



1400 South 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Bozeman, MT 59718

May 25, 2022

Dear Interested Person:

The enclosed Decision Notice has been prepared for the continuation of the Middle Madison Trumpeter Swan Reintroduction Project for an additional five years 2022-2026. A total of 5 e-mail comments were received during the 28-day comment period ending May 19, 2022. All were in support of the proposed action. No comments were received in opposition to the proposed action.

This Decision Notice and EA are available for review and may be viewed on FWP's Internet website:  
<http://www.fwp.mt.gov>.

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks has decided to proceed with the proposed project, with no changes to the Draft EA. Thank you for your interest.

Sincerely,

Marina Yoshioka  
Region 3 Supervisor

Attachments (2):  
Decision Notice  
Email comments





**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT DECISION NOTICE**  
for the  
**MIDDLE MADISON VALLEY TRUMPETER SWAN REINTRODUCTION**  
**PROJECT RENEWAL 2022-2026**

**Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks**  
**Region 3 - Bozeman**  
**May 25, 2022**

**Preface**

In 2005, Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) developed a Comprehensive Fish and Wildlife Conservation Strategy (CFWCS; 2005) that has been used to direct conservation efforts and direct attention to specific geographic areas or species that are in greatest need of conservation. This was followed by the 2015 State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP). This Plan identifies southwest Montana's Intermountain Basins and Valleys as a geographic focus area and identifies Trumpeter Swans (*Cygnus buccinator*) as a Tier 1 species. Conservation concerns for trumpeter swans include isolated breeding flocks, wetland loss and functional degradation, lack of information of current distribution and breeding effort/success, and vulnerability to power line collisions. FWP has worked extensively in this area to address these conservation concerns. In addition, extensive habitat protection and restoration work has been conducted in the Middle Madison valley which has resulted in nationally recognized wetland projects which are now providing quality wetland habitat and offer the immediate potential to increase swan production in the region and enhance connectivity between flocks.

Trumpeter swans historically nested in western Montana Valleys but were extirpated from all areas during European settlement. Trumpeter swans for reintroduction into the Tri-State area (Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming) are made available through a cooperative program with the Pacific Flyway Council, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Wyoming Wetland Society, and FWP. FWP is one of three state conservation agencies committed to implementing the Trumpeter Swan Implementation Plan developed by the Pacific Flyway Council and implementing the strategies in the Pacific Flyway Council Management Plan for Rocky Mountain Trumpeter Swans. Its aim is to address the slow growth in the number of trumpeter swans breeding in southeast Idaho, western Montana, and northwest Wyoming. The Madison flock's restoration would contribute to that overall goal.

Initial restoration work began in 2012, and ten years of releases have already taken place. This work proposes a 5-year extension to the established project. Nesting success in similar projects within the State of Montana (restoration work in the Blackfoot and Flathead valleys) have shown



that nesting initiates in 6-8 years, but the Madison project has released less birds than the other Montana projects and has released cygnets rather than yearlings. Trumpeter swans do not reach breeding age until about 4-5 years of age, so it has taken numerous years for breeding to start. We believe the additional five years of releases will help to promote additional nesting.

To date we have seen productivity in the valley. With survival of released birds, and we are confident that released birds act as decoys to the wetlands and speed up natural nesting efforts. The project has been welcomed with huge community support and involves state, federal, and private businesses all working together with non-government agencies and landowners throughout the Madison valley. An indirect benefit of the project is monitoring of powerline strike birds and working with Northwestern Energy to mark powerlines to minimize bird mortality in the valley.

We will continue to release birds at the O'Dell Creek Headwaters wetlands south of Ennis, Madison County, Montana, between Quake and Ennis Lakes. O'Dell Creek Headwaters is an 10,000-plus acre area with extensive wetlands, spring creeks, streams, and riparian areas on the east side of the Madison River. The proposed release site is currently under perpetual protection by a conservation easement. The O'Dell Creek Headwaters has undergone habitat suitability evaluations by MT Natural Heritage Program ecologists, Department of Environmental Quality, as well as biologists from the University of Montana Avian Science Center. Results of these surveys show large increases in breeding waterfowl in the O'Dell Creek Headwaters since restoration began. Private botanists are also monitoring the site for swan forage availability and abundance.

In summary, the continuation of the proposed Madison valley trumpeter swan restoration project, and the potential to continue to release captive-reared birds to establish a breeding flock in the Madison, will allow MFWP to implement the SWAP and also would allow FWP to implement the 2002 Pacific Flyway Council's Rocky Mountain Population Trumpeter Swan Implementation Plan that address conservation concerns for this iconic wetland species and includes a goal to increase the number of breeding pairs of trumpeter swans in suitable habitats. Releases of trumpeter swans in the Madison valley are expected to result in more trumpeters pioneering wetlands throughout the Madison valley where suitable nesting areas are available. Ultimately, these releases are expected to result in establishment of a small breeding flock in the Madison valley. The proposed project would also Implement the Pacific Flyway Rocky Mountain Population Trumpeter Swan Management Plan (2017) which has a desired objective of five nesting pairs in the Middle Madison valley.

Overall, the Rocky Mountain Population of trumpeter swans is doing well. From the last North American Trumpeter swan survey in 2015 the population was about 11,700 white birds, but approximately 11,000 of those birds are Canadian breeding flock. The US segment, particularly the tri state (GYE) area, is not growing and has shown decline in some years. The goal of this work is to augment the US breeding segment, tri-state population, and hopefully develop connectivity with other Pacific Flyway endorsed projects and connect to the larger robust Canadian breeding flock.

The project was brought before the Commission as per MCA 875-11(1).

## **Proposed Action**

FWP has been releasing trumpeter swans as part of a Commission approved project since 2012, and we propose to continue restoration efforts for another 5-year time frame, 2022-2026, with the goal of establishing a breeding flock of five established nesting pairs in the Middle Madison valley of southwest Montana. FWP aims to increase swan production in the region and to enhance connectivity between flocks within the Tri-state region of Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming and eventually with the robust Canadian breeding population. FWP will obtain trumpeter swans of Pacific Flyway endorsed genetics (Rocky Mountain Population) for release from the Wyoming Wetlands Society facility in Jackson, Wyoming. The reintroduction of captive-reared trumpeter swans into suitable nesting areas is a proven management tool in use in other parts of Montana and neighboring states. Releases are proposed to continue until five breeding pairs are established in the Madison or until monitoring of the program indicates that the project should be discontinued.

## **Public Process and Comments**

FWP is required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) to assess potential impacts of a proposed action to the human and physical environment. In compliance with MEPA, an Environmental Assessment (EA) was completed for the proposed renewal of the project by FWP and released for public comment on April 22, 2022.

Public comments on the proposed action were taken for 28 days through May 19, 2022. Legal notices were printed in Bozeman Daily Chronical and the Helena Independent Record. The Draft EA was also posted on the FWP webpage: <https://fwp.mt.gov/public-notices/news/2022/apr/0422-trumpeter-swan-renewal-ea>.

A total of 5 e-mail comments were received. All were in support of the proposed action. No comments were received in opposition to the proposed action.

*Summary - Public comment received to date regarding the proposed action is that residents and landowners are looking forward to the return of nesting trumpeters to the Madison Valley. All comments expressed support to restore trumpeter swans to their historic native range and applauded FWP with the success of this project so far and its community involvement. Comments expressed support for extending the restoration work to ensure successful. Comments came from landowners, interested birders, and conservationists throughout the state.*

FWP response: The Department concurs with this statement and believes that while trumpeter swans winter in small numbers in the area, there are only a small number of breeding trumpeter swans in Montana's Madison Valley in recent years. The intention of this restoration effort is that this breeding flock be migratory, leaving the Madison Valley in winter.

### **Final Environmental Assessment**

There are no modifications necessary to the Environmental Assessment based on public comment. The Environmental Assessment, together with this Decision Notice, will serve as the final document for this proposal.

### **Decision**

Based on the Environmental Assessment, public comment, and the need to meet the terms of MCA 87-5-711(1) for Commission approval of wildlife transplants in Montana, it is my decision to approve the proposed action to extend the time frame for implementation of the Madison Valley Trumpeter Swan Reintroduction project for another five years 2022-2026

I find there to be no significant impacts on the human and physical environments associated with this project. Therefore, I conclude that the Environmental Assessment is the appropriate level of analysis, and that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.



Marina Yoshioka  
Region 3 Supervisor  
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Attachments (2):  
Cover letter  
Email comments