



Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks

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ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

PART 1. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

Project Title: Transfer of Walleye into Hollecker lake

Application Date: February 10, 2021

Name, Address and Phone Number: Montana Dept. Fish, Wildlife & Parks
PO Box 1630
Miles City, MT 59301
218-205-6132

Project Location: Hollecker Lake is located immediately west of Glendive, Montana in the Yellowstone River drainage. The reservoir is an impoundment off of Crisafulli Creek, receiving water through a screened inlet off of the creek. The property around the reservoir is owned by Dawson County. The water right for the reservoir is owned by Montana, Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP).

Description of Project: Hollecker Lake is a popular family fishery for the community of Glendive. Unfortunately, the waterbody chronically becomes inhabited with undesirable species likely via poorly screened irrigation water and illegal transfers. In the winter of 2019, the local Walleyes Unlimited club, under approval from Dawson County, led an effort to drain Hollecker Lake to rid the unwanted species and provide a fresh start to the fishery. The lake was refilled in the spring of 2020. The club, along with guidance from FWP fisheries staff, decided on a restocking composition comprised of Rainbow Trout, Yellow Perch, Black Crappie, White Crappie, Channel Catfish, and Walleye. All of these species except Walleye had previously been stocked or transferred into Hollecker Lake. A one-time stocking of catchable Rainbow Trout was completed in the spring of 2020. Wild fish transfers of Yellow Perch, Channel Catfish, Black Crappie, and White Crappie were also completed in the spring of 2020. Walleye have not previously been stocked or transferred into Hollecker Lake, thus the impetus for this EA. We are proposing a wild fish transfer of 100-200 adult Walleye from the Yellowstone River downstream of Intake Dam to Hollecker Lake. Walleye would be captured via electrofishing in the spring and/or fall of 2021. While the transfer is expected to have little to no population-level effect on the Yellowstone River, it is expected to provide immediate opportunity for anglers at Hollecker Lake.

Alternatives to Proposed Action:

- 1- **No Action**
- 2- **Stock or transfer alternative species**
- 3- **Stock walleye fry or fingerling**

See discussion of alternatives below.

Other groups or agencies contacted or which may have overlapping jurisdiction:

None.

PART 2. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

Table 1. Potential impact on physical environment.

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Provided
1. Unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources				X		
2. Terrestrial or aquatic life and/or habitats			X			a)
3. Introduction of new species into an area			X			a)
4. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality				X		
5. Water quality, quantity and distribution (surface or groundwater)				X		
6. Existing water right or reservation				X		
7. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture				X		
8. Air quality or objectional odors				X		
9. Historical and archaeological sites				X		
10. Demands on environmental resources of land, water, air & energy				X		
11. Aesthetics				X		

Comments

(A description of potentially significant, or unknown, impacts and potential alternatives for mitigation must be provided.)

a) Minor impacts of the proposed action are expected on the aquatic life of Hollecker Lake (receiving waterbody) and the Yellowstone River downstream of Intake Dam (donor waterbody). Collection of walleye from the Yellowstone River will coincide with annual sauger and walleye tagging efforts at that location. There will be a minimal inconvenience for anglers fishing the Yellowstone River downstream of Intake Dam in the form of FWP use of the parking lot, boat ramp, and electrofishing boats on the water. No more than 200 adult walleye will be transferred from the Yellowstone River to Hollecker Lake. It is anticipated that this effort would be completed in 1-3 days.

Table 2. Potential impacts on human environment.

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Provided
1. Social structures and cultural diversity				X		
2. Changes in existing public benefits provided by wildlife populations and/or habitat				X		
3. Local and state tax base and tax revenue				X		
4. Agricultural production				X		
5. Human health				X		
6. Quantity and distribution of community and personal income				X		
7. Access to and quality of recreational activities			X			a)
8. Locally adopted environmental plans & goals (ordinances)				X		
9. Distribution and density of population and housing				X		
10. Demands for government services				X		
11. Industrial and/or commercial activity				X		

Comments

(A description of potentially significant, or unknown, impacts and potential alternatives for mitigation must be provided as comments.)

- a) Hollecker Lake is the closest fishing opportunity, outside of the Yellowstone River, to the community of Glendive. The reservoir and surrounding property are conducive to safe, family gatherings. Providing opportunity to catch sought-after walleye immediately increases recreational activities to the community. By transferring adult walleye, as opposed to stocking hatchery fry or fingerling walleye, opportunity to anglers is instantaneous. The transfer of adult fish to any waterbody as a put-and-take fishery is not feasible as a long-term or an annual stocking strategy. A put-and-take fishery is one where there is no expectation of reproduction from the fish stocked into a waterbody. The fish are stocked into a waterbody (i.e. put) and anglers catch and harvest those same fish (i.e. take). Once the population of fish is depleted, more fish must be stocked to retain the fishery. The current walleye population at Intake Dam in April is providing a unique opportunity at this time. That is, adult walleye can be easily captured with minimal effort and time.

Does the proposed action involve potential risks or adverse effects which are uncertain but extremely harmful if they were to occur?

None.

Does the proposed action have impacts that are individually minor, but cumulatively significant or potentially significant?

None.

Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives (including the no action alternative) to the proposed action when alternatives are reasonably available and prudent to consider. Include a discussion of how the alternatives would be implemented:

- 1- **No Action** – This action would leave Hollecker Lake in its current state. The Glendive Walleyes Unlimited club has invested a significant amount of funds along with donated time and materials to promote angling by improving Hollecker Lake habitat and fishing opportunity for the community. The club's draining and restocking plan will not be fulfilled if Walleye are not transferred. Walleye was a chosen species because of their popularity amongst anglers and their ability to prey upon unwanted species that may enter through the irrigation water.
- 2- **Stock or transfer alternative species** – There are a handful of alternative species that could be stocked or transferred into Hollecker Lake. Of these, logistically feasible predator species include Northern Pike, Tiger Muskie, Largemouth Bass and Smallmouth Bass. Largemouth Bass have been previously stocked into Hollecker, and anecdotal reports as well as Walleyes Unlimited club member comments suggest their value to

anglers was minimal. All of the potential alternative species were discussed when formulating the species restocking plan between Walleyes Unlimited and FWP.

- 3- **Stock walleye fry or fingerling** – Walleye can be produced in the hatchery and stocked as fry (less than 0.5 inches) or fingerlings (1.5-2 inches). This option was not desirable because, in Hollecker Lake, it is not believed that these young walleye would survive long enough and/or grow fast enough to reach a size at which they would be desired by anglers. Conversely, transfer of adult walleye provides instantaneous opportunity for anglers

1. **Public involvement:**

The public will be notified in the following manners to comment on this current EA, the proposed action and alternatives:

- Public notices in each of these papers: *The Independent Record* (Helena) and the *Glendive Ranger-Review*
- Public notice on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks web page: <https://fwp.mt.gov/news/public-notices>

Copies of this environmental assessment will be distributed to the neighboring landowners and interested parties to ensure their knowledge of the proposed project.

This level of public notice and participation is appropriate for a project of this scope having limited impacts, many of which can be mitigated.

2. **Duration of comment period:**

The public comment period will extend for (30) thirty days. Written comments will be accepted until **5:00 p.m., April 8, 2021** and can be mailed or emailed to the addresses below:

Email address for comments: mrugg@mt.gov

Mail comments to: *MT FWP*

Attn: Mat Rugg

PO Box 1630

Miles City, MT 59301

PART V. EA PREPARATION

1. **Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required? (YES/NO)?** No. Based on an evaluation of the primary, secondary, and cumulative impacts to the physical and human environment under the Montana Environmental Protection Act (MEPA), this environmental review found no significant impacts from the

proposed project. In determining the significance of the impacts, FWP assessed the severity, duration, geographic extent, and frequency of the impact, the probability that the impact would occur or reasonable assurance that the impact would not occur, growth-inducing or growth inhibiting aspects of the impact, the importance to the state and to society of the environmental resource or value affected, and precedent that would be set as a result of the proposed action that would commit FWP to future actions; and potential conflicts with local, federal, or state laws. Therefore, an EA is the appropriate level of review and an EIS is not required.

EA prepared by:

Mat Rugg, Glendive-area Fisheries Biologist, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Mike Backes, Region 7 Fisheries Manager, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks