



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Hungry Horse and Glacier View
Ranger Districts

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File Code: 2670

Date: March 16, 2016

Dear Interested Party,

The Flathead National Forest, Hungry Horse-Glacier Ranger District is seeking input on a proposal in cooperation with Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks to provide upstream passage for bull trout to historic spawning reaches in Big Creek.

Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks has requested to open a log jam that has formed in Big Creek since the 2001 Moose fire. The log jam is about 2 miles below the Skookoleel Bridge in sect. 25, T33N, R21W. Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks conducts bull trout redd counts in Big Creek annually since 1981 with counts starting at the Skookoleel Bridge and continuing upstream. In 2015, no redds were found in sections of Big Creek and Hallowat Creek where redds have historically been located. Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks then looked downstream and found 22 bull trout redds located below the log jam.

There is a beaver complex with a lodge and side channels at the location of the jam. The beavers have been successful in using the log jam to basically “putty” it tight in that no bull trout can make it upstream. Typically, bull trout have no problems making it upstream through log jams or over beaver dams but do to the size of this jam and the reinforcement by beavers no bull trout were able to make it upstream.

Removing wood from streams is not a common practice, however, we feel that it necessary in this situation because bull trout are migratory and there are no resident populations upstream unlike resident westslope cutthroat trout. Without passage, the numbers of bull trout would decline because adult bull trout would not be able to reach their spawning grounds. This decline would persist until the dam/log jam fails which has undoubtedly happened over the last 10,000 years. It is a natural process. What is not a natural process or has not happened over the last 10,000 years but the last 25 years is competition/predation by lake trout in Flathead Lake. There is concern that if the local population of bull trout in Big Creek is lost the re-colonization that has occurred in the past would be less likely to occur because of a depressed local population. It is paramount to attempt to get as many juveniles returning to Flathead Lake so that adults may return to spawn in Big Creek.

The plan is to notch the log jam this May with a spider backhoe which is expected to reduce soil disturbance compared to traditional tracked equipment and then use the spring flows to help remove bedload behind it. This would re-establish passage in the main channel. The beaver complex in the north channel which is a shallow overflow channel in the floodplain would be left



intact. We feel that this provides fish passage while leaving the beaver complex intact. It is possible that beavers could re-establish the dam in the log jam however, with increased stream velocities it will be difficult for beavers to get a dam built in this location. Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks would monitor passage throughout the summer and early fall and remove any dam that beavers might try to re-establish.

To provide comments, or if you have questions or concerns, please contact me at 406-387-3801 or rdavies@fs.fed.us by Wednesday, March 30, 2016. I appreciate your input on this proposal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert Davies". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "D" at the end.

ROBERT DAVIES
District Ranger