



DECISION NOTICE

Upper Sureshot Lake Tiger Trout Introduction

FWP-DN-Fisheries-R3-25-005

April 7, 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, 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 March 10, 2025, to March 25, 2025. The Draft EA was posted on FWP's Public Notice webpage: <https://fwp.mt.gov/news/public-notices>. 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 four comments during the public comment period.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks proposes to stock tiger trout into Upper Sureshot Lake, which is in the headwaters of North Meadow Creek near McAllister. The species is not indigenous to the drainage and has not been present historically. The primary goal of the tiger trout introduction is to provide a biocontrol on the existing brook trout population.

Tiger trout are a hybrid between brown trout and brook trout. Although they are occasionally found in the wild, most tiger trout are sterile so self-sustaining populations are not possible and reports of wild tiger trout are rare. The hatchery supplying the tiger trout takes an additional step to ensure sterile fish are stocked by treating eggs in a manner that creates triploid fish. Triploid fish have an extra set of chromosomes, which also makes them sterile. Introducing tiger trout will add a natural predator for the stunted brook trout population in Upper Sureshot Lake. Tiger trout are stocked in surrounding states to provide additional angler opportunities as well as prey on stunted fish populations with the intention of reducing abundances of the existing species to improve the quality of the fishery by increasing lengths of the remaining trout.

Upper Sureshot Lake is an 8.7-acre lake that supports a wild brook trout fishery. Angler reports and gill netting surveys indicate the brook trout are primarily smaller than 10". Initial stocking efforts will include 500 tiger trout in 2025. Stocked fish would be produced by the FWP hatchery system and follow AIS and disease testing protocols. FWP will continue gill netting efforts for several years to determine whether the introduction of tiger trout alters the size structure of the brook trout population. Opportunistic creel surveys will be conducted when staff are in the area to also assess angler use and satisfaction to help determine whether continued stocking of tiger trout would be a worthwhile effort. The stocking rate could be adjusted depending on growth rates, angler harvest, angler satisfaction, and impacts to the rainbow trout fishery as monitored via the identified management goals in the SFMP.

PURPOSE AND NEED

Upper Sureshot Lake supports a stunted brook trout fishery that could potentially be improved by stocking sterile tiger trout to serve as a predator on brook trout. The proposed action was included in the Statewide Fisheries Management Plan 2023-2026 as a potential management action for mountain lakes in the Madison Drainage: <https://fwp.mt.gov/conservation/fisheries-management/statewide-fisheries-management>.

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 tiger trout to Upper Sureshot Lake and the status quo would be maintained.

Alternative 2: Proposed Action

Under the Proposed Action, FWP would stock tiger trout in Upper Sureshot Lake during the summer of 2025. The status of the fishery would be monitored for several years to determine whether tiger trout altered the abundances and sizes of brook trout as well as angler satisfaction to help inform whether subsequent tiger trout introductions will occur.

PUBLIC COMMENT AND FWP RESPONSE

FWP received substantive public comments on the Draft EA. A substantive public comment was defined as the identification of a specific issue or impact. The following provides the public comments received and FWP response.

Comment 1: As a 77 year old avid fisherman i would support the introduction of tiger fish to sure shot lakes. Love to see some in the lower lake also. Put some size restrictions on them so they can get large enough to eat the brook trout.

Comment 2: As an avid angler and someone who deeply values Montana’s fisheries, I want to express my strong support for the introduction of tiger trout into Upper Sureshot Lake. I’ve spent years fishing in our state’s waters, and I know firsthand how important it is to maintain a healthy and thriving fishery. Right now, the brook trout in Upper Sureshot Lake are stunted due to overpopulation, which limits the quality of the fishing experience. Adding tiger trout as a natural predator will help balance the ecosystem and allow the remaining fish to grow to a more desirable size, ultimately making for a better fishing experience for those of us who enjoy this lake.

Beyond improving the existing fishery, I’m also excited about the opportunity to fish for tiger trout. They are a unique and aggressive species that would provide an exciting new challenge for anglers. I love the idea of having a new fish to target in the lake, adding variety to the experience and increasing the overall appeal of Upper Sureshot Lake as a fishing destination. The presence of tiger trout would make fishing here even more rewarding, and I would certainly make more trips to the lake knowing there’s a chance to land one.

Lastly, I appreciate that this introduction is being done in a responsible and controlled way. Since tiger trout are sterile, there’s no risk of them overpopulating or disrupting the long-term balance of the lake. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks’ careful approach—monitoring growth rates, angler satisfaction, and overall impacts—gives me confidence that this is a well-thought-out plan. If there’s anything I can do to assist in this effort, my friends and I are very familiar with the Sureshot area and would be happy to help in any way possible. Additionally, I will be supporting this effort publicly and throughout my extensive fishing community to ensure that this opportunity is well-received and appreciated by fellow anglers.

Comment 3: Fully support the idea. Hope to see it happen.

Comment 4: Sureshot: Great spot for Tiger trout to grow big and become candidates for spectacular mounted specimens.

FWP Response: Thanks for providing your thoughts. We’ll make sure to take them into consideration when we make a final decision, which will be published on the website shortly after the public comment period closes.

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 that reads "Kelly Proffitt". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each word being capitalized and prominent.

Kelly Proffitt
Regional Supervisor
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks