



Rattlesnake Wilderness Dams Public Informational Forum

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENT

SUMMARY

On April 7, 2021, City staff from the Public Works & Mobility and Parks & Recreation departments, Trout Unlimited, U.S. Forest Service, and Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks held an informational public forum presentation webinar to provide a brief introduction to the Rattlesnake Wilderness lakes and dams, what's currently known about them, and some of the future options for managing these dams moving forward. A public survey was developed and posted on the Engage Missoula website following the webinar to solicit preliminary public feedback on the wilderness lakes and dams. The survey was available for 3 weeks following the webinar. Since no specific actions or planned activities have been formulated at this point, the purpose of the survey was to gather some initial information about the attitudes and interests of survey participants as they relate to certain aspects of the project. The following summarizes the survey results.

SURVEY PARTICIPATION

The online survey was open to public input from April 7, 2021, through April 30, 2021. During that time, 70 participants submitted responses to the survey.

SURVEY SYNOPSIS, CLOSE-ENDED QUESTIONS

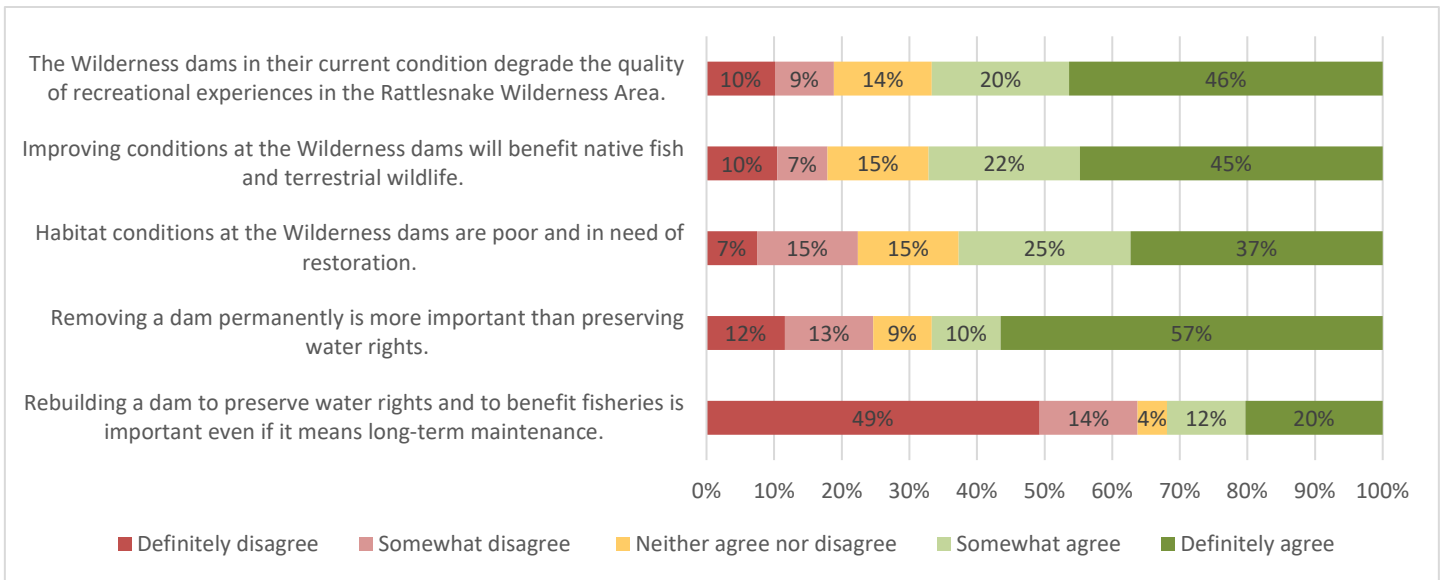
Question 1: Please rank the project goals from 1 to 5, with 1 being your top priority goal.

68 responses, 2 skipped

OPTIONS	AVG. RANK
WATERSHED: Decommission and/or rehabilitate dams to provide maximum public and environmental benefit.	1.55
BALANCE: Balance the restoration of wilderness character with the need to reduce capital and maintenance costs and preserve historical elements.	2.5
EFFICIENCY: Reduce and/or eliminate Missoula Water's costs of operation and maintenance for the wilderness dams.	3.33
WATER RIGHTS: Maintain and/or modify Missoula Water's existing water rights stored in the eight lakes to protect against non-use or abandonment.	3.61
SAFETY: Reduce dam safety hazards and satisfy regulatory agency requirements.	3.8

Question 3: Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

69 responses, 1 skipped



SURVEY SYNOPSIS, OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

Comments and responses to open-ended questions were analyzed both for the underlying interests or motivations of survey respondents and for specific actions or position statements about the wilderness dams. Because no actions or proposed actions have been determined at this early stage of the project, project partners are especially interested in the underlying motivations, reasons, or interests of survey participants in regards to their perspectives on wilderness dams. Understanding the various interests and motivations of the public will help project partners craft various options for managing the wilderness dams. Survey respondents also commented on the specific actions they desire to see or the positions they hold regarding the Rattlesnake Wilderness dams issue. Both the interests and positions of respondents are summarized below, grouped by common themes.

Common Themes of Respondent Interests	Number of Comments
Honor, preserve, and or restore the wild character of the rattlesnake headwater lakes and creek drainage	23
Maintain adequate flows in rattlesnake creek to support healthy fisheries and riparian habitat	8
Improve the natural and wild conditions of the wilderness lakes while minimize impacts	7
Ensure ecological integrity and function of the wilderness lakes and rattlesnake creek	7
Recognize the value of the stored water rights associated with the wilderness lakes	5
Improve habitat conditions for native trout including the threatened bull trout	5
Consider the recreational opportunities and values associated with the lakes and creek	4
Consider the impact of a changing climate and ways to promote climate resiliency	3
Ensure there are ample opportunities for public involvement	2
Use monitoring and evaluation to adaptively manage the wilderness lakes and any action that is taken	1
Consider how the wilderness lakes contribute to water quality within the rattlesnake watershed	1
Consider options that reduce cost to Missoula Water rate-payers	1

Common Themes of Respondent Position Statements	Number of Comments
Remove all wilderness dams and return lakes to their natural levels	26
Decommission all roads and remove all motorized access into the Recreation Area past Franklin Bridge	16
All work in the Wilderness should be done without the use of mechanized tools	10
Transfer existing storage water rights to groundwater rights that can continue to be used by Missoula Water for Missoula citizens	7
Rehabilitate the larger lakes to maintain storage and decommission and restore the smaller lakes	3
The creek and its healthy riparian habitat should be the number one priority	2
Leave the lakes undisturbed	2
Any restoration of the lakes should include full active restoration of the lake shore that will be exposed after lake levels drop	1
The reported benefits to fish are speculative and therefore should not hold weight in the management decision	1
Let natural processes degrade the dams and don't incur additional costs to rehab or restore them	1
Eliminate the exotic trout species currently in the lakes and replace them with native trout	1

SURVEY SYNOPSIS, QUESTIONS THAT STILL NEED ANSWERED

Finally, survey respondents also identified key questions that they feel still need to be answered as the Project Team considers options for managing these wilderness dams. The following table summarizes these questions, grouped by common themes.

Common Themes of Respondent Questions	Number of Comments
How can the work be done in a way that meets the intention of the Wilderness Act?	13
What will the lakes be restored to? Do we know what the pre-dam conditions of these lakes are? Will fish be maintained in these historically fishless lakes?	5
How will the project incorporate future climate modeling and population increases into the decision-making framework?	5
How will the long-term maintenance of any infrastructure that remains or is rehabilitated be weighed in the decision?	3
What impacts will occur to fisheries from any proposed action, both in the creek and in the lakes?	3
What is the feasibility of releasing cold water from these storage lakes? It is feasible from an engineering and economical viewpoint to have a significant impact on the flow and temperature of water in rattlesnake creek?	2
What are the public recreation values at play? How are the lakes currently used and what impacts will proposed actions have on recreational opportunities and experiences?	2
What are the hydrological factors at play? How will actions at one lake impact the hydrology/ecology of another lake lower in the same drainage?	2
How will the project incorporate adaptive management, incremental actions, and monitoring of results into the plan?	2

What will happen if we do nothing? Can we leave the dams alone to let natural forces remove them over time?	1
How can disturbance be minimized to the fullest extent possible?	1
What options exist for managing the water rights associated with the dams?	1
How will the project involve tribal nations in the decision-making process?	1

ATTACHMENTS

1. [Full Survey Results including all Comments](#)