OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
STATE OF MONTANA

GREG GIANFORTE
GOVERNOR

KRISTEN JURAS
LT. GOVERNOR

June 19, 2023

Craig and Wade Fellin
Big Hole Lodge
36894 Pioneer Mountains Scenic Byway
Wise River, MT 59762

Dear Craig and Wade:

I appreciate the recent letter from you and other business owners, guides, and community members regarding the conditions of rivers in the Jefferson Basin. I share your concerns, and have directed Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) to continue leading the state's response.

Montana's prized rivers and waterways, including rivers in the Jefferson Basin, define our way of life and support the livelihoods of thousands of Montanans. To promote the health of these rivers and the fisheries they support, FWP annually conducts sampling for fish health, monitors flows and temperatures, and publishes fish counts.

Furthermore, the department recently partnered with the U.S. Geological Survey to conduct an exhaustive review of fish populations and stream flows across time in Montana. The study confirmed what we know to be true: low stream flows and warm water temperatures contribute to trout population declines. To minimize stress on fish impacted by these conditions, FWP considers angling restrictions.

Recently, fish counts on rivers in the Jefferson Basin reached alarming new lows after declining over the last decade. FWP's regional biologists have sampled trout for unusual diseases, with test results coming back normal. The department is also working to process histological samples. With many questions still unanswered, we are in agreement – we must investigate the population decline over the last decade and develop solutions.

At my direction, on June 6, 2023, FWP announced new efforts to research and monitor trout population declines in the Jefferson Basin to better inform the state's strategies and response. FWP also proposed temporary angling restrictions on the Big Hole, Beaverhead, and Ruby Rivers to the Fish and Wildlife Commission, which the commission then adopted.

On June 7, 2023, FWP Director Dustin Temple sat down with you and other business owners and guides in Butte to discuss the issue. In response to that meeting, and in coordination with FWP biologists, FWP has prioritized and will develop and implement additional fish population and

health studies on the Big Hole, Beaverhead, and Ruby Rivers and monitor angler use on the Madison and Gallatin Rivers. These efforts will initiate data gathering and will include additional FWP staff, including creel clerks, as well as Montana State University professors and graduate students.

Where opportunities and partnerships allow, the Future Fisheries Improvement Program and the state's other existing habitat programs may also be used to respond to this crisis.

While FWP will continue to lead the state's response, no one entity can solve this problem alone. Please continue to stay engaged and provide feedback and specific recommendations to Quentin Kujala, Chief of Conservation Policy for FWP, at qkujala@mt.gov or 444-3196.

Thank you again for reaching out to me. Together, we will work to protect fisheries in the Jefferson Basin.

Sincerely,

Greg Gianforte
Governor

cc: Dustin Temple, Director of Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Quentin Kujala, Chief of Conservation Policy for Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks