



DECISION NOTICE

Bluewater Springs Trout Hatchery New Zealand Mud Snail Barrier Project FWP-CEA-FSH-R9-26-001

2/5/2026

ACTION

Decision Notice (DN). Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) shall prepare a DN for the proposed action. The DN must identify the agency's decision, the reasons for the decision, and any special conditions surrounding the decision or its implementation.

With this action, FWP hereby adopts the Draft Environmental Assessment or Draft EA as final, without modification, and approves Alternative 2, the proposed action.

AUTHORITY: MONTANA ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT

According to the applicable requirements of the Montana Environmental Policy Act or MEPA and its implementing rules and regulations, before a proposed action may be approved, environmental review must be conducted to identify, consider, and disclose any potential impacts of the proposed action on the affected human environment. The level of environmental review will vary with the complexity and seriousness of environmental issues associated with a proposed action. The level of public interest will also vary. The agency is responsible for adjusting public review to match these factors. *Title 75, Chapter 1, Parts 1 through 3, Montana Code Annotated (MCA)*.

Based on these factors, FWP determined a checklist EA (Draft EA) constitutes the appropriate level of review for the proposed action. Therefore, to assess and disclose potential impacts of the proposed action, FWP prepared a Draft EA for public review and comment. See *Public Participation Process* below.

Further, FWP must consider any substantive comments received in response to an EA and proceed in accordance with one of the following steps: determine the EA did not adequately reflect the issues raised by the proposed action and issue an Environmental Impact Statement or EIS; determine the EA did not adequately reflect the issues raised by the proposed action and issue a supplemental EA; or determine the Draft EA adequately addressed the issues raised by the proposed action and make a final decision, with appropriate modification resulting from the analysis provided in the Draft EA and the analysis of any substantive public comments received. See *Public Comment and FWP Response* below.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCESS

The Draft EA was made available for public review and comment from January 19th, 2026, thru February 2nd, 2026. The Draft EA was posted on FWP's Public Notice webpage: <https://fwp.mt.gov/news/public-notice>. The Draft EA was also made available for public review on the Environmental Quality Council or EQC website: <https://leg.mt.gov/mepa/search/>, by individual request, and through notice to identified interested parties. FWP received three comments during the public comment period.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION

FWP is proposing to upgrade infrastructure and install a barrier to prevent invasive New Zealand mud snails (NZMS) from entering the water sources for Bluewater Springs Trout Hatchery in Carbon County. In October 2025, NZMS were detected in a drainage channel that flows out of the Bluewater Spring at the state-owned fish hatchery. Currently, the snails are estimated to be approximately 15 feet from the spring outlet. The water temperature of the spring is consistently 55 degrees which prevents winter kills and provides conditions for the snails to reproduce year-round. If NZMS successfully enter and colonize the spring, water quality and fish reared at the hatchery would be compromised and result in a costly depopulation and decontamination effort.

To prevent the snails from moving into the hatchery system, the proposed project would remove an existing culvert and place a 36-diameter corrugated pipe in the existing overflow channel. Concrete box structures would be installed at either end of the pipe and the existing overflow structures, and piping will be replaced. This project would create two abrupt elevation changes in the water flow creating physical barriers and serve as a biosecurity measure.

FWP is anticipating the construction portion of the project to be contracted with work beginning early in 2026.

PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of this project is to construct a physical barrier to prevent NZMS from entering Bluewater Springs Trout Hatchery's water sources. By rerouting the overflow from Bluewater and Tillet springs from a drainage channel into a pipe allows the channel to dry out and freeze. Desiccation and subsequent freezing would kill any snails above the proposed outlet drop structure. The channel will remain dry to prevent future movement of snails into the springs and hatchery system.

ALTERNATIVES ANALYZED

Alternative 1: No Action

In addition to the proposed action, and as required by MEPA, FWP analyzes the "No-Action" alternative in the EA. Under the No-Action alternative, the proposed action would not occur. Therefore, no additional impacts to the human environment would occur. The No Action alternative forms the baseline from which the potential impacts of the proposed action may be measured.

Under the No Action alternative, a physical barrier would not be constructed and NZMS will continue to migrate, eventually entering the water supply for Bluewater Springs Trout Hatchery. Should the snails enter and colonize the springs, water quality will be compromised and millions of fish reared and held at the hatchery would be negatively affected. This could result in the hatchery's temporary and potentially long-term closure as production and distribution of fish would have to cease because the risk of transporting and

further spreading of invasive NZMS is too high. Consequently, over 1.5 million fish would not be stocked annually in reservoirs and lakes and result in statewide reduced angling opportunities.

Alternative 2: Proposed Action

Under the proposed action FWP would upgrade Bluewater Springs Trout Hatchery's current infrastructure and install new features to prevent NZMS from gaining access to the hatchery's water sources and subsequently the hatchery itself and reared fish.

PUBLIC COMMENT AND FWP RESPONSE

FWP received three supportive public comments about the proposed project. Additionally, during the Draft EA development, FWP staff contacted the Natural Heritage Program about the potential presence of swamp milkweed, a Montana Species of Special Concern, in the project area. As such, on January 13, 2026, a survey conducted by Montana Natural Heritage Program botanists and volunteers identified swamp milk outside the project area. Although this species will likely not be impacted by the proposed project, Montana Natural Heritage Program and FWP hatchery staff will continue to work together to better monitor and protect swamp milkweed.

DECISION

Based on the environmental review provided in the Draft EA, and in accordance with all applicable laws, rules, regulations, and policies, FWP determined the proposed action (Alternative 2), will not have significant adverse impacts on the human environment associated with the proposed action and constitutes a reasonable and appropriate strategy to achieve identified objectives. Therefore, preparation of an EIS is unnecessary. FWP hereby adopts the Draft EA as final and approves Alternative 2, the proposed action.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Adam Stainer', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Adam Stainer
Fisheries Division Administrator
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

