



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION FWP PROPOSAL AND INFORMATION SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

Meeting Date: October 15, 2026

Agenda Item: Approval of northern leopard frog transplants from eastern Montana to FWP Regions 1 and 2

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

Background: Northern leopard frogs are a Species of Greatest Conservation Need in Montana's State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP, 2025). While the species is common east of the Continental Divide, populations in western Montana were extirpated in the early 1990s, probably due to the introduction of an aquatic fungus, *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis*, that results in high mortality rates of amphibians. Currently, the only northern leopard frog population west of the Continental Divide in Montana is a reintroduced population on the Flathead Indian Reservation that was transplanted by the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribe in 2023. This effort has resulted in a self-sustaining population in the Little Bitterroot River drainage, demonstrating that an investment in transplanting northern leopard frogs is likely to succeed.

The goal of this transplant program is to reestablish additional self-sustaining populations of northern leopard frogs at multiple sites in FWP Regions 1 and 2. This goal fulfills a priority conservation action for the species in Montana's 2025 SWAP, which is a roadmap for conserving and recovering the state's at-risk species and the guiding document for prioritizing FWP's work to manage Species of Greatest Conservation Need. Furthermore, FWP is mandated to implement programs that "manage wildlife, fish, game and nongame animals in a manner that prevents the need for listing under 87-5-107 or the federal Endangered Species Act, 16 U.S.C. 1531, et seq." § 87-1-201(10)(a)(i), MCA. Proactive conservation, including maintaining or restoring species to their full historic geographic range, is critical to maintaining state management authority and preventing the need for federal listing.

The department has completed an environmental assessment (EA) to transplant northern leopard frogs from healthy breeding populations east of the Continental Divide to multiple sites in Regions 1 and 2, including sites in the Blackfoot and Seeley-Swan Valleys. Transplants would initially take place in spring 2027 and 2028, although supplemental transplants may occur through 2037, depending on recovery success. All transplant sites are located on public land.

Public Involvement Process and Results: The department prepared a checklist EA for recovering northern leopard frogs in western Montana. The EA was published June 5, 2026, with a 15-day comment period. The department received two comments, both in support of the reintroduction plan, with no suggested modifications to the plan. The department published a decision notice on June 23, 2026, announcing our intent to proceed with northern leopard frog recovery, pending approval from the Fish and Wildlife Commission on the transplant activity.

Alternatives and Analysis: The proposed translocations of northern leopard frogs will help recover the species in western Montana, thereby restoring the species to its full historical range and reducing the risk of listing under the federal Endangered Species Act.

Alternative A: The commission may approve the department's recommendation as presented.

Alternative B: The commission may choose to deny the department's request to approve northern leopard frog translocations.

Alternative C: The commission may approve a subset of locations proposed for translocation by the department.

Agency Recommendation and Rationale: Section 87-5-711, MCA, requires commission approval of the transplant of wildlife to new locations. Because translocations provide a public benefit, including the opportunity for the public to observe northern leopard frogs in western Montana and restoration of ecosystem function, the department recommends that the commission vote to approve translocations from healthy populations east of the Continental Divide to translocation sites with suitable habitat west of the Divide.

Proposed Motion: I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission approve the proposed northern leopard frog translocations into FWP Regions 1 and 2 during 2026–2037 as presented by the department.