



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

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Meeting Date: January 6, 2020

Agenda Item: Lake Koocanusa Bull Trout Harvest Closure

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 minutes

Background: Bull Trout are listed as a Threatened Species under the Endangered Species Act; however, through special arrangements with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, limited harvest is allowed to occur at Lake Koocanusa, Hungry Horse Reservoir, and a catch-and-release fishery is allowed in the South Fork Flathead River. Bull Trout redd counts in the fall are used as an important metric for measuring Bull Trout reproduction and recruitment and are included as part of the requirements for the harvest permit. For the Lake Koocanusa Bull Trout population, Redd counts in Wigwam River in British Columbia and Grave Creek in Montana are important critical to determine harvest quotas. Over the past 6 years, redd counts had been fairly steady in both streams. In Fall 2019 spawning redds in both streams declined substantially, prompting concerns that limited angler harvest may have population scale impacts. Currently, harvest is limited to 1 fish per license year from June 1 through February 28 with catch-and-release fishing allowed the rest of the year. The department is proposing catch-and-release fishing all year with no harvest allowed beginning at the season opening, March 1. Lake Koocanusa Bull Trout Catch Cards would still need to be in possession when fishing for Bull Trout.

Public Involvement Process & Results: There has been no public involvement on this decision. Due to the Threatened status of Bull Trout, the department prefers to take a very conservative approach to Bull Trout management while still allowing opportunities to harvest Bull Trout.

Alternatives and Analysis: This action is based on one year of data from two primary spawning tributaries to Lake Koocanusa, it is possible that unknown sampling variables or limiting factors could have depressed 2019 counts. But, since counts are down in both tributaries and based on a conservative management approach regarding harvest, the department believes it is appropriate to limit harvest until redd counts improve. The department recommends modifying the Lake Koocanusa Bull Trout regulation to read (page 41):

Bull Trout: Catch-and-release only (all Bull Trout must be released immediately). A Lake Koocanusa Bull Trout Catch Card must be in possession when fishing for Bull Trout. See Special Licenses requirements for application information. It is unlawful to possess a live Bull Trout for any reason.

Proposed Motion:

I move the commission approve modifying Lake Koocanusa Bull Trout regulations to catch-and-release only for the entire year.