

***Supplemental Information on
Draft Environmental Assessment for Centennial Valley Arctic Grayling***

- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service); in partnership with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MTFWP); is evaluating alternatives to improve winter habitat for Arctic grayling (grayling) in Upper Red Rock Lake (URRL) on Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge).
- The agencies request public input on a draft Environmental Assessment under the National Environmental Policy Act and the Montana Environmental Policy Act, respectively.

Environmental Assessment

- The draft Environmental Assessment evaluates six alternatives to increase dissolved oxygen levels in URRL to improve winter habitat for grayling:
 1. No-action
 2. Electricity powered splasher or diffuser aeration
 3. Electric generators and pumped aeration
 4. Shambow Pond diversion pipeline
 5. Permanent barrier from Elk Springs Creek to the center of URRL
 6. Dredge and berm Elk Springs Creek
- Construction on any of the alternatives would take place in summer 2023 due to weather conditions.
- All alternatives include measures to avoid and reduce any negative impacts such as seasonal wildlife breeding avoidance, invasive plant control, and some level of restoration.
- The Service expects to make a decision on an alternative during Spring 2023.
- A paper copy of the draft Environmental Assessment is available upon request at the Refuge.
- A digital copy of the draft Environmental Assessment is available at: <https://www.fws.gov/refuge/red-rock-lakes>

Centennial Valley Arctic Grayling

- One of the last populations of indigenous Upper Missouri River grayling resides in Montana's Centennial Valley (CV).
- Grayling numbers in the CV have experienced a long-term decline, leading to concerns about persistence of the population.
- The CV grayling population is a unique, endemic population that still expresses the full spectrum of life history behaviors found in historical grayling populations. The population also still possesses relatively high and stable genetic diversity.
- The CV grayling population is part of an unlisted Distinct Population Segment (DPS) under the Endangered Species Act. The DPS includes 19 known grayling populations.
- Most of the CV grayling population use URRL on the Refuge as winter habitat. Streams above and below the URRL are used for spawning.
- In 2022, the estimated number of grayling in the 2022 spawning population was 73, nearly unchanged from 2021.

Collaborative Solutions

- Over the past 10 years, a team consisting of FWS, MTFWP, Montana Trout Unlimited (TU), and other partners have been collaborating on solutions to reverse the CV grayling population decline.
- The Centennial Valley Arctic Grayling Adaptive Management Plan identifies the most effective management strategies to maintain at least 1000 spawning fish in the CV grayling population.
- Competition with non-native hybrid Yellowstone cutthroat-Rainbow trout, limited access to spawning habitat, and poor quality and quantity of winter habitat were identified as the three most likely factors that could limit long-term viability of CV grayling. A series of adaptive management experiments have indicated winter habitat is the biggest limiting factor of these three.
- Addressing winter habitat involves action in URRL which is within designated wilderness.
- FWS, MTFWP, and TU recently conducted a Structured Decision Making (SDM) process to guide the development of alternatives, inform the draft EA, and ultimately assist in selecting a final alternative to improve winter habitat in URRL.
- MTFWP is also using the draft EA to fulfill requirements of their Montana Environmental Policy Act.
- Due to the small number of remaining CV grayling, the FWS, MTFWP, and TU, are urgently working toward having a solution in place for late fall/winter 2024.

Next Steps

- Next steps include:
 - reviewing public comments and updating the EA based on those comments
 - making a decision on an alternative based on the SDM report and final EA
 - awarding a contract (if applicable); and implementing a solution.
- Implementing a solution can be a lengthy process. Contracting for the selected alternative may begin once the Decision Notice has been issued and consists of two parts- contracting for Project Design and contracting for Project Construction.
 - For most alternatives, a Project Design will be advertised to engineering firms. Awarding the bid typically requires a site visit to understand conditions and create bid packages for the agency to review.
 - The selected firm must then begin the design and package of construction documents.
 - With a final Design in hand, the agency can then put the project out to bid for construction.
 - This will require another bid and award process.
 - Once a contract is awarded, the selected company will need to acquire supplies and then may begin construction of the project.
 - The entire process is expected to take between three and six months, depending on the project scope, size, and contractor availability.