



## FISHING REGULATIONS PROPOSAL FORM

**Waterbody or Fishing District: Beaverhead River, Region 3**

**Proposed change, addition, or deletion** (for existing regs, include District Standard or Exception to the District Standard. Indicate new language in *italics*, deleted language with a ~~strikethrough~~):

Page 53 change:

### BEAVERHEAD RIVER

#### Entire River

- ~~1 daily and in possession. Catch-and-release for Rainbow Trout.~~
- Brown Trout: ~~Catch-and-release only~~ *5 fish daily and in possession, all fish must be less than 18"; except for Clark Canyon Dam to High Bridge FAS and Barretts Diversion to the mouth, see special regulations below.*
- ~~Artificial lures and single pointed hooks only. No treble or double hooks. Anglers may remove treble or double hooks from the lure and replaces them with a single hook, or the shanks may be cut off the other hook points to leave a single hook. Lures with multiple hook attachments may still be used but any treble hook must be replaced by a single hook.~~

#### Clark Canyon Dam to Pipe Organ Bridge

- Open third Saturday in May through ~~October 31~~ *September 30.*

#### Clark Canyon Dam to High Bridge FAS

- *Catch-and-release for Brown Trout.*
- *Artificial lures and single pointed hooks only. No treble or double hooks. Anglers may remove treble or double hooks from the lure and replace them with a single hook, or the shanks may be cut off the other hook points to leave a single hook. Lures with multiple hook attachments may still be used but any treble hook must be replaced by a single hook.*

#### High Bridge FAS to Henneberry FAS

- Closed to float fishing by nonresidents and float outfitting on each Saturday from the third Saturday in May through Labor Day

#### Henneberry FAS to Pipe Organ Bridge

- Closed to float fishing by nonresidents and float outfitting on each Sunday from the third Sunday in May through Labor Day.

#### Barretts Diversion to the mouth

- *Open April 1 through September 30.*
- *Catch-and-release for Brown Trout.*

#### Highway 91 South Bridge (Tash Bridge) to Selway Bridge

- Closed to float outfitting from the third Saturday in May through Labor Day.

**Rationale** (biological justification for proposing this change. Include how this change addresses a fisheries management problem):

The proposed regulation changes are directly responsive to the biology and abundance of trout populations in the Beaverhead River. Regulations were changed across the entire Beaverhead River in fall 2021 in response to low brown trout abundances in some sections; however, abundances were not low in all sections and, restrictive regulations that reduced angler opportunity were enacted in reaches with average to above average brown trout abundances.

Rainbow trout harvest is proposed to change from one fish daily to catch-and-release because of their limited distribution near Clark Canyon Dam, near historically low abundances the past five years, and a population skewed towards old, large fish (about 50% are over 18") that has lower than normal recruitment.

Brown trout harvest is proposed to only include fish less than 18" to protect age-4 and older fish in the spawning population and focus harvest on pre-spawning age classes (age-2 and 3) that have a negative effect on the survival of post-spawn brown and rainbow trout. The standard Central District limit of 5 fish daily and in possession would apply unless otherwise specified. Combined with the below, this would allow harvest of brown trout less than 18" in 13.7 miles of the Beaverhead River that presently has above average brown trout abundances.

The long-standing closure between Clark Canyon Dam and Pipe Organ Bridge would be changed to begin on October 1 instead of November 1. Over the coming biennial cycle, overwinter releases are expected to drop from 600-800 cfs during the irrigation season to the minimum allowed flow of 25 cfs on October 1, making highly concentrated brown and rainbow trout vulnerable to stress-induced mortality associated with angling during the ongoing extreme drought. Brown trout in the Beaverhead River begin spawning in late October and rainbow trout in late March, with eggs in the gravel and susceptible to trampling until the third Saturday in May. The 8-mile reach in question supports between 200 and 500 trout redds per mile while the remaining 8 miles of the upper Beaverhead River has between 0 and 100 redds per mile.

Catch-and-release for brown trout and artificial lures and single pointed hooks is proposed to be retained in the upper 1.7 miles of the Beaverhead River because 1) monitoring indicates most fish there are greater than 18" and would be subject to catch-and-release and 2) retaining restrictive gear regulations in this reach will allow statistical comparison of different regulations.

Between Barretts Diversion and the mouth, catch-and-release only for brown trout and a spawning closure from October 1 to April 1 is proposed because of abundances below the 5th percentile of the long-term dataset. Combined with the above, this would require catch-and-release for brown trout in 68.3 miles of the Beaverhead River.

The populations will continue to be monitored and future regulation proposals will be made based on biological assessment.

**Regulation Type** (clarification, enforcement, conservation, relevancy, management plan, other):

Conservation, relevancy: provides for sport fish conservation and a diversity in angling opportunities.

**Public Engagement** (summary of any public scoping or outreach that has been completed as it relates to this change. Includes public meetings, sporting group meetings, surveys, etc.):

The proposed regulation changes were included as part of scoping in the 2022 adaptive management plan for the river. Scoping meetings were held with the Region 3 Citizens Advisory Council, George Grant Trout Unlimited, Chuck Robbins Trout Unlimited, Skyline Sportsmen Association, Anaconda Sportsmen Club, Beaverhead Outdoors Association, Fishing Outfitters Association of Montana, Montana Trout Unlimited, Big Hole Watershed Committee, Beaverhead Watershed Committee, Big Hole River Foundation, Ruby Valley Strategic Alliance, Ruby Valley Conservation District, Beaverhead Conservation District, Mile High Conservation District, Clark Canyon Joint Irrigation Board, and the Ruby Valley Water Users Association. The adaptive management plan and the associated regulation proposals were generally well-supported, although concerns were raised over the dates associated with spawning closures. As part of the adaptive management strategy, the public also generally supported implementing less restrictive fishing regulations once the population improves, and abundances increase to levels near long-term averages.

The regulations (catch-and-release, artificial lures, and single hooks only) in the upper 1.7 miles of the Beaverhead River have not been scoped with the public and were added to facilitate data collection and statistical comparison of different gear types and regulations.

**Nonbiological Information** (is there an organized advocacy for this change, controversy, other information that decision makers should be aware, relevant MCA or ARM to justify this change):

None