



DECISION NOTICE

Rowley Private Pond License Review

FWP-DN-FSH-R3-24-061

September 10, 1013

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 August 2, 2024 to August 17, 2024. The Draft EA was posted on FWP's Public 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 received the comment below during the public comment period.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION

A private landowner is applying for a Private Fish Pond License and proposes to stock Rainbow Trout in an unnamed private pond. This pond is 0.5 surface acres and located on 1200 Mountain Meadows Lane, Big Sky, Montana about 1.5 miles south of Big Sky near the South Fork West Fork Gallatin River (hereafter referred to as the "South Fork"), which is a tributary to the West Fork Gallatin River. The South Fork contains Westslope Cutthroat Trout and Rainbow Trout below Ousel Falls. This pond is fed from groundwater recharge and has an intermittent outlet that consists of a screened culvert that discharges to open ground. Risk of escapement is very low. Rainbow Trout are not native to the South Fork but were legally stocked. Rainbow Trout could be removed from the pond via chemical treatments or through senescence.

The project is sponsored by the private landowner and the license would be active for 10-years from the year of issuance (2024). The license can be renewed for additional 10-year intervals at the end of each term and the license is transferable.

PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of this project is to issue a Private Fish Pond License for a private landowner to stock rainbow trout in the private pond located at 45.22818, -111.32088 only after careful review of potential impacts to State fish and wildlife resources stemming from the proposed fish stocking.

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 an angling opportunity would not be available for the landowner in their private pond.

Alternative 2: Proposed Action

Under the Proposed Action, FWP would issue the Private Fish Pond License to the applicant, rainbow trout from a state approved source would be stocked in the reservoir, and the statutory obligations of MCA 87-4-603:610 would be abided and enforced.

PUBLIC COMMENT AND FWP RESPONSE

FWP received one public comment.

Comment: *I am commenting on the request for a private pond license to stock Rainbow Trout on property owned by Nick Rowley at 1200 Mountain Meadows Lane, Big Sky, Montana. Per the Daily Montanan, April 12, 2024, Montana has over 10,000 private ponds and FWP is approving on average 200 more each year. From what I have found, this will be the second private pond this individual has in the same area. A property that was listed for sale in his name through Big Sky Real Estate in 2022, also had a private trout pond. I can only assume this is now the second pond license as the two locations are clearly not the same. So, my comment is, how many licenses does one person get to build something that is clearly antithetical to the surrounding environment? The request states "escapement is very low", but obviously it's not zero, and although the verbiage dances around it, if the fish somehow are released, or disease makes its way into the nearby water, the harm will NOT be zero. As a native Montanan, I must say, the folks in Big Sky have already done enough damage both in general, and in particular, to the rivers flowing through the Big Sky area, so my comment is, please either deny the request, or really examine what's happening to our environment courtesy of people who have a great amount of money and little stake in the ultimate outcome of damaged rivers and fisheries.*

FWP Response: *FWP is responsible for minimizing risks associated with legally constructed ponds that have an appropriate water right. Montana statute MCA 87-4-603 stipulates the conditions a private pond owner must meet to obtain a Private Fish Pond License. FWP takes those conditions, which include a valid water right from the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, flooding concerns, escapement, etc., into account when determining whether to issue a private pond permit. FWP does not dictate whether the pond can be constructed nor does FWP have any role in issuing a water right for private ponds.*

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, without modifications, and approves the proposed action.

Sincerely,

Nathan Lance

Nathan Lance
Acting Regional Supervisor
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks