

MEDIA ADVISORY

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Wilderness Watch and allies urge Forest Service to drop poisoning proposal for Scapegoat Wilderness as public opposition grows

Missoula – Today, Wilderness Watch joined fellow Montanans and other wilderness advocates from around the region to urge the Forest Service to reject Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks’ proposal to poison 67 miles of streams and three lakes in the headwaters of the North Fork Blackfoot River in the Scapegoat Wilderness. The State wants to dump the highly-toxic poison Rotenone into these naturally fishless waters in an attempt to kill fish that it planted decades ago, only to restock these waterways with hatchery-raised trout. The State and FS call it a “restoration” project, but in reality, it doesn’t restore any previously existing condition.

Heavy-handed ecosystem modifications are the antithesis of what is called for in Wilderness, which is defined by law as a place “untrammled” by humans, managed to preserve its “natural conditions.” The poisoning and fish-stocking proposal also calls for approximately 100 helicopter flights, and the use of motorboats, pumps and gas-powered generators. Motorized vehicles and equipment are also banned in Wilderness unless they are necessary to accomplish a project that preserves Wilderness, which this one clearly doesn’t.

Rotenone has been shown to kill many of the organisms that derive oxygen from water, including aquatic vertebrates and invertebrates, amphibians and other species that naturally occur in these streams. Research also shows that introducing an alien predator like trout into naturally fishless ecosystems has had a devastating effect on these high-elevation aquatic ecosystems throughout the West.

Despite the size, scope and controversial nature of the proposal, the Forest Service is trying to approve the project through a Categorical Exclusion, which has traditionally been used for simple tasks like painting administrative buildings on the national forests. The agency needs to prepare a comprehensive environmental impact statement, and allow for extensive public comment, in order to consider the direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts of this proposal on Wilderness.

Read comments from Wilderness Watch and 13 other groups on our website: <https://bit.ly/3bD15Ke>