



# MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

**Meeting Date:** Aug 17, 2023

**Agenda Item:** Implement smallmouth bass catch, kill, and report regulation on lower Bitterroot River

**Action Needed:** Final

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 5 minutes

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**Background:** On July 5, an angler reported catching a smallmouth bass in the Bitterroot River near the confluence with the Clark Fork River. The angler provided video of the catch, and the species and location of the catch were verified by FWP staff. This is the first reported and confirmed observation of smallmouth bass in the Bitterroot River. Subsequent snorkel surveys by FWP staff did not observe any smallmouth bass but determined that water temperature and habitat availability are suitable for smallmouth bass.

Smallmouth bass are a predatory and adaptable species, and an established population would be expected to adversely impact the native and non-native coldwater sport fishery in the Bitterroot River. Since the smallmouth bass population abundance is still low, relying on angler harvest and mandatory reporting is a cost-effective tool to determine distribution, abundance, and preferred habitats for smallmouth bass in the lower Bitterroot River. Additionally, collection of otoliths and other tissues may provide information regarding age, growth, and origin of the fish. This tool has been helpful in determining management action in other waters, including Lake Mary Ronan (Northern pike), Kootenai River (brown trout), and upper Yellowstone River (smallmouth bass), among others.

**Public Involvement Process & Results:** There has been minimal public outreach as this is a very recent discovery. The commission has an Unauthorized Placement of Fish rule ([ARM 12.7.1501- 1505](#)) to guide FWP's response to unauthorized introductions. The proposed action falls within management action listed in rule ([ARM 12.7.1503](#)). Similar actions to unauthorized introductions of fish have generally had wide public support.

**Alternatives & Analysis:** The commission could adopt the FWP proposed regulation, not adopt the regulation, amend the proposed regulation, or propose another alternative.

**Agency Recommendation & Rationale:** FWP recommends adopting the proposed catch, kill, and report regulation for smallmouth bass in the lower Bitterroot River. Catch, kill, and report is an effective tool to efficiently determine the status and potential impacts of a new fish population and helps FWP determine a course of action to minimize resource impacts of the introduction.

**Proposed Motion:** I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission adopt the mandatory catch, kill, and report regulation for the lower Bitterroot River from Florence Bridge to the mouth, effective immediately.