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2 May 2011

Travis Horton, regional fisheries manager
Region 3
Montana FWP
1400 19th Avenue
Bozeman, MT 59718

George Liknes, regional fisheries manager
Region 4
Montana FWP
4600 Giant Springs Road
Great Falls, MT 59405

Re: northern pike suppression in R-3 and R-4

Dear Travis and George:

Montana Trout Unlimited, representing 3,400 conservation-minded anglers in the state, strongly supports FWP's proposal to suppress northern pike in the Missouri River Basin above Holter Dam. Because of the demonstrated value of the existing recreational fishery in the affected waters –representing approximately 25 percent of all angling pressure statewide – it is incumbent on the agency to address the potential threat posed by an expanding population of northern pike.

Amplifying the importance of this proposal are experiences found elsewhere in the state where northern pike populations expanded in both riverine and lentic environments, often to the detriment of desirable introduced or native species. Pike drifting down from the Clearwater chain of lakes into the Blackfoot and Clark Fork systems in the last 20 years established a reproducing population in the Milltown Reservoir, which in turn served as a recruitment source for pike occupying some habitats in the lower and middle reaches of the Clark Fork as well as the lower Bitterroot River. Stomach samples collected by FWP documented pike predation on native salmonids in Milltown Reservoir. Pike radiating from the Clearwater lake chain have become established in side-channels and slower reaches of the Clark Fork, potentially preying on rearing salmonids. It appears, however, recruitment of

northern pike in the Clark Fork system above the Flathead has been hampered since removal of Milltown Dam.

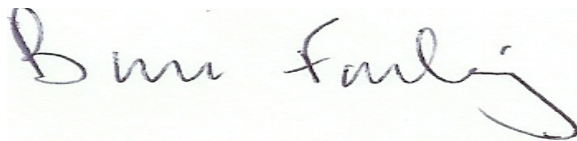
FWP has also documented predation by northern pike on native salmonids and other fishes in the Flathead River system. One bioenergetics study indicates the predation on native salmonids could be substantial (Muhlfeld et al 2008.).

As proposed, the project is relatively cost-effective and targeted. That it can be implemented in concert with standing fieldwork performed by FWP staff makes it even more desirable. However, the EA is unclear on how the suppression effort will advance in increments, especially in the rivers, though it appears the primary target at first will be Toston Reservoir. We assume FWP considers Toston Reservoir to be the largest source - with the Three Forks area perhaps the secondary source -- at this time of pioneering northern pike in the upper Missouri River basin.

Given the relative seasonal predictability of where northern pike occur, as well as the fact that the population still appears to be limited, it seems that coupled with the new angling regulations, the proposed suppression efforts proposed could reduce the pike population to numbers that have a minimal effect on other species. We recommend FWP report annually to the public on the progress of suppression efforts, as well as its estimate of the effect of angler take.

Thanks for the opportunity to support this proposal. If FWP sees a role for TU in this effort, by all means contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bruce Farling". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

Bruce Farling
Executive Director

cc.
Madison-Gallatin Chapter TU
Missouri River Fly Fishers
Pat Barnes - Missouri River Chapter TU
George Grant Chapter TU
Lewis and Clark Chapter TU