



---

P.O. BOX 7792 MISSOULA, MT 59807 (406) 241-3121  
[www.hellgatehuntersandanglers.org](http://www.hellgatehuntersandanglers.org)

October 28, 2020

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks  
1420 East Sixth Avenue,  
P.O. Box 200701  
Helena, MT 59620-0701

RE: Madison River Management/Rulemaking Process

Montana FWP and Members of the Fish & Wildlife Commission:

Hellgate Hunters & Anglers (HHA) is a local, all volunteer rod and gun club based in Missoula. We represent over 300 local sportsmen and women and appreciate the opportunity to provide input on the proposed rules for much-needed regulations on the Madison River. Our members routinely wade, float, and fish the Madison River and thus have a keen interest in preserving this world-class fishery and the recreational experience that it provides. We appreciate the opportunity to comment on future management options for this iconic river.

From HHA's perspective, regulations on the Madison are long overdue. Beginning in 2003, significant increases in angling pressure have been observed on the Madison River. Over the last four years, the upper Madison River has seen a steep increase in use, doubling from 88,000 to 179,000 angler days. According to annual outfitter reports submitted to FWP, the number of Madison River trips reported by commercial outfitters has increased by 72% since 2008. The overall increase in pressure on the river has created conflict between users and user groups, particularly during key times of the year. As a result, many resident anglers – including our members – have been seasonally or entirely displaced from the Madison River. The levels of use on the Madison will inevitably increase, and it is only a matter of time before the resource itself begins to suffer. In fact, recent FWP data on the declining number of large trout in the Madison indicates that the unsustainable level of use may have already begun to impact the resource. This outcome is unacceptable.

We appreciate the Department's attention to the concerns of the public and the best available science. HHA and our members believe that common sense regulations on commercial use (similar to the regulations already in place on the Big Hole, Beaverhead and Bitterroot Rivers) are the best way to alleviate negative impacts caused by unmitigated use. This includes a rest-and-rotation system that closes one stretch of river each day to commercial outfitting. As history has shown, the regulations in place on some of Montana's most iconic, blue-ribbon streams have benefitted both the resource and the experience of those that are using them without any

significant impact to commercial use or the businesses that rely on visiting anglers. As such, HHA supports the adoption of New Rules 1 through 4, as well as New Rule 16.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to comment and for your efforts to protect the Madison River.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Walker Conyngham". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Walker" being more legible than the last name "Conyngham".

Walker Conyngham,  
President, Hellgate Hunters & Anglers