

MADISON RIVER STAMP PLAN

From FWP application for committee:

“In recent years, angler and commercial use has increased dramatically. This has led to increased conflicts among wade anglers, boating anglers and commercial anglers. User satisfaction has declined among users of varying demographics which has resulted in displacement to other waters.

From the April 2018 plan:

“The Madison River is an iconic fishing destination for trout anglers worldwide. The popularity of this fishery can be documented through FWP estimates on angling pressure, which indicate that the Madison River is frequently one of the most heavily fished rivers in Montana.”

“Dissatisfaction with social conditions on the Upper Madison River has risen concomitantly with steadily increasing angler days.”

GOAL: Reduce crowding on the Madison River.

Who is crowding the river?

1. The non-resident use is 70 % of total use. (Page 15 Angler Satisfaction Demographic and Creel Survey) (ASDCS)

What is happening to the Montana resident angler as a result?

1. A survey of anglers from Lyons to Ennis show that 53.7 % of Montana residents find the number of people float fishing the river to be very unacceptable or unacceptable. (Page 11 ASDCS)

2. A survey of anglers from Lyons to Ennis show that 54.6% of Montana residents find the number of people at access points to be very unacceptable or unacceptable. (Page 11 ASDCS)

3. A survey of anglers from Hebgen to Lyons show that 59.8 % of Montana residents feel the number of people at access points to be very unacceptable or unacceptable. (Page 12 ASDCS)

4. A survey of anglers from Hebgen to Lyons show 43.5 % of Montana residents find the number of people using boats in the walk/wade section are very unacceptable or unacceptable. (Page 12 ASDCS)

5. From the 2016 Survey of Anglers Concerning the Madison River (Page 42):

67.4% of Montana residents say they fish the upper Madison river less frequently.

68.9% of Montana residents seek times and places where there is less crowding.

32.3% of Montana residents fish the river before June 14th in a shoulder season.

38.6% of Montana residents now fish the Upper Madison earlier or later in the season.

A PROPOSAL TO REDUCE CROWDING

1. Limit the number of non-resident anglers on the river while still allowing commercial interests to operate profitably. The goal would be to try to achieve a figure closer to the 2016 or 2017 number of non-resident anglers, reducing slightly the 70% reported in the survey. This reduction would still fulfill the goal of **Statute 12.11.405(8)** “to allow the non-resident reasonable and equitable opportunities compared to other recreational users to use the river.”

2. Require **both** residents and non-residents to purchase a Special Madison River Stamp (SMRS) as an add-on fee to their regular license. This will spread out the cost of using the Madison River to all anglers, not just the commercial operators. The cost to residents is nominal, set by FWP and the number of resident stamps is unlimited. The cost to non-residents will be higher than the resident fee, set by FWP. Non-residents can of course still fish other rivers in the area with a regular fishing license.

3. There are no limits to the number of Montana resident stamps. However, the number of non-resident stamps will be limited to a number to be determined by FWP to achieve a 2016-2017 use level by non-residents or a similar reduction as determined by FWP.

4. Stamps for non-residents may be purchased online or in a shop or store. They can purchase their regular non-resident license at the same time.

Stamps for non-residents would be available twice during the fishing season: an allotment of stamps available at the beginning of the season, and a second allotment available at the middle of the season (perhaps in July or August). Allotments will be determined by FWP based on the number of stamps already sold.

For each allotment, stamps are available on a first come first served basis. This stamp buys the right to a certain number of days you are allowed to fish on the Madison. The non-resident pays a per day, weekly, or seasonal fee for the SMRS, determined by FWP, just like purchasing a regular license.

6. The on-line, phone and in-person FWP licensing site keeps track of the total number of stamps sold and stops selling them when the maximum for each half of the season is reached.

7. The number of stamps can be adjusted yearly as accurate data and river usage is collected by FWP.

8. Status quo (boats allowed to float but fishing only by wading) on both walk/wades but add two Resident-Only days on both sections of the walk/wade to provide Montana resident anglers relief from crowding. Friday and Saturday on the Hebgen/Lyons walk/wade and Sunday and Monday on the Ennis to Ennis Lake walk/wade. (This follows the precedent set by establishing residents days on the Upper Bitterroot and West Fork Bitterroot River and the Big Hole.)

ADVANTAGES:

1. **Simplicity.** The simplicity of the plan allows maximum enforceability of plan without additional warden hours. No new kind of enforcement is required. Wardens check licenses as they always have.

2. **Simplicity of compliance.** This stamp plan maximizes clarity and conciseness. There is no long list of elaborate rules. There is no rationing of days, times, trips or beats. Outfitters can carry on business just as they do now.

3. **Fairness and compliance with existing laws.** Both old and new outfitters can compete for customers. No outfitter is arbitrarily eliminated. **Statute 12.11.405 (9)** “Management plans need to provide opportunities for river service providers to compete for the business of paying customers.”

Both residents and non-resident under **Statute 12.11.405 (8)** “should have reasonable and equitable opportunities . . . to enjoy Montana’s resources.”

4. **The possibility of revenue neutrality.** The fees for the stamp can make up revenues FWP loses as a result of limiting the non-residents permits. The fees can be lower or raised depending on the income date FWP receives.

5. **Maximizes available outfitter days.** This plan does not rely on rationing of outfitters days. The stamp plan avoids rationing of the use which **Statute 12.11.405(5)** describes as “the most restrictive form of management intervention.”

7. **Mirrors the April plan which minimized adverse economic effects.** It would do no more harm to the local economy than rationing days, which would cause the same reduction in use.

8. **Easy data collection allows rapid adjustment of plan.** The stamp plan offers an economical way to collect data about the resident/non-resident use. The plan is also easily adaptable. FWP can make changes in the plan by simply increasing or decreasing available stamps.

9. Outfitters are no longer singled out to pay fees for the use of the Madison River.

10. Commercial outfitter days on the Madison River are not monetized. When an outfitter sells their business, they can transfer the SRP (special river permit) but not the days associated with the permit. This allows the new outfitter the chance to start a business but not have to buy days, which are now too expensive on the Beaverhead (52 days for \$60,000 , FOAM Newsletter classifieds, Summer, 2018) and Big Hole for the new outfitter to afford.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. The need to educate the anglers about the plan. Outfitters are worried that their customers will not know about the plan. There has to be some effort on the part of both FWP and the outfitters to let anglers know about the plan. Sage, TU, Orvis, the angling press, web sites such as Hatch and Midcurrent will definitely get the word out.

2. Any plan proposed by the Commissioners needs to have an economic impact study done to show that that plan will not significantly and directly impact small businesses as required under 2-4-111, MCA.

I was pleased to be able to serve as a member of the Madison River Negotiated Rulemaking Committee.

I am proposing this plan **having been both an out of state angler and a six- year resident Montana angler.** I float an average of 15 days a year using the services of outfitters. I also fish myself, unguided and on foot, an additional 50 or so days a year.

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