



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
4600 Giant Springs Road
Great Falls, MT 59405

August 17, 2021

Dear Interested Party:

The enclosed draft Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared for public review regarding a proposal to stock Largemouth Bass to Lake Shel-oole, Shelby, Montana from the FWP Miles City Fish Hatchery. The Largemouth Bass will provide an additional angling opportunity within north-central Montana. In addition to the angling opportunity, the proposed action is intended to create a top-down control to the Yellow Perch population thereby improving the size structure of the existing Yellow Perch fishery.

Additional copies of the draft EA are available at Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks in Great Falls or the draft EA is also available on the FWP website at <http://fwp.mt.gov/news/publicNotices/>. A public review and comment period will be open for 14 days. Written comments will be accepted until 5 pm on August 31, 2021. Comments can be submitted electronically via email to fwpr4publiccom@mt.gov or can be mailed to the address below:

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Lake Shel-oole Largemouth Bass Introduction Comments
4600 Giant Spring Road
Great Falls, MT 59405

Thank you for your interest and involvement.

Sincerely,

Gary Bertellotti
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Region 4 Supervisor
Great Falls, MT 59405
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(406) 454-5840



Draft Environmental Assessment

Lake Shel-oole

Largemouth Bass Fish Introduction



August 17th, 2021

PART 1. PROJECT SUMMARY

Project Title: Lake Shel-oole Largemouth Bass Fish Introduction

Project Location:

Name: Lake Shel-oole

County: Toole

Legal description: T 32N R 2W Sec 15 (48.52609, -111.85301)

Description of Project

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes to introduce Largemouth Bass (*Micropterus salmoides*) to Lake Shel-oole, Shelby, Montana from the FWP Miles City Fish Hatchery. The Largemouth Bass will provide an additional angling opportunity within north-central Montana. In addition to the angling opportunity, the proposed action is intended to create a top-down control to the Yellow Perch population thereby improving the size structure of the existing Yellow Perch (*Perca flavescens*) fishery.

Lake Shel-oole is a 24.1 surface acre reservoir in the Marias River drainage located north of Shelby, Montana. The reservoir is filled by surface water from Sullivan Coulee and was constructed as flood control and for recreation purposes. The City of Shelby holds a water right for Lake Shel-oole. They received a FWP Future Fisheries grant in 2020 for a floating dock to promote angling and access opportunities at Lake Shel-oole.

Lake Shel-oole has been stocked with Rainbow Trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) since 1971. Yellow Perch were first documented in Lake Shel-oole in 1995. Fish stocking was significantly reduced in 1998 and from then on became periodic due to low reservoir water elevations and poor fish survival. Other fish species within Lake Shel-oole include White Suckers (*Catostomus commersonii*).

In 2017, Lake Shel-oole refilled and the Yellow Perch population increased greatly. High levels of reproduction and recruitment for the past 4 years with minimal predation has resulted in an overpopulated, stunted fishery. In 2020 and 2021, majority of Yellow Perch sampled ranged between 6.0-8.0 inches in total length. Most fish are within a "Stock" size and well below what is considered a "Preferred" size (Gabelhouse 1984). The addition of Largemouth Bass would provide a predator in the system and offer a top-down pressure on the Yellow Perch fishery and may help improve the overall size structure while providing an additional angling opportunity.



Figure 2. Map showing location of Lake Shel-oole relative to the Marias River and Tiber Reservoir within Toole County, Montana.

Project Timeline

The proposed action of stocking Largemouth Bass from the FWP Miles City Fish Hatchery would first occur during the fall of 2021. Additional stocking of Largemouth Bass may occur in 2022 and into the future if deemed necessary.

Need and Benefits

The recreational value, specifically, low angler use of Lake She-oole, is attributed to the small, less desirable size of Yellow Perch present in the reservoir. The Largemouth Bass will provide an additional angling opportunity within north-central Montana. In addition to the angling opportunity, the proposed action is intended to create a top-down control to the Yellow Perch population thereby improving the size structure of the existing Yellow Perch fishery.

Relevant Authorities

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks has the authority under state law (§ 87-1-301 Montana Code Annotated (MCA)) to “set the policies for the...propagation of the...fish...of the state for the fulfillment of all other responsibilities of the department related to fish and wildlife as provided by law.”

Furthermore, it is the policy of Montana FWP, under Administrative Rules of Montana (ARM) 12.7.601(4), that “Introduction of fish not indigenous to a particular drainage may be made only after careful study to ensure these fish will be beneficial to that area.” This EA is intended to document careful study of the proposed fish introduction.

Relevant Plans

There are no specific management plans for Lake Shel-oole.

Alternatives to Proposed Action

No Action: The No Action alternative would result in not stocking the proposed species and not providing an additional angling opportunity in north-central Montana. This would also result in the existing Yellow Perch fishery to remain overpopulated and stunted.

Decision to be Made

The decision to be made is whether FWP should move forward with the proposed alternative of stocking Largemouth Bass in Lake Shel-oole via the Miles City Hatchery. Following completion of the Environmental Assessment (EA) and public comment period, the FWP Region 4 Regional Supervisor will issue a decision notice recommending a course of action. This course of action could be the Proposed Alternative, the No Action Alternative, or an action that is within the scope of the analyzed alternatives. This EA and the public comments FWP receives are part of the decision-making process.

Other groups or agencies contacted, or which may have overlapping jurisdiction

Lake Shel-oole is located on City of Shelby property. Lorette Carter, Community Development Coordinator, and Stan Anthony, Mayor of Shelby, have been notified. Comments have been received and will be included in the decision-making process.

PART 2. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

Table 1. Potential impact on physical environment.

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Provided
1. Unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources				X		
2. Terrestrial or aquatic life and/or habitats			X			X
3. Introduction of new species into an area			X		X	X
4. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality				X		
5. Water quality, quantity and distribution (surface or groundwater)				X		
6. Existing water right or reservation				X		
7. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture				X		
8. Air quality or objectionable odors				X		
9. Historical and archaeological sites				X		
10. Demands on environmental resources of land, water, air & energy				X		
11. Aesthetics				X		

Comments

2. No impacts to terrestrial life or habitats would be expected. Potential impacts to other fish populations through competition and/or predation and potential impacts to other aquatic life forms have been considered. Aquatic invertebrates will likely be consumed but no population level impact is expected. It is anticipated that Largemouth Bass will prey upon Yellow Perch and possibly decrease Yellow Perch abundance and improve their size structure. Largemouth Bass may compete with Yellow Perch for similar food sources during similar life stages.

3. The proposed action involves the introduction of a new species, Largemouth Bass, to Lake Shel-oole. Largemouth Bass are not considered native to the Marias River drainage or Montana. They have historically been introduced in numerous ponds within the Teton and Marias River drainages dating back to 1950. Largemouth Bass have been historically stocked in Montana back to 1928.

The new introduction to Lake Shel-oole would be managed under the Central Fishing District regulations. Additionally, if necessary, the introduction could be mitigated and/or removed from the waterbody via angling, netting, and/or chemical treatment. Escapement from Lake Shel-oole is not expected.

Table 2. Potential impacts on human environment.

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Provided
1. Social structures and cultural diversity				X		
2. Changes in existing public benefits provided by wildlife populations and/or habitat			X			X
3. Local and state tax base and tax revenue				X		
4. Agricultural production				X		
5. Human health				X		
6. Quantity and distribution of community and personal income				X		
7. Access to and quality of recreational activities			X			X
8. Locally adopted environmental plans & goals (ordinances)				X		
9. Distribution and density of population and housing				X		
10. Demands for government services				X		
11. Industrial and/or commercial activity				X		

Comments

2. The proposed action would be intended to improve recreational angling conditions, opportunity, and species diversity in Lake Shel-oole for the public's enjoyment. This would be an anticipated benefit of the proposed action.

7. The proposed action would be intended to improve the quality of the recreational fishery at Lake Shel-oole. This would be an anticipated benefit of the proposed action.

Does the proposed action involve potential risks or adverse effects which are uncertain but extremely harmful if they were to occur?

No, the proposed action does not involve uncertain risks or adverse effects that would be extremely harmful.

Does the proposed action have impacts that are individually minor, but cumulatively significant or potentially significant?

No, this environmental review found that cumulatively/potentially significant impacts from the proposed action would not be anticipated.

PART 3. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

This analysis did not reveal any significant impacts to the human or physical environment. The No Action Alternative would result in no impacts to the physical or human environments, however, maintaining the status quo at Lake Shel-oole is not preferable from a fisheries management perspective. The No Action Alternative is not recommended because it does not meet the objectives of improving the recreational fishery at Lake Shel-oole.

It is recommended that the Proposed Alternative, as described in this Environmental Assessment, has the greatest potential of fulfilling the desired objectives while having minimal impacts to the human and physical environments.

PART 4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Describe the level of public involvement for this project if any, and, given the complexity and the seriousness of the environmental issues associated with the proposed action, is the level of public involvement appropriate under the circumstances?

Notice of this draft EA will be distributed to media contacts throughout Region 4 and posted to the FWP website. A copy will be provided to the City of Shelby. Due to the simple nature and minor impacts of the proposed action, the level of public involvement is appropriate for the proposed project.

Duration of comment period, if any:

The draft EA will be open for public comment for a period of 14 days from August 17th, 2021 through August 31st, 2021.

PART 5. EA CONCLUSION

Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required?

No, an EIS is not required.

If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action.

Based on an evaluation of impacts to the physical and human environment stemming from the proposed action, this assessment revealed no significant negative impacts from the proposed action. Therefore, an EIS is not necessary and an environmental assessment is the appropriate level of analysis.

Name, title, address and phone number of the person(s) responsible for preparing the EA:

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Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks
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(406) 466-5621 kvivian@mt.gov

List of agencies consulted during preparation of the EA:

Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks

Date Completed

August 17th, 2021