

COLORADO PARKS AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION POLICY

**TITLE: THE STOCKING AND USE OF FISH TESTED POSITIVE FOR OR EXPOSED TO
THE WHIRLING DISEASE PARASITE *MYXOBOLUS CEREBRALIS***

Effective Date: June 6, 2019

I. PURPOSE

The Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission recognizes its responsibility to preserve, protect and maintain the native and sportfish coldwater resources of the State for the use, enjoyment and benefit of the people of Colorado and its visitors. The possible incidence of the Whirling Disease (WD) parasite, *Myxobolus cerebralis*, in fish which are produced and stocked by Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) and private salmonid fish culture facilities requires that the Commission give clear guidance as to the proper use of those fish in enhancing the State's coldwater fishing opportunities. Research strongly suggests that the stocking of WD exposed fish into salmonid habitats has resulted in increased levels of WD spores in previously exposed waters. The Commission intends that any fish stocking or fish management program, public or private, should strive to protect Colorado's aquatic resources and fish populations from destructive diseases or parasites.

II. AUTHORITY

- A. C.R.S. § 33-1-101 Legislative Declaration. (1) "It is the policy of the state of Colorado that the wildlife and their environment are to be protected, preserved, enhanced, and managed for the use, benefit, and enjoyment of the people of this state and its visitors. "
- B. C.R.S. § 33-1-105 (d) authorizes the Commission to control the capture, propagation or transport of any species of wildlife needed for the purpose of stocking the lands and waters of the state; C.R.S. § 33-1-106 (c) further authorizes the Commission to control export, import, release, possession and transfer of wildlife.

III. POLICY STATEMENT

It shall be the policy of the Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission that the primary objective of CPW and others interested in stocking fish is the protection of the health of the aquatic resources of the state when the stocking of fish exposed to the WD parasite is considered.

IV. IMPLEMENTATION

This policy on the use of fish exposed to the whirling disease parasite is intended to be part of fishery and aquatic management, angler education, and hatchery management efforts to prevent the expansion of the parasite. It is further intended that CPW seek to eliminate, where possible, or greatly reduce the WD spore levels at CPW-owned hatcheries. The Commission recognizes that there are waters currently

containing fish populations with the parasite and that WD will likely be present in these waters in perpetuity. It is the Commission's intent to decrease background spore levels by precluding continued stocking of WD positive fish into self-recruiting salmonid habitat including standing water upstream of habitat that supports natural reproduction of salmonids.

The Commission recognizes that the use of hatchery-reared fish is currently, and will continue to be a major component of CPW's and private aquaculture's overall program of managing fishery resources to provide angling recreation. This policy is intended to give direction for development of stocking guidelines for only those fish exposed to or infected by the WD parasite. A goal of CPW will be to reduce the incidence and level of infectivity of whirling disease on positive salmonid fish culture facilities and to conduct appropriate testing of all state and private fish to be stocked. CPW will also pursue reasonable methods to reduce levels of infectivity in previously exposed habitats.

CPW will strive toward the objective of eliminating the stocking of WD positive fish in habitat that is capable of supporting self-reproducing salmonid populations including standing water above salmonid habitat. CPW is directed to maintain rules and regulations to prohibit private parties from stocking WD positive fish in such habitat. The Director shall have the authority to allow fish to be raised or stocked in coldwater aquatic habitat where such activity will not conflict with the objective of this policy, subject to the rules and regulations defining criteria for such exemptions, including but not limited to, the development and use of WD management plans.

The Commission expressly acknowledges that the cessation of stocking of WD positive fish in salmonid habitat will have a detrimental impact on private aquaculturists and may have a short- term negative impact on anglers and local economies. WD-resistant salmonids shall be used, where feasible and biologically justified, to augment the populations of salmonids throughout the state.

To comply with this policy, CPW is directed to support and encourage continued research on WD in Colorado. Such research shall include, at a minimum, the contribution of habitat on the WD spore levels, the possible immune response in exposed salmonids and the identification of species and strains that show resistance to clinical symptoms of WD, and management strategies to minimize WD spore levels in positive hatcheries and wild salmonid populations. In addition, CPW is directed to monitor research from other states and the biological relevance of any such research in Colorado. Fish tested positive for, or exposed to, the WD parasite on positive salmonid fish culture facilities may be used to provide recreational fishing opportunity in WD exposed waters that do not pose a threat to self-reproducing populations of salmonids or other aquatic species.

This policy will be re-evaluated when research or other information materially modifies the current assumptions regarding WD.