



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

Meeting Date: June 24, 2021

Agenda Item: 2021 Fish Removal Projects

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 minutes

Background: Fish removals are a common fisheries management tool to reduce competition between species, remove undesirable or invasive species, protect species with elevated conservation risk, or to improve the quality of a sport fishery. Most removal projects conducted by FWP aspire to improve fishing opportunity by reintroducing species better suited for available habitats or by reducing competition with other species. Fish removal projects have been typically developed and reviewed within FWP Administrative Regions with public input provided through MEPA and/or NEPA process. In order to ensure the department is authorized to conduct fish removal projects, the department will seek approval through the commission for removal of fish in restoration projects. Of the planned current 22 fish removal projects, 8 have been specifically approved through previous commission action, and 14 are still seeking commission approval. One project has been approved for planning purposes by the Director, but still need commission approval prior to starting the project.

Public Involvement Process & Results: At a work session on May 18, the commission heard how fish removals are used for fisheries management, tool available for removals, department and commission authority to conduct removals, and a list of removal projects proposed for 2021. Following the work session, the department accepted public comment on the 22 fish removal projects proposed for this year. From May 19 to June 3, the department received 209 comments. Generally, 172 comments were in support of completing a portion or all of the projects while 37 were opposed or raised additional concerns. Six comments were provided after the open comment period. All submitted comments, including late submissions, have been provided to the commission.

Alternatives and Analysis: The commission could choose to approve all or a portion of the proposed projects or choose to not approve the projects. Eight of the proposed projects have already been acted on by the commission through the Future Fisheries Improvement Program. The remaining 16 projects have not been considered by the commission prior to the May 18 work session. Of the 22 projects, 12 have completed EA's with Decision Notices while 10 have draft EA's or EA's pending. If the commission approves the projects, the department will continue proposed fish removal work, with some on the ground work beginning early July. If projects are not approved the department will have to reevaluate all fish removal projects and determine how not proceeding jeopardizes commitments and partnerships.

Proposed Motion: I move the commission approve the fish removal projects proposed for 2021.