



BIG HOLE RIVER DROUGHT MANAGEMENT PLAN VERSION 2026 QUICK REFERENCE

SECTION	FLOW TRIGGERS, APR 1 – OCT 31	TEMPERATURE TRIGGERS
I: Saginaw Bridge on Skinner Meadows Road to North Fork Big Hole River mouth	160 cfs - April 1 to June 30 target for Arctic grayling spawning. 60 cfs – Prepare for Conservation 40 cfs – Conservation 20 cfs – MFWP River Closure Measured at USGS Wisdom Gage (06024450)	<p>Step 1: MFWP Hoot-Owl Fishing Restrictions: Hoot-owl fishing restriction will be in place when daily maximum water temperature reaches or exceeds 73° F (23° C) for at least some period of time during three consecutive days. Hoot-owl fishing closure prohibits fishing between the hours of 2:00 p.m. and 12:00 a.m. (Midnight). They will remain in place until re-opening criteria are met.</p> <p>Step 2: MFWP River Closure Due to High Temperatures: River closure based on water temperature may be implemented if hoot-owl restrictions are inadequate to protect the fishery (e.g., prolonged period where water temperatures exceed 73° F and forecasts are not favorable for cooler temperature, thermal stress in fish observed by biologist, etc.). Closure will remain in place until re-opening criteria are met. <i>Section temperature measured at flow gages (left).</i></p> <p>Current Waterbody Restrictions</p> <p>Current Fishing Regulations</p>
II: North Fork Big Hole River mouth to Dickie Bridge	450 cfs - April 1 to June 30 target for Arctic grayling spawning. 170 cfs – Prepare for Conservation 140 cfs – Conservation 100 cfs – MFWP River Closure Measured at DNRC Big Hole River near Wise River Gage (41D 08000)	
III: Dickie Bridge to MFWP Maiden Rock FAS	250 cfs – Prepare for Conservation 200 cfs – Conservation 150 cfs – MFWP River Closure* Measured at USGS Maiden Rock Gage (06025250)	
IV: MFWP Maiden Rock FAS to Tony Schoonen FAS	250 cfs – Prepare for Conservation 200 cfs – Conservation 150 cfs – MFWP River Closure* Measured at LOWEST of USGS Glen Gage (06026210) or Melrose Gage (0602550)	
V: Tony Schoonen FAS to confluence with Jefferson River	200 cfs – Prepare for Conservation 150 cfs – Conservation 100 cfs – MFWP River Closure Measured at USGS Big Hole River below Hamilton Ditch near Twin Bridges Gage (06026420)	

*Section III will close to fishing when Section IV reaches closure criteria for streamflow OR water temperature AND trout populations are below objective (below 25th percentile as determined by MFWP).

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VOLUNTARY CONSERVATION MEASURES FOR ANGLERS DURING PERIODS OF DROUGHT AND SPAWNING

The following are voluntary actions anglers can take to protect the Big Hole River fishery during periods of drought:

- ❖ Use a stream thermometer when you fish, available at your local fly shop. Water temperatures change throughout the day with the coldest water occurring in the early morning. Take the temperature frequently throughout the day and when water temperatures rise above 67F, stop fishing.
- ❖ Always keep fish wet and release them quickly.
- ❖ Use heavier tippet and land fish quickly. Prolonged fight times in warm water place a high amount of stress on the fish and increase hooking mortality.
- ❖ Consider exploring high mountain streams and mountain lakes, where water temperatures stay cooler and give the river fish a break.
- ❖ Consider taking a break from fishing during hot weather and find other ways to enjoy the Montana outdoors.

The following are voluntary actions anglers can take to protect the Big Hole River fishery during periods of spawning:

- ❖ Choose to fish elsewhere if you can, or for a different species.
- ❖ Don't walk or fish in areas with clean gravels (redds).
- ❖ Don't use flies, lures, or bait that resemble fish eggs, including glo-bugs, egg flies, florescent colored scuds, or beads.
- ❖ Educate yourself. Learn what a redd (fish nest) looks like and how to avoid them.
- ❖ Use polarized glasses so you can see areas where fish are spawning.
- ❖ Use extra caution when wading through tailouts and shallow riffles, as these are where brown trout spawn, and they are common areas at which to ford the river.

BIG HOLE RIVER FISHING REGULATIONS

Trout abundances in the Big Hole River have steadily declined since 2011 and are at or near historical lows. Meanwhile, fishing pressure has increased. The Montana Fish and Wildlife Commission adopted these emergency fishing regulations on June 8, 2023 to be responsive to fish populations in accordance with Montana's draft statewide fisheries management plan.

- ❖ Entire river: Catch-and-release for Arctic grayling
 - Headwaters to Dickie Bridge: Combined trout: five daily and in possession
- ❖ Dickie Bridge to Brownes Bridge: Open April 1 through September 30
 - Catch-and-release only
 - Artificial lures only
- ❖ Brownes Bridge to mouth: Open April 1 through September 30
 - Catch-and-release only

For more information about fishing regulations or waterbody closures, visit fwp.mt.gov/fish.