



## DECISION NOTICE

### Bootjack and Leon Lakes Burbot Introduction

FWP-DN-FSH-R1-24-024

01/28/2025

#### **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 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 23, 2024 – September 21, 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 did not receive comments during the public comment period.

## **DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION**

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) is proposing to stock burbot into Bootjack Lake and Leon Lake. Bootjack and Leon Lakes are closed basin lakes in the Kootenai River drainage portion of the Thompson Chain of Lakes south of Highway 2 near Happy's Inn. The proposed action is being considered to provide angling opportunity, reduce density of illegally introduced yellow perch thus reducing competition with and predation on stocked rainbow trout, and improve individual growth rates of existing game fish populations. Juvenile burbot would be stocked as fish become available from Twin Rivers Hatchery administered by the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho, and/or adult burbot would be transferred directly from the Kootenai River in Montana pending availability and disease testing. Burbot would be introduced at densities not to exceed 10 burbot/acre. Because hatchery and wild burbot are rare and likely not available at numbers approaching 10/acre, this project may take several to many years to establish a self-reproducing, harvestable population. As such, regulations will start conservatively (no harvest) and evolve to limited harvest as the populations reach 10 burbot/acre.

## **PURPOSE AND NEED**

Illegally introduced yellow perch have become abundant and stunted in Bootjack and Leon Lakes, preying on and competing with stocked rainbow trout for limited food resources. Introducing burbot would add a natural predator of yellow perch to the affected lake ecosystems. The purpose of the proposed action would be to:

- substantially reduce the existing yellow perch population in Bootjack and Leon Lakes, and
- decrease yellow perch competition with and predation on rainbow trout.

Benefits of the proposed action would include:

- increased food availability for rainbow trout and a subsequent increase in the quality of the rainbow trout fishery,
- increased quality of the remaining yellow perch population, and
- the addition of a unique trophy fishery for regionally native burbot.

## **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, FWP would not introduce burbot to Bootjack or Leon Lakes. Without action, FWP would remain limited on their ability to improve the quality of the existing fishing opportunities in the lakes.

**Alternative 2: Proposed Action**

Under the Proposed Action, FWP would introduce burbot in Bootjack and Leon Lakes

**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 "Neil Anderson", written in a cursive style.

Neil Anderson  
Acting Regional Supervisor  
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks