



## DECISION NOTICE

### Boxelder Reservoir Artificial Habitat Placement

8/14/2023

#### **ACTION**

Decision Notice (DN). Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) shall prepare a DN for the proposed action. The DN must identify the agency decision, the reasons for the decision, and any special conditions surrounding the decision or its implementation.

With this action, FWP hereby adopts the Draft Environmental Assessment or Draft EA as final, without modification, and approves Alternative 2, the proposed action.

#### **AUTHORITY: MONTANA ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT**

According to the applicable requirements of the Montana Environmental Policy Act or MEPA and its implementing rules and regulations, before a proposed action may be approved, environmental review must be conducted to identify, consider, and disclose any potential impacts of the proposed action on the affected human environment. The level of environmental review will vary with the complexity and seriousness of environmental issues associated with a proposed action. The level of public interest will also vary. The agency is responsible for adjusting public review to match these factors. *Title 75, Chapter 1, Parts 1 through 3, Montana Code Annotated (MCA)*.

Based on these factors, FWP determined a checklist EA (Draft EA) constitutes the appropriate level of review for the proposed action. Therefore, to assess and disclose potential impacts of the proposed action, FWP prepared a Draft EA for public review and comment. See *Public Participation Process* below.

Further, FWP must consider any substantive comments received in response to an EA and proceed in accordance with one of the following steps: determine the EA did not adequately reflect the issues raised by the proposed action and issue an Environmental Impact Statement or EIS; determine the EA did not adequately reflect the issues raised by the proposed action and issue a supplemental EA; or determine the Draft EA adequately addressed the issues raised by the proposed action and make a final decision, with appropriate modification resulting from the analysis provided in the Draft EA and the analysis of any substantive public comments received. See *Public Comment and FWP Response* below.

#### **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCESS**

The Draft EA was made available for public review and comment from July 27 – August 10, 2023. A legal Notice was published in Sheridan County News and the Draft EA was posted on FWP's Public Notice

Notice webpage: <https://fwp.mt.gov/news/public-notice>. The Draft EA was also made available for public review on the Environmental Quality Council or EQC website: <https://leg.mt.gov/mepa/search/>, by individual request, and through notice to identified interested parties. FWP did not receive comments during the public comment period.

### **DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION**

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) is proposing to place synthetic artificial habitat structures in Boxelder Reservoir in Plentywood, Montana. Boxelder Reservoir is a 77-acre publicly accessible water body located on Sheridan County property. Fisheries resources are managed by FWP.

The proposed project would increase and improve spawning habitat for yellow perch, while providing rearing habitat for a variety of fish species including but not limited to yellow perch, walleye, white sucker, northern pike, and fathead minnows. The proposed project would take place in fall 2023.

### **PURPOSE AND NEED**

The purpose of the proposed project is to increase yellow perch spawning habitat in Boxelder Reservoir. In addition, rearing habitat for juvenile fishes will be improved as a result of installed structures. Yellow perch in Boxelder Reservoir have demonstrated highly variable recruitment in recent years, likely resulting from a lack of spawning stock and adequate spawning habitat. The project will benefit yellow perch recruitment by providing adequate habitat for spawning, while also providing rearing habitat for newly hatched yellow perch. Artificial structures may also provide habitat for small-bodied and juvenile fishes of other species.

### **ALTERNATIVES ANALYZED**

#### **Alternative 1: No Action**

In addition to the proposed action, and as required by MEPA, FWP analyzes the "No-Action" alternative in the EA. Under the No-Action alternative, the proposed action would not occur. Therefore, no additional impacts to the human environment would occur. The No Action alternative forms the baseline from which the potential impacts of the proposed action may be measured.

Under the No Action alternative, artificial habitat structures will not be placed in Boxelder Reservoir.

#### **Alternative 2: Proposed Action**

Under the Proposed Action, artificial habitat structures will be placed in Boxelder Reservoir, allowing for increased yellow perch spawning habitat availability and improved rearing habitat for juvenile and small-bodied fishes.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT AND FWP RESPONSE**

No public comments were received during the public comment period.

### **DECISION**

Based on the environmental review provided in the Draft EA, and in accordance with all applicable laws, rules, regulations, and policies, FWP determined the proposed action (Alternative 2), will not have significant adverse impacts on the human environment associated with the proposed action and constitutes a reasonable and appropriate strategy to achieve identified objectives. Therefore, preparation of an EIS is unnecessary. FWP hereby adopts the Draft EA as final and approves the Alternative 2, the proposed action.

With this DN, FWP hereby adopts the Final EA, with modifications, and approves the proposed action.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Drew Henry", with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Drew Henry  
Regional Supervisor, Region 6  
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks