, other):

Relevancy: northern pike are not thought to exist in the East Gallatin River.

Conservation: to provide conservation of sport fish in an area where habitat enhancement projects have been completed.

Statewide Management Plan (how is the regulation proposal supported by the Management Plan):

This proposal directly follows regulations prescribed in the Statewide Management Plan.

Public Engagement (summary of any public scoping or outreach that has been completed as it relates to this change. Includes public meetings, sporting group meetings, surveys, etc.):

The proposed regulation changes were scoped during meetings with the Region 3 Citizens Advisory Council, Madison Gallatin Trout Unlimited, Fishing Outfitters Association of Montana, Montana Trout Unlimited, Madison River Foundation, and the Madison Conservation District, which encompassed between 100 and 200 individuals and included state legislators and county commissioners.

There was good support for the proposed changes during all the meetings. No changes were suggested during the public scoping process.

Interdivisional Review (most likely input from Enforcement, but input from CommEd, Legal, Wildlife may also be appropriate. Multiple divisions will review in Helena via RRAM):

Region 3 Enforcement had no concerns with the proposed regulation changes.

The proposal has had broad Department review.

Nonbiological Information (is there an organized advocacy for this change, controversy, other information that decision makers should be aware, relevant MCA or ARM to justify this change):

Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks is proactively collaborating with Northwestern Energy, Bureau of Land Management, and the Madison River Foundation to enhance spawning and rearing habitats in the Madison River. These projects are scoped and have garnered widespread support by the Madison Technical Advisory Committee comprising Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks, Northwestern Energy, United States Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and United States Fish and Wildlife Service.

Proposal 32: Miner Lake Arctic Grayling Catch-and-Release and Burbot Harvest Restrictions

Page 61 add:

LOWER MINER LAKE (near Wisdom)

- *Catch-and-release for arctic grayling*
- *Burbot (Ling): 1 daily and in possession*

Rationale (biological justification for proposing this change. Include how this change addresses a fisheries management problem):

Recent population surveys indicate grayling abundance has declined, and brown trout have colonized Lower Miner Lake, which may be contributing to grayling decline. Lower Miner Lake is one of three lakes in the Big Hole River drainage with native Arctic grayling populations and are an important part of the statewide grayling conservation plan.

The burbot population declined in the 2010s and has not recovered. Although FWP lacks harvest surveys, harvest may have contributed to the burbot decline. Burbot in Lower Miner Lake are long-lived (> 25 years). The long-lived nature of these fish necessitates a low harvest rate to maintain the fishery. Before the population declined, a mark-recapture population estimate for the burbot population in Lower Miner Lake was only 403 fish. However, no fish were captured in recent surveys. It is unclear how the recent brown trout colonization in the lake have contributed to declining abundances of burbot. However, brown trout are known to prey on and compete with burbot.

Regulation Type (clarification, enforcement, conservation, relevancy, management plan, other):

Conservation: to provide conservation of a native population of Arctic grayling and encourage harvest of non-native trout species also present in the lake. Regulate burbot harvest to improve the burbot fishery.

Statewide Management Plan (how is the regulation proposal supported by the Management Plan):

This proposal directly follows direction in the Arctic Grayling Conservation Strategy.

Public Engagement (summary of any public scoping or outreach that has been completed as it relates to this change. Includes public meetings, sporting group meetings, surveys, etc.):

The proposed regulation change would be scoped along with other state-wide regulation changes.

Interdivisional Review (most likely input from Enforcement, but input from CommEd, Legal, Wildlife may also be appropriate. Multiple divisions will review in Helena via RRAM):

Region 3 Enforcement had no concerns with the proposed regulation changes.

Nonbiological Information (is there an organized advocacy for this change, controversy, other information that decision makers should be aware, relevant MCA or ARM to justify this change):

Because other trout species are present in the lake and available for anglers to catch and consume, it is unlikely that this proposal will receive much opposition from the public. Grayling have been an important part of the fishery in Miner Lake for decades and it is likely that anglers will support their conservation.

Reducing the burbot limit will still allow anglers to catch and harvest burbot but reduces the limit by 4 fish to limit potential overharvest.

Proposal 33: Missouri River-Big Spring Confluence Season Length

Page 63 add/delete:

MISSOURI RIVER

Confluence of Madison and Jefferson Rivers to Holter Dam

· Northern pike: no limit.

Toston Dam Reservoir (Toston Dam to approximately 1 mile upstream)

· Northern Pike: no limit. Spearing allowed through the ice only.

Toston Dam to Canyon Ferry Reservoir

· ~~Big Springs spawning area closed as posted from March 1 through June 15.~~

Big Springs Spawning Area: Fishing prohibited in the spring channel and within 100 yards upstream and downstream of its confluence with the Missouri River, from March 1 through June 15 and Sept. 30 through Nov. 30.

· Catch-and-release for brown trout, except anglers 14 years of age or younger may take 1 brown trout daily and in possession, any size.

· Walleye: 10 daily, only 1 over 15 inches. Possession limit is twice the daily limit.

· Northern Pike: no limit.

Rationale (biological justification for proposing this change. Include how this change addresses a fisheries management problem):

Trout populations in the Missouri River below Toston Dam have limited access to high value spawning habitat. There are limited locations for trout to spawn in the mainstem river. Otolith microchemistry data from 2023 indicate most brown trout in the Missouri River upstream of Canyon Ferry originate from tributaries. Therefore, places that attract concentrated spawning activity should be protected. Seasonally closing areas where trout spawn is intended to improve recruitment of wild fish to the Missouri River and increase overall abundance of trout. This regulation clarifies the spawning closure for the rainbow trout spawning season while adding protection during the brown trout spawning period.

The current regulation states the closure occurs “as posted”. The proposed regulation eliminates the signage requirement and would create a standardized, annual closure. Each year, if the location is not signed or the signs get washed out, then spawning fish do not receive the protections intended by the regulation.

Regulation Type (clarification, enforcement, conservation, relevancy, management plan, other):

Clarification and Conservation: to improve regulation effectiveness and provide additional protection/conservation of spawning sport fish.

Statewide Management Plan (how is the regulation proposal supported by the Management Plan):

This proposal directly follows regulations and practices prescribed in the Statewide Management Plan.

Public Engagement (summary of any public scoping or outreach that has been completed as it relates to this change. Includes public meetings, sporting group meetings, surveys, etc.):

The proposed regulation change was informally scoped with Broadwater Conservation District, Natural Resource Conservation Service, and Montana Trout Unlimited.

There was good support for the proposed changes. No alternatives were suggested during the public scoping process.

Interdivisional Review (most likely input from Enforcement, but input from CommEd, Legal, Wildlife may also be appropriate. Multiple divisions will review in Helena via RRAM):

This regulation proposal was scoped with Region 3 Enforcement, who had no concerns.

The proposal has had Department review.

Nonbiological Information (is there an organized advocacy for this change, controversy, other information that decision makers should be aware, relevant MCA or ARM to justify this change):

This proposal is an adjustment to an existing regulation, so interest and controversy are expected to be minimal.

Proposal 34: O'Dell Creek Season Length

Page 65 add:

O'DELL CREEK (Madison County)

- *Open third Saturday in May through Sept. 30*

Rationale (biological justification for proposing this change. Include how this change addresses a fisheries management problem):

This regulation is being proposed to seasonally protect rainbow and brown trout in O'Dell Creek: a tributary to the Madison River that provides high-quality spawning and rearing habitat for salmonids. The regulation is intended to reduce angler-induced stress and mortality on spawning brown and rainbow trout and angler trampling of incubating embryos. O'Dell Creek is a spring creek that has relatively consistent flows and temperatures throughout the year, making it a popular fishery. Instituting angling closures during the spawning and rearing life-stages of brown and rainbow trout will improve recruitment to the O'Dell Creek and mainstem Madison River fisheries.

Regulation Type (clarification, enforcement, conservation, relevancy, management plan, other):

Conservation: to provide conservation of sport fish in high-quality spawning and rearing habitats.

Statewide Management Plan (how is the regulation proposal supported by the Management Plan):

This proposal directly follows regulations prescribed in the Statewide Management Plan.

Public Engagement (summary of any public scoping or outreach that has been completed as it relates to this change. Includes public meetings, sporting group meetings, surveys, etc.):

The proposed regulation changes were scoped during meetings with the Region 3 Citizens Advisory Council, Madison Gallatin Trout Unlimited, Fishing Outfitters Association of Montana, Montana Trout Unlimited, Madison River Foundation, the Madison Conservation District, and adjacent landowners, which encompassed between 100 and 200 individuals and included state legislators and county commissioners.

There was good support for the proposed changes during all the meetings. No changes were suggested during the public scoping process.

Interdivisional Review (most likely input from Enforcement, but input from CommEd, Legal, Wildlife may also be appropriate. Multiple divisions will review in Helena via RRAM):

Region 3 Enforcement had no concerns with the proposed regulation change.

The proposal has had broad Department review.

Nonbiological Information (is there an organized advocacy for this change, controversy, other information that decision makers should be aware, relevant MCA or ARM to justify this change):

Since 2005, Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks has collaborated with Northwestern Energy, the Madison River Foundation, and local landowners to enhance spawning and rearing habitats in O'Dell Creek. These projects are scoped and have garnered widespread support by the Madison Technical Advisory Committee comprising Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks, Northwestern Energy, United States Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and United States Fish and Wildlife Service.

Proposal 35: Pintler Lake Arctic Grayling Catch-and-Release

Page 65 add:

PINTLER LAKE

- *Catch-and-release for arctic grayling*

Rationale (biological justification for proposing this change. Include how this change addresses a fisheries management problem):

Recent population surveys suggest grayling abundance has declined in Pintler Lake. Additionally, genetic evidence suggests that metrics of genetic diversity are declining in Pintler Lake due to low population size. Brown trout have also recently colonized the lake and may be contributing to the grayling decline. Pintler Lake is one of three lakes in the Big Hole River drainage with native populations of Arctic grayling and are an important part of grayling conservation state-wide.

Regulation Type (clarification, enforcement, conservation, relevancy, management plan, other):

Conservation: to provide conservation of a native population of Arctic grayling and encourage harvest of other trout species also present in the lake.

Statewide Management Plan (how is the regulation proposal supported by the Management Plan):

This proposal directly follows direction in the Arctic Grayling Conservation Strategy.

Public Engagement (summary of any public scoping or outreach that has been completed as it relates to this change. Includes public meetings, sporting group meetings, surveys, etc.):

The proposed regulation change would be scoped along with other statewide regulation changes.

Interdivisional Review (most likely input from Enforcement, but input from CommEd, Legal, Wildlife may also be appropriate. Multiple divisions will review in Helena via RRAM):

Region 3 Enforcement had no concerns with the proposed regulation change.

Nonbiological Information (is there an organized advocacy for this change, controversy, other information that decision makers should be aware, relevant MCA or ARM to justify this change):

Because other trout species are present in the lake and available for anglers to catch and consume, it is unlikely that this proposal will receive much opposition from the public. Grayling have been an important part of the fishery in Pintler Lake for decades and it is likely that anglers will support their continued conservation.

Proposal 36: Rae Creek Season Length

Page 65 add:

RAE CREEK aka Rey Creek (Gallatin County)

- *Open third Saturday in May through Sept. 30*

Rationale (biological justification for proposing this change. Include how this change addresses a fisheries management problem):

This regulation is being proposed to seasonally protect rainbow and brown trout in Rae Creek: a tributary to the Gallatin River that provides high-quality spawning and rearing habitat for salmonids. The regulation is intended to reduce angler-induced stress and mortality on spawning brown and rainbow trout and angler trampling of incubating embryos. Rae Creek is a spring creek that has relatively consistent flows and temperatures throughout the year, making it a popular fishery. Instituting angling closures during the spawning and rearing life-stages of brown and rainbow trout will improve recruitment to the Rae Creek and mainstem Gallatin River fisheries.

Regulation Type (clarification, enforcement, conservation, relevancy, management plan, other):

Conservation: to provide conservation of sport fish in high-quality spawning and rearing habitats.

Statewide Management Plan (how is the regulation proposal supported by the Management Plan):

This proposal directly follows regulations prescribed in the Statewide Management Plan.

Public Engagement (summary of any public scoping or outreach that has been completed as it relates to this change. Includes public meetings, sporting group meetings, surveys, etc.):

The proposed regulation changes were scoped during meetings with the Region 3 Citizens Advisory Council, Madison Gallatin Trout Unlimited, Fishing Outfitters Association of Montana, Montana Trout Unlimited, Madison River Foundation, the Madison Conservation District, and adjacent landowners, which encompassed between 100 and 200 individuals and included state legislators and county commissioners.

There was good support for the proposed changes during all the meetings. No changes were suggested during the public scoping process.

Interdivisional Review (most likely input from Enforcement, but input from CommEd, Legal, Wildlife may also be appropriate. Multiple divisions will review in Helena via RRAM):

Region 3 Enforcement had no concerns with the proposed regulation changes.

The proposal has had broad Department review.

Nonbiological Information (is there an organized advocacy for this change, controversy, other information that decision makers should be aware, relevant MCA or ARM to justify this change):

Proposal 37: Randall Creek Season Length

Page 65 add:

RANDALL CREEK and tributaries (Gallatin County)

- *Open third Saturday in May through Sept. 30*

Rationale (biological justification for proposing this change. Include how this change addresses a fisheries management problem):

This regulation is being proposed to seasonally protect rainbow and brown trout in Randall Creek: a tributary to the Gallatin River that provides high-quality spawning and rearing habitat for salmonids. The regulation is intended to reduce angler-induced stress and mortality on spawning brown and rainbow trout and angler trampling of incubating embryos. Randall Creek is a spring creek that has relatively consistent flows and temperatures throughout the year, making it a popular fishery. Instituting angling closures during the spawning and rearing life-stages of brown and rainbow trout will improve recruitment to the Randall Creek and mainstem Gallatin River fisheries.

Regulation Type (clarification, enforcement, conservation, relevancy, management plan, other):

Conservation: to provide conservation of sport fish in high-quality spawning and rearing habitats.

Statewide Management Plan (how is the regulation proposal supported by the Management Plan):

This proposal directly follows regulations prescribed in the Statewide Management Plan.

Public Engagement (summary of any public scoping or outreach that has been completed as it relates to this change. Includes public meetings, sporting group meetings, surveys, etc.):

The proposed regulation changes were scoped during meetings with the Region 3 Citizens Advisory Council, Madison Gallatin Trout Unlimited, Fishing Outfitters Association of Montana, Montana Trout Unlimited, Madison River Foundation, the Madison Conservation District, and adjacent landowners, which encompassed between 100 and 200 individuals and included state legislators and county commissioners.

There was good support for the proposed changes during all the meetings. No changes were suggested during the public scoping process.

Interdivisional Review (most likely input from Enforcement, but input from CommEd, Legal, Wildlife may also be appropriate. Multiple divisions will review in Helena via RRAM):

Region 3 Enforcement had no concerns with the proposed regulation change.

The proposal has had broad Department review.

Nonbiological Information (is there an organized advocacy for this change, controversy, other information that decision makers should be aware, relevant MCA or ARM to justify this change):

Proposal 38: Red Rock Creek Hybrid Cutthroat Harvest Limit

Page 64 add:

RED ROCK CREEK (Beaverhead River drainage)

Upstream from Elk Lake Road

- Open entire year except May 1 through June 14.
- Artificial lures only.
- *Cutthroat trout: 3 daily and in possession.*

Elk Lake Road to Upper Red Rock Lake

- Closed the entire year.

Rationale (biological justification for proposing this change. Include how this change addresses a fisheries management problem):

The non-native, hybridized Yellowstone cutthroat trout population in Red Rock Creek has significantly increased in abundance following a planned management suppression to assess their effect on Arctic grayling and can support increased harvest similar to the standard Central District regulation (3 fish daily and in possession). A length limit is not included because 1) fast growth rates result in few accessible cutthroat trout under 18" during the periods and locations anglers can fish and 2) larger fish likely have greater impact on the grayling population. Although the standard Central District regulations presently allow harvest of one cutthroat trout, that regulation was enacted for conservation purposes that do not apply to the non-native, hybridized cutthroat trout in Red Rock Creek.

Region 3 Enforcement have not observed much harvest by trout anglers on Red Rock Creek when contacting anglers, so the proposed change is not expected to have a biological effect on the cutthroat population. Therefore, we want to increase the opportunity for a small number of anglers to harvest two more fish during their trips to the Centennial Valley.

Montana FWP, The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and other partners have worked collaboratively to develop an adaptive management plan to understand factors that drive the status of Arctic Grayling in the Centennial Valley. In 2013, harvest limits of hybridized Yellowstone Cutthroat trout were liberalized and active trapping and removal by the USFWS occurred to suppress the population to determine the effect that the non-native fish were having on Arctic Grayling. After four years of suppression, it became apparent that the non-native cutthroat hybrids were not the primary driver of Arctic Grayling abundance; therefore, in 2017, FWP changed the harvest regulation to the Central District limit of 5 fish of any size, and began to evaluate other factors in the valley that may be influencing the conservation status of Arctic Grayling. However, in 2018 the USFWS approached FWP and requested to reduce the harvest regulation for non-native Yellowstone cutthroat trout until the population increases warrant and support additional harvest to benefit grayling. In 2025, the cutthroat trout population had increased 598% from 2017 abundances and the USFWS is supportive of increasing the limit to 3 cutthroat trout of any size.

Overwinter habitat in Upper Red Rock Lake, not non-native fish, is the primary population driver for Centennial Valley Arctic grayling. However, other management actions that benefit grayling (maximizing quality of and access to spawning habitat, genetic infusion to improve variation, riparian and flow improvements on private lands, angling closures at vulnerable periods and locations) are being

implemented until a solution can be developed and constructed to improve overwinter conditions. The proposed regulation change is consistent with FWP's management approach for Centennial Valley Arctic grayling.

Regulation Type (clarification, enforcement, conservation, relevancy, management plan, other):

Conservation: to provide conservation of a native Arctic grayling population.

Statewide Management Plan (how is the regulation proposal supported by the Management Plan):

Conservation of the Centennial Valley Arctic grayling population through Adaptive Management and by improving habitat conditions in Upper Red Lake is listed as a priority in the Statewide Management Plan.

Public Engagement (summary of any public scoping or outreach that has been completed as it relates to this change. Includes public meetings, sporting group meetings, surveys, etc.):

The proposed regulation changes were independently suggested by several anglers and scoped by FWP with the USFWS, who supported the proposed changes.

Interdivisional Review (most likely input from Enforcement, but input from CommEd, Legal, Wildlife may also be appropriate. Multiple divisions will review in Helena via RRAM):

Region 3 Enforcement had no concerns with the proposed regulation change.

Nonbiological Information (is there an organized advocacy for this change, controversy, other information that decision makers should be aware, relevant MCA or ARM to justify this change):

Wilderness Watch has previously sued to prevent overwinter habitat improvements that FWP and the USFWS developed for Upper Red Rock Lake, which occurs in designated wilderness. FWP is working with partners to develop a solution; however, implementation of other conservation actions is being pursued in the interim.

Proposal 39: Thompson Creek Season Length

Page 68 add:

THOMPSON CREEK (Gallatin County)

- *Open third Saturday in May through Sept. 30*

Rationale (biological justification for proposing this change. Include how this change addresses a fisheries management problem):

This regulation is being proposed to seasonally protect rainbow and brown trout in Ben Hart Creek: a tributary to the East Gallatin River that provides high-quality spawning and rearing habitat for salmonids. The regulation is intended to reduce angler-induced stress and mortality on spawning brown and rainbow trout and angler trampling of incubating embryos. Ben Hart Creek is a spring creek that has relatively consistent flows and temperatures throughout the year, making it a popular fishery. Instituting angling closures during the spawning and rearing life-stages of brown and rainbow trout will improve recruitment to the Ben Hart Creek and mainstem East Gallatin River fisheries.

Regulation Type (clarification, enforcement, conservation, relevancy, management plan, other):

Conservation: to provide conservation of sport fish in high-quality spawning and rearing habitats.

Statewide Management Plan (how is the regulation proposal supported by the Management Plan):

This proposal directly follows regulations prescribed in the Statewide Management Plan.

Public Engagement (summary of any public scoping or outreach that has been completed as it relates to this change. Includes public meetings, sporting group meetings, surveys, etc.):

The proposed regulation changes were scoped during meetings with the Region 3 Citizens Advisory Council, Madison Gallatin Trout Unlimited, Fishing Outfitters Association of Montana, Montana Trout Unlimited, Madison River Foundation, and the Madison Conservation District, which encompassed between 100 and 200 individuals and included state legislators and county commissioners.

There was good support for the proposed changes during all the meetings. No changes were suggested during the public scoping process.

Interdivisional Review (most likely input from Enforcement, but input from CommEd, Legal, Wildlife may also be appropriate. Multiple divisions will review in Helena via RRAM):

Region 3 Enforcement had no concerns with the proposed regulation change.

The proposal has had broad Department review.

Nonbiological Information (is there an organized advocacy for this change, controversy, other information that decision makers should be aware, relevant MCA or ARM to justify this change):

Proposal 40: Missouri River - Cow Creek to Beachamp Creek Setlines Limit and Season Length

Waterbody or Fishing District: Eastern District

Proposed change, addition, or deletion (for existing regs, include District Standard or Exception to the District Standard. Indicate new language in *italics*, deleted language with a ~~strickethrough~~):

Page 82 add:

Eastern District Exceptions to Standard Regulations

MISSOURI RIVER

Mouth of Cow Creek downstream to Beachamp Creek and CMR Trail 837

- *Hook and Line/Setlines: Only 3 lines with up to 6 hooks per line from April 15 to June 30.*

Page 81 add:

Add the location of the *Mouth of Cow Creek* to the map of the Missouri River Upstream of Fort Peck

Rationale (biological justification for proposing this change. Include how this change addresses a fisheries management problem):

This change is intended to reduce setline use to alleviate overcrowding issues during the paddlefish snagging season, while also reducing potential impacts to aggregations of native species during spring spawning activities. This section of river receives a large amount of angling pressuring during this time frame. Access can become limited with the current regulation of 6 lines per angler. Several species of concern including sauger and endangered pallid sturgeon are known to form spawning aggregations in this reach during spring. While biological impacts are not currently being observed, the potential for overharvest of sauger exists if lines are deployed at locations with spawning aggregations present. Deep hooking mortality associated with setlines has the potential to lead to wanton waste or over limit violations due to the conservative daily limit of only 2 sauger. Additionally, setline densities are highest in the reach where endangered pallid sturgeon are known to form spawning aggregations. A reduction in the number of lines would help alleviate access/overcrowding concerns while also still allowing set line use during this time frame. Limiting this exception to the area and timeframe where overcrowding and potential biological impacts may occur allows anglers the opportunity to still use 6 lines and 6 hooks at other locations or times of year. Additionally, paddlefish anglers and anglers in this reach still have the opportunity to use set lines during the timeframe, but at a reduced number. Most setline anglers are pursuing channel catfish, and this proposed change retains that opportunity.

Management Plan Reference (drainage, waterbody, language directly from the plan):

Section 2.25 – Judith River Drainage

“Sauger Management: Altered environmental conditions, changing abiotic conditions, changing prey availability, presence of walleye and smallmouth bass, and a life history that makes them vulnerable to over exploitation are all factors potentially contributing to the observed declines.”

“Creel Surveys: The 2027 survey will follow the template of previous surveys but will also include questions aimed at answering additional questions related to sauger exploitation and the increasingly popular use of setlines in the Fred Robinson Bridge area in the spring. Additional creel surveys may be conducted to address management questions surrounding angler pressure, access, or biological impacts.”

“Sauger: Maintain populations within historic levels and manage as a recreational fishery with limited harvest”

“Channel Catfish: Maintain populations within historic levels and manage as a recreational fishery”

“Pallid Sturgeon: Maintain and enhance existing population levels to reduce extinction risk.”

Regulation Type (clarification, enforcement, conservation, relevancy, management plan, other):

Relevancy/conservation/crowding

Public Engagement (summary of any public scoping or outreach that has been completed as it relates to this change. Includes public meetings, sporting group meetings, surveys, etc.):

This public scoping effort is the first public outreach on this topic.

Interdivisional Review (most likely input from Enforcement, but input from Com Ed, Legal, Wildlife may also be appropriate. Multiple divisions will review in Helena via RRAM):

Appropriate regional and headquarters staff have reviewed this proposal.

Nonbiological Information (is there an organized advocacy for this change, controversy, other information that decision makers should be aware, relevant MCA or ARM to justify this change):

Some members of the public have asked for changes to this regulation in the past, including during the last regulation cycle. Most are concerned about the lack of access when the area is saturated with setlines.

Proposal 41: Castle Rock Lake Bluegill Harvest Limit

Waterbody or Fishing District: Castle Rock Lake (Eastern)

Proposed change, addition, or deletion (for existing regs, include District Standard or Exception to the District Standard. Indicate new language in *italics*, deleted language with a ~~strikethrough~~):

Page xx add/change/delete:

Page 80 addition:

Castle Rock Lake (Colstrip)

- *Bluegill: 20 daily and in possession May 15-June 15.*

Rationale (biological justification for proposing this change. Include how this change addresses a fisheries management problem):

Since the pandemic, angler use of regional waters including Castle Rock Lake has increased substantially. This includes the number of anglers targeting large-sized adult bluegill concentrated on communal spawning beds. Continued increases in angler pressure and focus on harvesting bluegill during the spawning period could easily impact spawning success, abundances of bluegill in the future, and reduce the ability to catch a quality-sized bluegill due to cropping off the largest adult bluegill from the fishery while they are concentrated. A conservative harvest limit of adult bluegill during the short spawning period is a strategy to maintain the popular pan fishery, maintain a percentage of quality-sized fish, and ensure an abundant forage base (bluegill) for other predatory fish species at Castle Rock Lake.

Management Plan Reference (drainage, waterbody, language directly from the plan):

Limiting bluegill harvest at Castle Rock Lake during the bluegill spawning period (May 15-June 15) has been added to the concurrent process of updating the Statewide Management Plan for the 2027-2030 period. The timeline for updating the plan is March – December 2026.

Regulation Type (clarification, enforcement, conservation, relevancy, management plan, other):

Conservation – maintain a fishery with high-quality sized fish and reduce negative impacts to spawning success.

Public Engagement (summary of any public scoping or outreach that has been completed as it relates to this change. Includes public meetings, sporting group meetings, surveys, etc.):

Pending – one public scoping meeting at the regional FWP office in Miles City in April and attend a spring Walleye Unlimited meeting in Miles City, Glendive, and Sidney.

Interdivisional Review (most likely input from Enforcement, but input from Com Ed, Legal, Wildlife may also be appropriate. Multiple divisions will review in Helena via RRAM):

Pending.

Nonbiological Information (is there an organized advocacy for this change, controversy, other information that decision makers should be aware, relevant MCA or ARM to justify this change):

In recent years, hearing complaints from anglers observing large numbers of bluegill being harvested during the bluegill spawning period when large adults concentrate on communal spawning beds.