



October 31, 2024

RE: Support for the Amendment to Bull Trout Regulations in select Montana waters

Dear Chair Robinson and members of the Montana Fish and Wildlife Commission,

The Montana Wildlife Federation supports the proposals to amend bull trout fishing regulations in the South Fork Flathead drainage to protect this important bull trout population. The proposals would include lowering the harvest limit in Hungry Horse Reservoir, shortening the fishing season in the South Fork Flathead River, putting a closure around staging areas at the mouths of Gordon and Little Salmon Creeks, and closing the area where Big Salmon Creek enters Big Salmon Lake. These proposed closures are supported by Fish Wildlife and Parks data showing a decrease in bull trout redd counts with a concurrent increase in bull trout angling as reported by bull trout catch cards.

Bull trout are listed as a Threatened species but the South Fork Flathead drainage supports one of the healthiest populations in Montana so recreational angling has been allowed under a special permit and catch card system from USFWS. Angling pressure is the easiest factor for FWP to control and a conservative approach is warranted to maintain the health of the fishery and the USFWS special use permit. These native fish appear to be sensitive to handling so fishing has been closed in most waters. Bull trout also require clean, cold and connected waters to flourish so the Montana Wildlife Federation is concerned about future impacts on the species due to climate change. It is important for Fish, Wildlife and Parks to take proactive steps within its jurisdiction to maintain healthy populations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Servheen", is written below the word "Sincerely,".

Chris Servheen, Ph.D
President and Board Chair
Montana Wildlife Federation