



FISHING REGULATIONS PROPOSAL FORM

Waterbody or Fishing District: Big Hole 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~~):

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BIG HOLE RIVER

Entire River

- Catch-and-release for Arctic Grayling

Headwaters to Dickie Bridge

- Combined trout: 5 daily and in possession, no size restriction.

Dickie Bridge to *Brownes Bridge FAS*

- *Open April 1 through September 30.*
- *Catch-and-release only.*
- ~~Catch and release for Rainbow Trout December 1 to third Saturday in May.~~
- ~~Brown Trout: Catch and release only.~~
- *Artificial lures only. 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.*

BLM Maiden Rock to *Brownes Bridge FAS*

- ~~Open April 1 through September 30.~~
- ~~Brown Trout: Catch and release only.~~
- *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.*

Brownes Bridge FAS to the mouth

- *Open April 1 through September 30.*
- *Catch-and-release only.*
- ~~Catch and release for Rainbow Trout December 1 to the third Saturday in May.~~
- ~~Brown Trout: Catch and release only.~~
- *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.

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 Big Hole River. Regulations were changed in the middle and lower portions of the Big Hole River in fall 2021 in response to low brown trout abundances resulting in restrictive regulations that reduced angler opportunity and harvest but allowed harvest of rainbow trout.

Brown trout abundance is at an all-time lows and rainbow trout abundance has also recently declined. When combined, the total trout abundance is the lowest since records began in 1969. Therefore, the proposal is for catch and release only for all trout downstream of Dickie Bridge.

Dickie Bridge to Brownes Bridge FAS: artificial lures only. This section has been artificial lures only since the mid-1980s. The public has been supportive of keeping these regulations in place. Having a section of the river remain artificial lures only also allows the evaluation of fish mortality compared to the section downstream that has no gear restrictions.

Dickie Bridge to Brownes Bridge and Brownes Bridge to the mouth: open from April 1 through September 30. This regulation is intended to protect spawning brown trout from the potential impacts of angling and protect incubating brown trout eggs from the potential impacts of trampling. It is recommended only when trout abundances are below objective.

Population monitoring will continue on these waters and any future department regulation proposals will be made based on biological data.

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.

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.