



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

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Meeting Date: February 22, 2023

Agenda Item: Upper Missouri River Reservoirs 2022 Regulation Changes

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 minutes

Background: The Upper Missouri River Reservoir Fisheries Management Plan (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 recommended management actions when species-specific abundance or size structure goals are not achieved. Monitoring surveys in 2021 and 2022 found that yellow perch abundance in Holter Reservoir was well above management goals. For yellow perch management, the plan recommends more liberal fishing regulations when abundance increases above goal range. To maximize yellow perch fishing opportunity while minimizing the impact to the population, the department is proposing to change the Holter Reservoir harvest regulation for yellow perch from 25 daily and in possession to 25 daily and 50 in possession.

In the river section from Toston to Canyon Ferry, monitoring has shown stable walleye abundance, but size structure is comprised primarily of large fish. In the river section, the department proposes to modify the current regulation of 10 daily, only one over 15 inches, to the Central Fishing District standard regulation of five walleye per day, 10 in possession. The current regulation, which only allows harvest of one fish over 15 inches, is unnecessarily restrictive and there is no biological reason to restrict walleye harvest to this extent. In addition, the standard walleye limit for the Central Fishing District has the advantage of being simple and easy to implement.

Public Involvement Process & Results: The plan was developed through a rigorous public process and was approved by the commission in December 2019. Current fisheries trends and the proposed regulation changes were presented and discussed with a commission-appointed citizen advisory committee (CAC) in December. The CAC generally agreed with the proposed regulation for perch on Holter, with one member preferring a higher bag limit. Three of the five CAC members disagreed with the proposed change for the river from Toston to Canyon Ferry, preferring a regulation that matches regulations in place for the reservoir.

Alternatives & Analysis: A) The commission could adopt both regulation changes as proposed; B) The commission could modify either proposal, which could be contrary to recommendations outlined in the management plan; C) The commission could not adopt one or both proposed changes, which would be contrary to recommendations outlined in the management plan. Both proposed changes are based on recommendations from the management plan and are intended to provide additional fishing opportunity while using sound fisheries science to ensure sustainability of the resource.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: The department recommends adopting the Holter Reservoir yellow perch regulation of 25 daily and 50 in possession and adopting the Central Fishing District standard for walleye from Toston Dam downstream to the Highway 287 bridge north of Townsend.

Proposed Motion: I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission adopt the fishing regulations: for Holter Reservoir, for yellow perch: 25 daily and 50 in possession, and from Toston Dam downstream to the Highway 287 bridge north of Townsend, for walleye: the Central Fishing District standard.