

FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AMENDMENT

FWP proposal to be amended: 2025-2026 Fishing Regulations/*Hungry Horse Reservoir*

Commissioner: Vice Chair Pat Tabor (Commissioner, Region 1)

Date Received by Commission: October 15, 2024

Proposed amendment:

I move the Commission amend the 2025-2026 Fishing Regulations for Hungry Horse Reservoir to read as follows:

- Bull trout: 1 *fish per license year* from the third Saturday in May through Aug. 15. Catch-and-release the rest of the year with a Hungry Horse/South Fork Flathead permit validation on Fishing License. A Hungry Horse/South Fork Flathead Bull Trout Catch Card must be in possession when fishing for bull trout. See bull trout under *"What do I Need to Fish in Montana" (page 15)*. All bull trout must be released immediately or killed and counted as your limit when harvest is allowed. It is unlawful to possess a live bull trout for any reason.

Requested by FWP (YES/NO): YES

If YES, then FWP's Rationale: See attached.

If NO, then FWP Response: NA



FISHING REGULATIONS PROPOSAL FORM

Waterbody or Fishing District: Hungry Horse Reservoir

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 36 add/**change**/delete:

Bull trout: 1 ~~daily and in possession fish per license year~~ from the third Saturday in May through Aug. 15, ~~maximum of 2 fish per license year~~. Catch-and-release the rest of the year with a Hungry Horse/South Fork Flathead permit validation on Fishing License. A Hungry Horse/South Fork Flathead Bull Trout Catch Card must be in possession when fishing for bull trout. See bull trout under ~~obtain a license~~ *"What do I Need to Fish in Montana" (page 15)*. All bull trout must be released immediately or killed and counted as your limit when harvest is allowed. It is unlawful to possess a live bull trout for any reason.

Rationale (biological justification for proposing this change. Include how this change addresses a fisheries management problem): Adult bull trout numbers are monitored by counting the redds (spawning nests) in 8 tributaries to the South Fork Flathead River (4 direct tributaries to Hungry Horse Reservoir and 4 tributaries to the South Fork Flathead River). Redd counts in 2024 revealed the lowest number of redds on record (Figure 1). This is the second consecutive year of lowest redd count totals and a trend since 2006. Redd count totals were 48% of the long-term average. During this same time period, participation in the Hungry Horse/South Fork bull trout catch-card fishery have been increasing since its inception in 2004. Estimated bull trout angling pressure in the South Fork Flathead River has tripled since 2014 (Figure 2), and FWP suspects that angling could be partially responsible for the decline in redd numbers. Reducing the amount of angler harvest in the reservoir will likely help stabilize the downward trend in adult bull trout numbers.

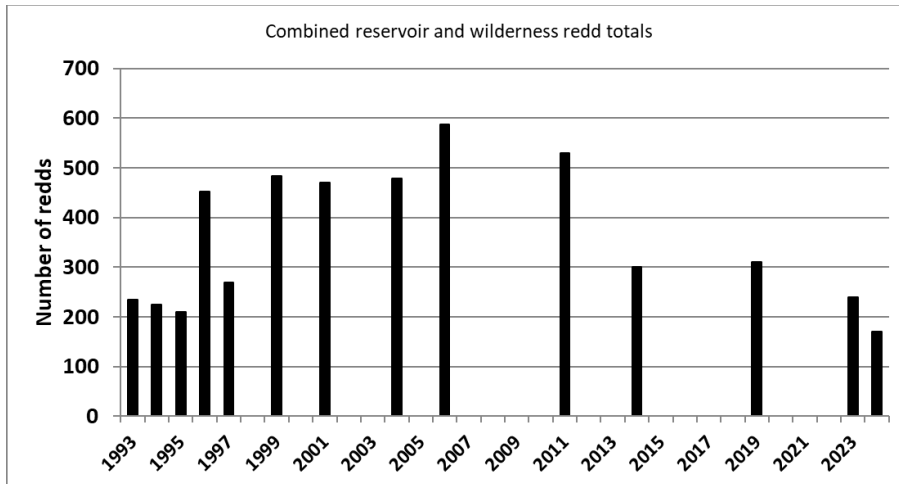


Figure 1: Bull trout redd numbers for the Hungry Horse/South Fork population 1993-2024.

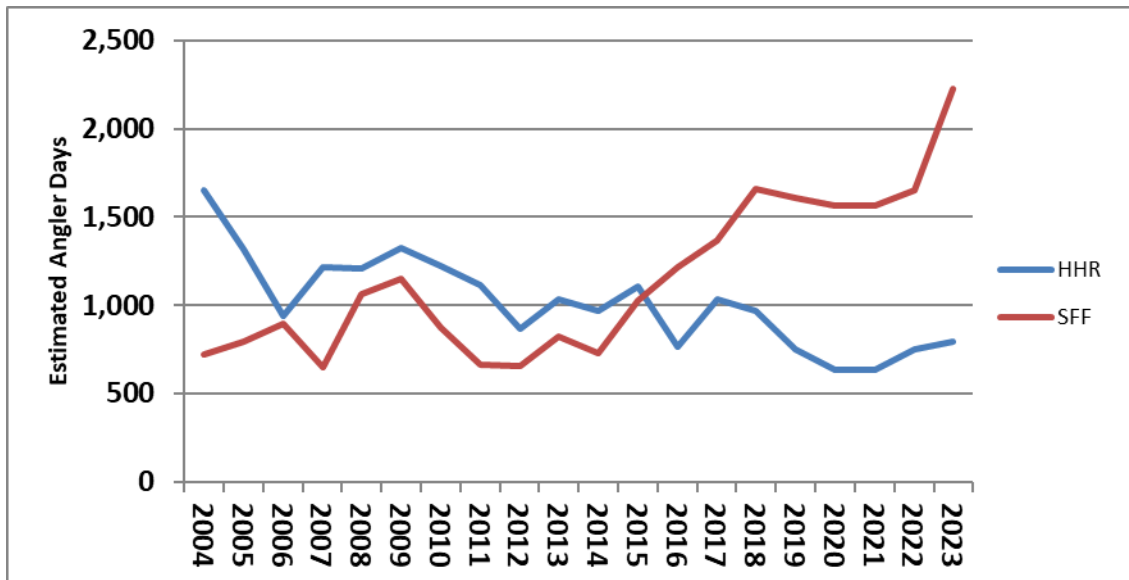


Figure 2: Estimated bull trout angling pressure for Hungry Horse Reservoir and the South Fork Flathead River 2004-2024.

Management Plan Reference (drainage, waterbody, language directly from the plan):

South Fork Flathead River drainage, section 2.02, page 5 under “South Fork Flathead Bull Trout Fishery”.

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

Conservation

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.):

Interdivisional Review (most likely input from Enforcement, but input from Com Ed, Legal, Wildlife may also be appropriate. Multiple divisions will review in Helena via RRAM):

R-1 Enforcement has reviewed and concurred with the proposal.

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):