



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION FWP PROPOSAL & INFORMATION SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

Meeting Date: June 12, 2026

Agenda Item: East Fork Bull River Non-Native and Hybrid Trout Suppression

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 min

Background: FWP proposes to suppress non-native and hybrid trout in the East Fork Bull River to address increasing hybridization and competition affecting native bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout. Within the Lower Clark Fork River (LCFR), the Bull River drainage is the only remaining open system where non-hybridized westslope cutthroat trout are widespread, and most tributaries are largely or entirely occupied by non-hybridized fish; the Bull River also supports the only remaining migratory (fluvial) westslope cutthroat trout population in the LCFR, while the East Fork Bull River holds the only remaining bull trout population in the Bull River drainage and is one of just three Montana LCFR tributaries that still contain meaningful numbers of adfluvial bull trout.

Recent work has documented increasing non-native brown, brook, and rainbow trout, along with westslope × rainbow and bull trout × brook trout hybrids, in the lower East Fork Bull River, elevating risks to these remaining native strongholds. From 2007-2009, FWP and partners conducted non-native suppression in the lower East Fork Bull River that removed roughly 3,500 brown trout and 1,900 brook trout and reduced brown and brook trout densities by about 70 percent relative to pre-suppression levels for at least a decade, demonstrating that targeted suppression can substantially lower non-native abundance. Building on those results, the proposed project would again use backpack electrofishing and existing weir traps operated from July-November, avoiding bull trout spawning, to mechanically remove non-natives and hybrids. Non-native fish 250 mm and larger, will be relocated to community pond (Triangle Pond) when feasible.

Public Involvement Process & Results: An Environmental Assessment was posted on the FWP website on April 1, 2026. The Decision Notice was posted on May 1, 2026, following the conclusion of the public comment period.

Alternatives & Analysis:

A. Approve the proposed East Fork Bull River non-native fish suppression project

This would allow FWP to proceed with suppression of non-native brown, brook, and rainbow trout, and hybrid cutthroat-rainbow trout in the East Fork Bull River using backpack electrofishing and existing weir traps. The action is intended to reduce competition and hybridization affecting native bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout and continue conservation work in one of the most important native trout systems in the LCFR.

B. Do not approve the project

FWP would not conduct non-native fish suppression in the East Fork Bull River. Without action, bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout would likely continue to face increasing hybridization and competition from non-native trout.



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Agency Recommendation & Rationale: FWP recommends approving the proposed East Fork Bull River non-native fish suppression project. The project supports native fish conservation goals by reducing threats posed by non-native trout, helping protect ESA-listed bull trout and conserving westslope cutthroat trout in a drainage that remains especially important for non-hybridized native fish. Prior suppression work in the East Fork Bull River substantially reduced non-native trout abundance for years after treatment, supporting the use of this approach again.

Proposed Motion: I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission approve the East Fork Bull River suppression project.