

DECISION NOTICE

Corbicula fluminea (Asian Clam) Eradication and Lake Elmo Habitat and Access Improvement Project

Prepared by Region 5, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

December 29, 2020

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes to eradicate *Corbicula fluminea* (Asian Clam) with a full draw down of Lake Elmo. The drawdown will begin in September 2021 with refilling in April of 2022. Additionally, the Fisheries and Parks Divisions will work together to implement park trail and access projects and fisheries habitat and access projects analyzed in the draft environmental assessment.

MONTANA ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT (MEPA) PROCESS

The proposal has been analyzed in an Environmental Assessment (EA) to satisfy the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA). FWP is required to assess the impacts of the proposed action to the human and natural environment as directed by MEPA. Under the MEPA process, a 33-day public comment period ran from October 16, 2020 through November 18, 2020. Notice was published twice in the Billings Gazette and Helena Independent Record and was posted on the FWP web page.

ISSUES RAISED IN THE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT (EA)

Issues raised by the public included the need to remove invasive clams, making improvements compliant with the American Disability Act, frustration with lack of leash law compliance which in turn is detrimental to wildlife--particularly birds in the park, support for the project with offer of private funds, recommendations to make improvements as described for the fisheries and parks programs in the EA, ensuring improvements to the dog park shoreline and park are fully considered, liberalization of fishing regulations preceding the draw down with a desire for a carp bowfishing opportunity, supporting renovation with consideration of restoring native fish, support for alternative 3 with concerns for avian response to loss of water and a request to include small island features as part of the habitat work, requesting access amenities to support bird watching as part of the jetty and/or boardwalk node projects, support for a safer alternative to the trail system boardwalk connection to the existing trail or use of Lake Elmo Drive, concerns about the ability to fully draw down and dry the lake bed, suggestions for fish species to be restored with a request to allow live bait for fishing once the project is completed, and questions about the ability of people to salvage artifacts.

GENERAL SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENTS

During the public comment period nine emails and several phone calls were received. The respondents either directly supported the project or raised concerns outside of the scope of the EA and project. In addition to the formal public comment there have been many conversations with FWP staff - most very supportive of the renovation and park improvement projects. No objections to the proposed project have been received.

DECISION

After review of this proposal and public comment, it is my decision to select Alternative 3. Under Alternative 3 FWP will drain, dry, and allow the lakebed to freeze to remove the *Corbicula fluminea* population and implement the identified fisheries and park projects. The drawdown will start in September 2021 in cooperation with the Billings Bench Water Association. Funded projects will be initiated. The lake will be refilled by May 2022. Because some projects can be completed when there is water in the lake, these projects may continue to completion past May 2022.

Barb S Beck

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Barb S Beck", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Regional Supervisor, FWP Region 5
Billings, Montana