



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

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Meeting Date: April 1, 2021

Agenda Item: Upper Missouri River Reservoirs 2021 Regulation Changes

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 30 Minutes

Background: The Upper Missouri River Reservoir Fisheries Management Plan guides fisheries management in Canyon Ferry, Hauser, and Holter Reservoirs and Missouri River sections from Toston to Canyon Ferry and from Hauser Dam to upper Holter Reservoir. The plan outlines fisheries management goals and objectives and provides strategies when species do not fall within goal ranges.

Monitoring surveys in 2020 found that walleye abundance in Canyon Ferry was slightly below management goals and size criteria were below management goals, and in Hauser walleye abundance was within goal range while size criteria fell below goal. To maintain walleye abundance near current levels in both reservoirs while improving size structure, the department is proposing to change the bag limit to 10 fish daily, only 1 fish over 15 inches, possession is twice the daily limit.

In the river section from Toston to Canyon Ferry monitoring has shown walleye abundance decline, but size structure is comprised primarily of older fish. The department is proposing reducing the bag limit to maintain walleye as a supplementary component to the fishery, but looking at other alternatives for size restrictions, as highly restrictive length limits are not warranted due to predominately older fish in the section.

Public Involvement Process & Results: The management plan was developed through a rigorous public process and was approved by the commission in December 2019. Current fisheries trends in the reservoirs and river sections were presented and discussed with a commission appointed citizen advisory committee in December 2020. Management alternatives for Canyon Ferry and Hauser were thoroughly discussed with the CAC and the reservoir proposals presented by the department were fully endorsed by the CAC. All management options for the Toston to Canyon Ferry section were not discussed with the CAC. The department took public comment via email and FWP website on the proposed changes from February 23 to March 15. The department received 152 comments for the proposed reservoir changes and 128 comments on three alternatives for the river section. Most commenters supported the proposed changes in Canyon Ferry and Hauser (78.9%), and most supported a river walleye regulation that would match Canyon Ferry (Alternative 2, 70.3%).

Alternatives and Analysis: The department recommends approving the proposed regulations for Canyon Ferry and Hauser walleye: 10 fish daily, only 1 fish over 15 inches, possession is twice the daily limit. Despite strong public support to have walleye regulation in the river match Canyon Ferry, the department recommends 10 fish daily, only 1 fish over 20 inches, possession is twice the daily limit, for Toston to Canyon Ferry. After completion of a creel survey in 2021 the department could reevaluate regulations in the river when angler use and harvest is better understood. The commission can: approve all or a portion of the regulations as presented; not approve the presented changes and the current regulations would remain in place, or; modify a portion or all of the regulations presented.

Proposed Motion: I move the commission approve walleye regulation changes for Canyon Ferry and Hauser Reservoirs and the Missouri River from Toston to Canyon Ferry.