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**Montana Fish,
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Montana Fish & Wildlife Commission

MINUTES

Montana Fish and Wildlife Commission Teleconference Informational Meeting
FWP Headquarters – Helena, MT

September 1, 2016

Commission Members:

Dan Vermillion-Chairman via video,
Richard Stuker-Vice Chairman, Matt Tourtlotte and Gary Wolfe via
telephone

Fish, Wildlife & Parks Staff Present: Jeff Hagener, Director and FWP Staff.

Guests: September 1, 2016 – No guests were in attendance

Topics of Discussion:

1. Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance
2. Yellowstone River Closure Update - Informational

1. Call to Order - Pledge of Allegiance

Chairman Vermillion called the meeting to order at 12:00 p.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Yellowstone River Closure Update - Informational

Travis Horton, Region 2 Fisheries Manager and Ken Frazer, Region 5 Fisheries Manager explained the Yellowstone River and its Tributaries, current test, data, sample results and environmental conditions.

Commissioner Wolfe and Horton discussed the trout versus white fish mortality percentages.

Chairman Vermillion and Frazer discussed surveys on the Boulder and Stillwater Rivers.

Becky Dockter, Chief Legal Counsel, explained in detail, the Administrative Rule that was implemented and adopted on August 19, 2016.

Chairman Vermillion and Dockter discussed: if the environmental conditions continue to improve, the Department can propose to open addition stretches going forward under this rule and there is no need for additional informational meetings; and if there is a resurgence of the disease what can be done under the current language rule and the process that would need to be taken.

Director Hagener explained the environmental conditions that warranted the Commission to issue a temporary emergency rule on August 19, 2016 to close the Yellowstone River and all of its associated tributaries have improved in the river sections described below. Therefore, the prohibition for public occupation is rescinded, effective immediately, as follows:

Section 1

The Yellowstone River and all of its tributaries from the northern boundary of Yellowstone National Park in Gardiner, MT downstream to the Carbella BLM Fishing Access Site are open to all non-angling recreational uses. Angling remains closed in this section to protect the Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout fishery. On Tuesday, September 6, Department biologists will float this section to assess any change in fishery health during this period of non-angling recreational use. In the event this section does not show any detrimental change in fishery health, it will be open to all uses beginning Thursday, September 8. The public will be notified via press-release of the status of this section on Wednesday, September 7.

Section 2

The mainstem Yellowstone River from the Carbella BLM Fishing Access Site downstream to the Highway 89 Bridge Fishing Access Site near Livingston, MT remains closed to all public occupation and recreation per the original August 19 closure. All Yellowstone River tributaries in this section, including Armstrong, Depuy's, and Nelson's Spring Creeks, are open to all uses.

Section 3

The Yellowstone River and all of its tributaries downstream from the Highway 89 Bridge Fishing Access Site to the Highway 212 Bridge in Laurel are open to all uses, with the exception of the Shields River and all of its tributaries, which remain closed to all public occupation and recreation per the original August 19 closure in order to protect the Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout fishery. The mainstem Yellowstone River and all tributaries downstream from the Highway 212 Bridge in Laurel were never part of a closure, and remain open to all uses.

Chairman Vermillion and Sam Sheppard, Region 3 Supervisor discussed water based recreation and hunting on the Shields River.

Director Hagener stated the Commission and Department appreciate the public support and responsiveness to the closure that was deemed necessary to protect the sustainability of the Yellowstone River fishery. Recognizing the value of the fishery, the Department is restoring appropriate and beneficial uses of the Yellowstone River system as quickly as is prudent, given the unprecedented nature of the event.

Vice-Chairman Stuker thanked the Department for their quick response for closing of the river and their rapid action to opening the river.

Chairman Vermillion stated it is important for citizens to still inform the Department of any evidence of dead fish they see on the river.

Sheppard stated Region 3 will continue to update the fact sheet on the website so there is one main source of information.

Gary Bertellotti, Region 4 Supervisor, stated the Department is being pro-active with de-contamination efforts on the east and west side of the closed area.

Commissioner Wolfe seconded Vice-Chairman Stuker's comments; appreciates the Department's work.

Chairman Vermillion echoed Vice-Chairman Stuker and Commissioner Wolfe's comments; the closure had a severe economical impact on a lot of people; the Department and Commission did not take this lightly; guides and outfitters put the resource first and did not want to do any long term harm; trout population and fishing has not been effected; feels comfortable with the Department's recommendations.

The meeting adjourned at 12:34 p.m.


Dan Vermillion, Chairman
M. Jeff Hagener, Director