



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

February 22, 2022

Dear Interested Party:

Thank you for your input and feedback on the environmental assessment (EA) regarding the proposal to construct a concrete fish barrier in Carpenter Creek near Neihart, MT. The goal of the proposed action is to protect a nonhybridized westslope cutthroat trout population from competition and hybridization by preventing the upstream movement of nonnative trout.

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 Carpenter Creek Fish Barrier Construction

Proposed Action

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes to construct a cast-in-place concrete fish barrier in Carpenter Creek near Neihart, MT. This fish barrier will protect the upper nine miles of fish habitat in Carpenter Creek and its tributaries from nonnative trout invasion. As water quality improves in the drainage following mine clean-up activities, it is expected the nonhybridized westslope cutthroat trout population in the drainage will expand and eventually meet the “secured” criteria identified in the Conservation Goals for westslope cutthroat trout in the Montana Statewide Fisheries Management Plan.

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 January 2022 for public comment. The EA was titled "Conservation of Native Westslope Cutthroat Trout in Carpenter Creek by Construction of a Concrete Fish Barrier". 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 alternative in addition to the proposed action.

Alternative A: No Action Alternative

The no action alternative would be to not construct a fish barrier. As mine clean-up activities continue and water quality improves, nonnative species in Belt Creek would eventually move up Carpenter Creek and compete, displace, and hybridize with the currently nonhybridized westslope cutthroat trout population. The establishment of nonnative trout in Carpenter Creek would eventually lead to the extirpation of this unprotected population of native westslope cutthroat trout. As a result, the objectives of the project would not be met.



Summary of Public Comment and FWP Response

There were six comments submitted during the open comment period for this project. All comments were made via email; 5 were supportive and 1 was neither in support or opposition of the proposed action. Among the comments within the scope of the EA was concern for the fish barrier to withstand high flow events, particularly spring runoff. Comment summaries and the Department's response are as follows:

Comment Summary 1

Support for the construction of a concrete fish barrier in Carpenter Creek.

Response: Thank you for your comments.

Comment Summary 2

Concern for the ability of the constructed fish barrier to withstand high flow events.

Response: The design of the Carpenter Creek fish barrier was completed by Pioneer Technical Services, Inc. who have designed multiple fish barriers within the region and across Montana. The barrier will be built to exclude fish up to the 50-year recurrence interval flow (296 cfs) and remain structurally stable up to a 100-year recurrence interval flow (356 cfs). Several constructed fish barriers are currently in place within the Belt Creek drainage, including the Dry Fork Belt Creek fish barrier whose upstream watershed is 6.5 times larger than that of the proposed Carpenter Creek barrier site. To date, no structural or performance issues have arisen with the constructed fish barriers in the Belt Creek drainage.

Decision

Based on the Environmental Assessment, public comment, and FWP evaluation, it is my decision to proceed with constructing a cast-in-place concrete fish barrier in Carpenter Creek near Neihart, MT that will act to protect the upper nine miles of fish habitat from nonnative trout invasion.

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