



29 May 2026

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Attention: 2027/2028 Fishing Regulation Scoping
PO Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620

Re: FOAM Comments: 2027-2028 Fishing Regulation Proposals

Dear Fish, Wildlife & Parks:

On behalf of the board of directors and over 1,100 professionally-licensed guide and outfitter members of the Fishing Outfitters Association of Montana (FOAM), I am writing to provide our comments on the 2027-2028 Fishing Regulation Proposals. We appreciate the opportunity to comment.

Proposal 1: Definition of a Hook

The definition of “single-pointed hook” has been continually confusing as the regulation can allow for two separate single-pointed hooks on one artificial lure. The proposed regulation should define a single-pointed hook as one hook with a single point. The confusion arises where there is a defined distinction between a single hook and a single-pointed hook, especially when two single-pointed hooks can be attached to an artificial lure and still be considered a single-pointed hook. The proposed regulation could be clarified by stating that an artificial lure may have up to two single-pointed hooks.

We do not support the definition of artificial bait as written as it includes the sentence, “Artificial bait also includes all soft plastic imitations including unscented, infused, brined or salted.” Many flies are tied using such materials, such as modern worm materials, foam materials for dry flies, and foam materials used in tying streamers, which would omit the use of these flies for angling under this definition.

This definition “lure” should define “artificial lure.”

We support:

Proposal 2: Western District Standard Lake Trout Harvest

Proposal 4: Eastern District Standard Smallmouth Bass Limits

Proposal 5: Central District Standard Smallmouth Bass Limits

Proposal 6: Transportation of Live Fish in the Eastern District

Proposal 8: Including Tiger Trout to Combined Trout for Central and Eastern District Standard Limits, and,

Proposal 9: Flathead Lake Northern Pike Limits

We strongly support the following proposals to conserve and protect bull trout, wild populations of kokanee, trophy rainbow trout, westslope cutthroat trout, and Arctic grayling:

Proposal 12: Fishtrap Creek and Tributaries Bait Restriction

Proposal 13: Hungry Horse Reservoir Bull Trout Length Restriction and Season Change

Proposal 14: Little Bitterroot Lake Kokanee Harvest Limit

Proposal 15: Little Bitterroot Lake Rainbow Trout Length Restriction

Proposal 16: Graves Creek Gear Restriction

Proposal 17: Graves Creek Bait Restriction

Proposal 18: Vermillion River Bait Restriction

Proposal 19: Vermillion River Gear Restriction

Proposal 20: Vermillion River Bait Restriction

Proposal 21: West Fork Thompson River and Tributaries Bait and Gear Restrictions

Proposal 32: Miner Lake Arctic Grayling Catch-and-Release and Burbot Harvest Restrictions

Proposal 35: Pintler Lake Arctic Grayling Catch-and-Release, and,

Proposal 38: Red Rock Creek Hybrid Cutthroat Harvest Limit

We strongly support those proposed regulations that seasonally protect rainbow and brown trout spawning and high-quality spawning and rearing habitat for salmonids including:

Proposal 25: Baker Creek Season Length

Proposal 26: Ben Hart Creek Season Length

Proposal 27: Camp Creek Season Length

Proposal 31: Madison River Pike Harvest and Side Channel Closure

Proposal 33: Missouri River-Big Spring Confluence Season Length

Proposal 34: O'Dell Creek Season Length

Proposal 36: Rae Creek Season Length

Proposal 37: Randall Creek Season Length

Proposal 39: Thompson Creek Season Length, and,

Proposal 40: Missouri River - Cow Creek to Beachamp Creek Setlines Limit and Season Length

We support proposals meant to remove regulations that are no longer biologically relevant. Northern pike have not been detected in the East Gallatin River or nearby waterbodies upstream of Toston Dam for nearly 15 years. Therefore, a special regulation is no longer necessary for the East Gallatin or Jefferson rivers, including:

**Proposal 29: Gallatin River Pike Harvest, and,
Proposal 30: Jefferson River Pike Harvest**

We are vehemently opposed to **Proposal 28: East Gallatin River Pike Harvest**.

Firstly, this proposed regulation is misleading as it has nothing to do with northern pike management. Further, although the East Gallatin River has experienced the fastest rate of population growth in Montana, the East Gallatin River is a popular fishery, and it also provides spawning habitat for trout from the Gallatin and upper Missouri rivers; we think strongly that the FWP rationale describing boat vessel hulls impacting spawning trout is misleading and false. The justification that vessel hulls can disturb incubating brown and rainbow trout eggs by scouring trout redds, the relatively narrow width of the East Gallatin increases the likelihood of encountering redds with a boat/vessel hull, and boats/vessels can cause these disturbances over a larger area, potentially disturbing several miles of redds, we think, are ideas from proposed effects of jetboats on spawning salmonids such as salmon and steelhead and these ideas are strongly inappropriately applied to the driftboat and raft floating that occurs on the East Gallatin River.

We think this proposal should be omitted from the list of fishing regulation proposals.

We would further provide an addition proposal to the 2027-2028 fishing regulation proposals.

Proposal: Revised Beaverhead River and Big Hole River Spawning Closure Reaches

Beaverhead River

Page 51 Barretts Diversion to the Mouth Jessen Park Boat Ramp

Big Hole River

Page 53 Brownes Bridge FAS to the Mouth High Road Bridge FAS

Rationale: The Jefferson River begins at the confluence of the Beaverhead and Big Hole rivers near Twin Bridges, Montana. The furthest downstream available boat launch on the Beaverhead River is the Jessen Park Boat Ramp approximately one mile upstream from the confluence of the Jefferson River. The furthest downstream available boat launch on the Big Hole River is the High Road (or Melrose Road) Bridge FAS roughly one mile above the start of the Jefferson River.

About eight years ago there was confusion as to whether commercial users needed a Beaverhead or Big Hole River CUP (Commercial User Permit) when floating the upper Jefferson River launching from the Jessen Park Boat Ramp on the lower Beaverhead River or the High Road Bridge FAS on the lower Big Hole River. The Fish and Wildlife Commission revised the recreation rules and defined that the upper

Jefferson River users did not need a Big Hole or Beaverhead CUP and could launch from either the Jessen Park Boat Ramp on the Beaverhead River or the High Road Bridge FAS on the Big Hole River. Therefore, for commercial users this revision defined the beginning of the Jefferson River NOT at the confluence of the Beaverhead and Big Hole rivers, but at either the High Road Bridge FAS on the Big Hole River OR Jessen Park Boat Ramp on the Beaverhead River.

The seasonal spawning closure regulations implemented on the Beaverhead River extend from Barretts Diversion to the mouth, or confluence with the Big Hole River or start of the Jefferson River. The seasonal spawning closure regulations implemented on the Big Hole River extend from Brownes Bridge FAS to the mouth, or confluence with the Beaverhead River or start of the Jefferson River.

The Fishing Outfitters Association of Montana is a strong proponent of seasonal spawning closures to protect wild trout. Further, we assisted Fish, Wildlife & Parks in defining the spawning closure dates and reaches on the Beaverhead and Big Hole rivers. Currently, there are no spawning closures on the Jefferson River. However, there have been several observations of anglers fishing while floating from the Jessen Park Boat Ramp on the lower Beaverhead River to the Jefferson River during the spawning closures on the Beaverhead River. These anglers, we think, may be fishing these lower one-mile reaches of the Beaverhead and Big Hole rivers confusing the commercial recreation definitions of the Jefferson River with the spawning closure definitions of those rivers.

We think revising the spawning reach definitions for the Beaverhead and Big Hole rivers would alleviate and confusion among anglers as to where the Jefferson River starts and where spawning closures are implemented on these rivers without adversely affecting trout recruitment from either the Beaverhead or Big Hole rivers.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments and your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Michael A. Bias".

Michael A. Bias, Ph.D.
Executive Director