



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

Meeting Date: June 24, 2021

Agenda Item: Buffalo Creek Fishing Regulation Change, Region 5

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 minutes

Background:

Buffalo Creek originates in the Beartooth Mountains and flows south into Yellowstone National Park to its confluence with Slough Creek, a tributary to the Lamar River. Buffalo Creek has been identified as the main source of non-native Rainbow Trout threatening native Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout in the Lamar River drainage. Rainbow Trout hybridize with Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout, resulting in the loss of genetic purity of Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout. Removing Rainbow Trout in Buffalo Creek would help protect Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout in their native range. The public has requested the ability to harvest as many fish in Buffalo Creek before FWP removal efforts occur. FWP proposes to lift all harvest regulations and add a mandatory harvest on Rainbow Trout in Buffalo Creek and its tributaries. Yellowstone National Park currently has a mandatory kill regulation on Rainbow Trout in the Lamar River drainage, including Buffalo Creek.

Public Involvement Process & Results:

On March 18 FWP released a draft EA for a fish removal project in Buffalo Creek to remove non-native Rainbow Trout and establish Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout in the drainage. The project would remove the source of Rainbow Trout threatening to hybridize with native Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout in the Lamar River drainage. Through public comment on the draft EA, the public identified interest in lifting the harvest regulations of fish in Buffalo Creek to allow angling and harvest opportunity before FWP removal efforts occur.

Alternatives & Analysis:

The commission could: 1) lift current harvest regulations for Rainbow Trout and implement a mandatory harvest regulation of all Rainbow Trout in Buffalo Creek and its tributaries; 2) lift current harvest regulations in Buffalo Creek and its tributaries; 3) not lift harvest regulations on Buffalo Creek and keep current limits in place; or, 4) adopt another regulation not presented here. Lifting harvest regulations and implementing mandatory harvest would match regulations currently in place in Yellowstone National Park and could reduce confusion by the angling public. Any regulation changes adopted now will be reevaluated following the proposed fish removal project in Buffalo Creek (if the fish removal project is endorsed by the commission).

Proposed Motion:

I move to approve lifting fish harvest regulations and implement a mandatory harvest regulation of Rainbow Trout in Buffalo Creek and its tributaries.

OR

I move to approve lifting fisheries harvest regulations in Buffalo Creek and its tributaries.