MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW OF FISH INTRODUCTION

Description of water body:

Name: East Fork Reservoir
County: Hill
Legal description: T28N, R16E, S22

Name of the drainage where the pond would be located:

East Fork Reservoir is located near the headwaters of Beaver Creek (Hill County), a tributary to the Milk River.

Fish species proposed for introduction:

Smallmouth bass, the introduced bass would be captured from existing populations located in downstream reservoirs and transferred to East Fork Reservoir.

Is this species legally present in the drainage?

Smallmouth bass were legally stocked during the 1990's into two reservoirs located downstream of East Fork Reservoir, Beaver Creek Reservoir and Bearpaw Lake. Currently, self-sustaining populations of smallmouth bass remain in each reservoir.

Species of Special Concern present in the drainage and associated risks:

Sauger, Iowa Darter and Northern Redbelly Dace are known species of special concern present in the drainage, with their presence limited to lower sections of Beaver Creek near the confluence with the Milk River. Associated risks to species of special concern are considered minimal. The proposed species is present throughout the Milk River drainage below Fresno Dam and the proposed introduction would not result in cumulative impacts or be considered a new introduction.

RISKS:

Potential for impacts on genetic structure of existing fish populations:

___X__ None _____ Minor _____ Major

Comments: The potential genetic impacts to downstream fish populations of the listed species is considered negligible. The introduced smallmouth bass would come from

existing downstream populations and the genetic structure of the population would remain the same.

Impacts to any life stage of existing fish populations due to competition and/or predation?

_____ None __X___ Minor _____ Major

Comments: The proposed species will utilize white sucker as a primary forage fish. The white sucker population in East Fork is over-populated and smallmouth bass will act as a biological control of white suckers as well as provide additional angling opportunities.

Impacts to other forms of aquatic life that may be caused by this introduction?

_____ None __X__ Minor _____ Major

Comments: Aquatic invertebrates would be consumed by young smallmouth bass and some low-level competition with the existing trout population may occur. This would be mitigated with reduced adult white sucker densities.

Potential for the proposed new species to reproduce in this location:

_____ None _____ Minor __X___ Major

Comments: It would be anticipated that smallmouth bass could successfully reproduce at the proposed location as smallmouth bass are able to naturally reproduce at the two reservoirs located downstream.

If necessary, would it be feasible to remove this species after it has been stocked?

Yes, the proposed species could be removed via chemical treatment.

Would this introduction result in impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable?

No.

Describe reasonable and prudent alternatives to this action, if any (including no action).

Alternative 1 – No Action: The No Action alternative would result in not stocking the proposed species and not providing additional recreational angling opportunity in Northcentral Montana.

Describe and evaluate mitigation, stipulations, or other control measures enforceable by the agency, if any:

The reservoir is located on the Rocky Boy Indian Reservation and managed by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. The proposed species would be managed according to the fishing regulations set forth by the Chippewa Cree Tribe.

List any other agencies or individuals that may be affected by the proposed introduction:

Chippewa Cree Tribe and United States Fish and Wildlife Service

List all agencies and individuals who have been notified of this proposed introduction:

Chippewa Cree Tribe and United States Fish and Wildlife Service

Based on this evaluation, is an EIS required? YES/NO? If no, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for the proposed action.

No EIS required. Action is expected to be minor.

Describe the level of public involvement and, given the complexity of the proposed action, is the level of public involvement appropriate?

To date, there has been no public involvement. To ensure adequate public involvement opportunity, this draft EA will be posted on the FWP website and copies will be made available at the FWP Havre Area Resource Office. A notice of the proposed action and EA will be advertised in the *Havre Daily News*.

Given the simple nature and minor impacts of the proposed action, the level of public involvement is deemed appropriate.

Comments will be accepted until: July 8, 2022

Comments may be submitted to:

Mail: Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks
Attn: East Fork Reservoir Smallmouth Bass Introduction
2165 HWY 2 E
Havre, MT 59501

Email: cnagel@mt.gov

Online: http://fwp.mt.gov/news/publicNotices/

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Date: May 31, 2022