



FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AMENDMENT

FWP proposal to be amended: Madison River Fishing Regulations

Commissioner: Vice Chair KC Walsh, Region 4

Date Received by Commission Liaison: *Amendment #6- October 8, 2026 @3:19 PM*

Proposed Amendment: I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission adopt the following fishing regulations for the 2027-2028 biennial period:

Yellowstone National Park Boundary to the mouth at the Jefferson River:

- Catch-and-Release for trout.
- Artificial lures only with barbless, single-pointed hooks. No treble hooks or double hooks. Anglers may remove treble or double hooks from the lure and replace them with a single hook, or the shanks may be cut off the other hook points to leave a single hook. Lures with multiple hook attachments may still be used but any treble hook must be replaced with a single barbless hook. Barbs may be pinched down completely with pliers.

Quake Lake outlet to Lyons Bridge and Ennis Bridge to Ennis Lake:

- Closed to fishing from boats/vessels.

Ennis Dam to the mouth at the Jefferson River:

- Northern Pike: no limit.

Requested by FWP: ☐ **YES** ☒ **NO** (check one)

Rationale and Background:

This amendment seeks to both simplify fishing regulations and create less harm to trout in the Madison River. In light of the significant increases in angling pressure on the Madison, the intent of this



amendment is also to improve the quality of the fishing experience by reducing the potential ill effects of repeated catching of trout and to make handling and release of fish easier for all anglers.

This amendment has broad support from the guide, outfitting, and lodge owner community as well as the owners of fishing specialty shops that serve the Madison River. Feedback was provided by members of the public in support of expanding single barbless hook requirements in both the scoping session in Bozeman and in public comments received in response to draft biennial regulations.

The Madison River is one of the two most heavily fished rivers in Montana. In the latest data from 2023, Montana FWP's Angling Pressure Survey estimated that the Madison supported 277,971 total angler days reported. In 2025, there were 15,831 guided angling trips with nearly 30,000 client days reported on the Madison.

In the 2025 surveys completed by Montana FWP's Region 3, significant numbers of the trout in the Madison River displayed "hook scarring" which resulted from catch and release angling.

In the last biennial regulations, the Montana Fish & Wildlife Commission voted to implement barbless single hook regulation for the section between Varney Bridge and Ennis Lake. At this time, the results are inconclusive, however it has only been two years and we do know that trout migrate within the various reaches of the Madison. We may never see a significant difference in hook scarification in a single section of the river. With this amendment we are proposing that Montana treat the entirety of the Madison as a test case for Montana's other popular rivers.

In fact, the Madison River in Yellowstone Park is entirely managed as catch and release with barbless single hook restrictions. The Henry's Fork of the Snake River in Idaho, a river that is often fished by the same anglers who fish the Madison, is also restricted to catch and release with barbless single hooks. Todd Koel, the head of fisheries for Yellowstone, reports that the incidence of hook injuries in the Park section of the Madison is now so low that they no longer survey for it.

In addition, this amendment eliminates the regulation allowing for youth anglers under the age of 14 to take 1 trout daily of any size. There are far better waters in Montana to take kids to keep trout than the heavily fished Madison. The Madison presents a unique opportunity in our state to teach kids about the value of catch & release fishing and conservation ethics.

Importantly, this amendment expands catch & release and barbless single-hook requirements to the Lower Madison reaches, below Ennis Dam to the mouth, where there are currently no special restrictions



on trout fishing. Angling pressure in this lower section as estimated by FWP in 2023 was 71,645 angler days.

This amendment significantly simplifies trout fishing regulations on the Madison River and addresses the dramatic increase in angling pressure that we have seen over the last decade.

Department Response:

FWP continues to monitor the Madison River fishery via standardized and issue-specific surveys to achieve the goals established in the Statewide Fisheries Management Plan. While the fish population has remained stable in recent years, widespread concern about hook scarring in 2023 led to an evaluation of barbless hooks across two sections of the upper Madison.

The current fishing regulations continue to provide ample angling opportunities for a diverse array of styles and harvest preferences. At the same time, they allow for the evaluation of contemporary mitigation strategies (such as catch-and-release and barbless hooks) on high-use waterbodies. Preliminary results from the ongoing barbless hook evaluation match over 50 years of scientific literature, indicating that a barbless regulation has a negligible positive impact on the fishery.

Therefore, this amendment—which broadly applies fishing gear mandates and eliminates harvest opportunities altogether—lacks foundational data from FWP's own ongoing scientific assessments to justify mitigating angling impacts in this manner. Ultimately, FWP supports the current regulations in place, approved by the Commission in 2023, on the Madison River.