

Comments sought on state AIS funding

Whitefish Pilot

Potential funding options for Montana's Aquatic Invasive Species Program were presented at a recent meeting of the Upper Columbia Conservation Commission (UC3) at the Flathead Lake Biological Station on Flathead Lake.

Hope Stockwell, a research analyst for the Legislative Services Division presented the Environmental Quality Council's current proposal to continue funding the state's AIS Program. Currently, the \$6.5 million program is funded by a mixture of hydroelectric fees and an angler "prevention pass," though this is being re-evaluated for the 2019 Legislative session.

"While the UC3 is not making a recommendation regarding funding at this time, we encourage stakeholders and citizens with an interest in the AIS funding mechanism to provide input on this important issue," says Lori Curtis, Chair of the UC3.

The EQC is currently proposing to take the hydroelectric fee out of the budget, make slight adjustments to the angler "prevention pass" by

decreasing the non-resident fee by half, bringing it to \$7.50 per license; adding a watercraft decal user fee for \$25 resident motorized, \$60 non-resident motorized and \$10 all non-motorized; and an annual general fund appropriation.

Under this new proposal, the breakdown to reach \$6.5 million includes: angler "prevention pass" of \$2.07 million, watercraft fee for resident motorized of \$1.7 million, general fund (statutory appropriation) of \$1.16 million, watercraft fee non-motorized of \$640,000, motorized watercraft generated gas tax of \$500,000, watercraft fee for non-resident motorized of \$386,000, and the commercial watercraft fee of \$100 per year amount is still to be determined.

The EQC will be accepting public comment on the proposed funding package until Monday, July 9. It will review comments at its July meeting as it considers whether to move this concept forward for consideration by the full Legislature in 2019.

Send comments to: Legislative Services Division, Attn: Hope Stockwell, P.O. Box

201704, Helena, MT 59620 or hstockwell@mt.gov (include "AIS funding proposal" in the subject line).