



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

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Meeting Date: June 23, 2022

Agenda Item: Middle Madison Valley Trumpeter Swan Reintroductions during 2022 through 2026

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 15 minutes

Background: Reintroduction of captive-raised trumpeter swans into suitable nesting areas is a proven management tool in use in Montana and neighboring states. The department has released trumpeter swans as part of a commission-approved project since 2012 and is seeking commission approval to continue releases for 2022 through 2026. The department is conducting an environmental assessment (EA) to document effects of continuing releases in the middle Madison River valley to re-establish breeding in areas where extensive habitat restoration has been ongoing since 2005. Trumpeter swans for release would be obtained from the Wyoming Wetland Society facility in Jackson, which has provided swans for release in the Flathead-Mission and Blackfoot valleys of Montana. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) has approved these releases and the program adheres to the Pacific Flyway genetic restrictions for Rocky Mountain population origin. Primary funding for the proposed program will be from conservation agencies and organizations, private individuals, and foundations.

Trumpeter swans historically nested in western Montana valleys but were extirpated during European settlement. Trumpeter swans for reintroduction into Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming are made available through a cooperative program with the Pacific Flyway Council, the USFWS, and the Wyoming Wetland Society. Wyoming Wetland Society trumpeter swans have been used for releases into the wild in Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, and Yellowstone National Park. Wild nesting flocks consistently have been established within five to seven consecutive years following releases of captive-raised swans. The Madison project is embedded into a large tri-state flyway goal to increase connectivity and augment the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem population. Pair bonding, successful nesting, community involvement and support, and collaborative involvements with private landowners and private industry are among the accomplishments in the middle Madison Valley.

The middle Madison Valley (between Ennis and Quake lakes) has been the site of significant habitat restoration for almost 20 years. This work included funding from FWP, USFWS, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Northwestern Energy, and others. Collectively, these efforts have restored and enhanced over 1,000 acres of wetlands that were drained in the early 1950s. The objective is to address the slow growth and potentially declining number of trumpeter swans breeding in southeast Idaho, western Montana, and northwest Wyoming.

Public Involvement Process and Results: Following completion of the EA, including public comment, the department will request the commission to authorize the release of about five swans annually from 2022-2026.

Alternatives and Analysis: Allowing trumpeter swans to naturally pioneer a breeding population in the Madison Valley could take many years and may not facilitate the growth of trumpeter swan numbers in Montana.

Agency Recommendation and Rationale: The department recommends that the commission authorize the releases to ensure that a robust population of trumpeter swans exist within their historic range in Montana.

Proposed Motion: I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission authorize the release of trumpeter swans annually during 2022 through 2026 within the Madison Valley, as proposed by the department.