



# MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

**Meeting Date:** February 22, 2023

**Agenda Item:** Paddlefish regulation proposed change for Intake Bypass Channel

**Action Needed:** Final

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 5 minutes

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**Background:** The Intake Fish Bypass Channel, at Intake Diversion Dam on the Yellowstone River, was completed in April 2022. Objectives for the project are to improve upstream and downstream fish passage for pallid sturgeon and other native species, including paddlefish, while maintaining water diversions into the Lower Yellowstone Project Main Canal. Snagging for paddlefish is very popular in the lower Yellowstone and can lead to high concentrations of anglers targeting paddlefish during spawning migrations. Since it is not yet fully understood how the fish bypass channel will influence fish movements and angler behavior, the department proposes closing the bypass channel to snagging to avoid bycatch of migrating pallid sturgeon and other native species. Closing the bypass to snagging could also reduce potential conflicts between paddlefish anglers and FWP monitoring crews. The bypass channel will remain open for passage by boats and for angling by other methods.

**Public Involvement Process & Results:** The proposed regulation change was scoped extensively in 2022. No negative public input was received.

**Alternatives & Analysis:**

**Alternative A)** The commission could close the bypass channel to snagging to avoid bycatch of pallid sturgeon and other migrating fish and to reduce potential conflicts between anglers and monitoring crews.

**Alternative B)** The commission may choose to not support the regulation change which would leave the Intake Fish Bypass Channel open for snagging with a high potential of snagging non-target fish, including the endangered pallid sturgeon.

**Agency Recommendation & Rationale:** The department recommendation is to adopt the regulation change as proposed to protect the endangered pallid sturgeon, other native fish species, and to minimize conflicts between anglers and survey crews working in the channel.

**Proposed Motion:** I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission prohibit snagging of paddlefish within the Intake fish bypass channel as proposed by the department.