



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Region 4
4600 Giant Springs Rd.
Great Falls, Montana 59405

March 22, 2022

Dear Interested Party:

Thank you for your input and feedback on the environmental assessment (EA) regarding the proposal to mechanically remove nonnative Yellowstone cutthroat trout from Big Camas Creek near White Sulphur Springs, MT. Removal of nonnative Yellowstone cutthroat trout from Big Camas Creek would benefit the native westslope cutthroat trout population by reducing the threat of competition and hybridization. Presently, Yellowstone cutthroat trout are found at low densities within the project area.

Enclosed is a decision notice document in which Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) explains its rationale for proceeding with the proposed action and response to public comment received during the public comment period.

Please feel free to contact Alex Poole, Native Fish Biologist, 406-454-5848 or email alex.poole@mt.gov with any questions. Thank you for your interest and participation.

Sincerely,

Gary Bertellotti
Regional Supervisor
FWP Region 4



Environmental Assessment Decision Notice for the Mechanical Removal of Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout from Big Camas Creek

Proposed Action

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes to mechanically remove Yellowstone cutthroat trout by trap net and backpack electrofishing Big Camas Creek above Camas Lake during the spring spawning season. This mechanical suppression effort will reduce the threat of competition and reduce the number of Yellowstone cutthroat trout that can hybridize with the native westslope cutthroat trout. The proposed timeline for the action of this mechanical removal project would be 2022-2025. Subsequent years would include continued supplemental stocking of westslope cutthroat trout. Ultimately the long-term goal of this project is to maintain a conservation population with a >90% westslope cutthroat trout genetic contribution.

Montana Environmental Policy Act

FWP is required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) to assess potential impacts of its proposed actions to the human and physical environments. An Environmental Assessment was prepared by FWP for the proposed project and released in February 2022 for public comment. The EA was titled "Conservation of Native Westslope Cutthroat Trout in Camas Lake and Big Camas Creek by Mechanical Removal of Nonnative Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout". The EA was distributed to media contacts throughout Region 4 and posted to the FWP website. The EA evaluated the potential impacts of the following alternatives in addition to the proposed action.

Alternative A: No Action Alternative

The no action alternative would allow status quo management to continue which would allow the Yellowstone cutthroat trout population to compete and hybridize with westslope cutthroat trout in Camas Lake and upper Big Camas Creek. With continued stocking of hatchery westslope cutthroat trout it is conceivable that the long-term genetic goals of the project could still be achieved, although on a much longer time scale. Alternatively, there is potential that the long-term genetic goals are not met, and the resulting population becomes a hybrid swarm of varying levels of Yellowstone and westslope cutthroat trout genetic contribution. The selection of this alternative would not reduce threats to the species that encourage requests for listing westslope cutthroat trout under the Endangered Species Act.

**Alternative B: Removal of nonnative Yellowstone cutthroat trout from Big Camas Creek with rotenone.**

This alternative would meet the project goals by removing all fish from the project area using the piscicide rotenone. However, verbal commitments were made to Meagher County residents in 2014 that additional rotenone treatments would not be pursued on this waterbody. Rotenone projects typically require multiple treatments (one per year) to achieve complete removal of the target organism. This alternative would cause a temporary loss of angling opportunity in Camas Lake and upper Big Camas Creek between the time of fish removal and repopulation (approximately 3 years). Because of the verbal commitments made during the initial project scoping and the potentially significant recreational impact of additional rotenone treatments in Camas Lake/Big Camas Creek this alternative was eliminated from further consideration.

Summary of Public Comment and FWP Response

There was one comment submitted during the open comment period for this project. Comment summaries and the Department's response are as follows:

Comment Summary 1

Support for the mechanical removal of Yellowstone cutthroat trout from Big Camas Creek.

Response: Thank you for your comments.

Decision

Based on the Environmental Assessment, public comment, and FWP evaluation, it is my decision to proceed with the mechanical removal of nonnative Yellowstone cutthroat trout from Big Camas Creek near White Sulphur Springs, MT to benefit the native westslope cutthroat trout population.

I find there to be no significant impacts to 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.

Gary Bertellotti
Regional Supervisor
FWP Region 4

