

March 15, 2004
1420 East 6th Ave.
P.O. Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620-0701

Environmental Quality Council
Montana Department of Environmental Quality
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Fisheries Division
Endangered Species Coordinator
Missoula Office

Montana State Library, Helena
MT Environmental Information Center
Montana Audubon Council
Missoula County Conservation District, 3550 Mullan Road, Suite 106, Missoula, MT 59808
U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Helena
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Helena
State Historic Preservation Office, Helena
Montana Trout, Inc., P.O. Box 8871, Missoula, MT 59807
Missoula Department of Parks and Recreation, 100 Hickory, Missoula, MT 59801

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Please find enclosed an Environmental Assessment (EA) prepared for the Future Fisheries Improvement Program. The Program tentatively plans to provide partial funding to a project calling for the re-naturalization of 370 feet of Pattee Creek within two Missoula city parks. This proposed project is located in Elms and Lester parks within the city limits of Missoula in Missoula County.

Please submit any comments that you have by 5:00 P.M., April 15, 2004 to the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks in Helena at the address listed above. Completion of this project is contingent upon approval being granted by the Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at (406) 444-2432. Please note that this draft EA will be considered as final if no substantive comments are received by the deadline listed above.

Sincerely,

Mark Lere, Program Officer
Habitat Protection Bureau
Fisheries Division
e-mail: mlere@state.mt.us

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
Fisheries Division
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Pattee Creek Channel Re-naturalization Project

General Purpose: The 1995 Montana Legislature enacted statute 87-1-272 through 273 that directs the Department to administer a Future Fisheries Improvement Program. The program involves physical projects to restore degraded fish habitat in rivers and lakes for the purpose of improving wild fisheries. The legislature established an earmarked funding account to help accomplish this goal. The Future Fisheries Improvement Program is proposing to provide partial funding for a project calling for the re-naturalization of 370 feet of Pattee Creek within two Missoula city parks. The project site is located in Elms and Lester parks within the city limits of Missoula in Missoula County (Attachment 1).

I. Location of Project: This project will be conducted on Pattee Creek located along two Missoula city parks (Elms and Lester) within Township 12 North, Range 19 West, Section 33 in Missoula County.

II. Need for the Project: One goal within Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks six year operations plan for the fisheries program is to “restore and enhance degraded habitats” by implementing habitat restoration projects and administering the Future Fisheries Improvement Program to restore important habitats on public and private lands. This proposed project may help met this goal. Pattee Creek was channelized through much of Missoula decades ago for flood control, leaving a straightened channel that supports little biological diversity. A larger flood control project is now nearing completion resulting in the elimination of annual flooding problems associated with the stream. This present flood control project will create sustained, controlled low flows with the reaches of Pattee Creek selected for this proposal. These controlled flows eliminate potential flooding problems within a residential area and allow the proposed channel re-naturalization work to occur.

III. Scope of the Project:

The project proposes to restore the dimension, pattern and profile of approximately 370 feet of straightened channel on Pattee Creek along Elms and Lester city parks. The proposal calls for restoring channel sinuosity and pool-riffle periodicity, as well as replacing non-native riparian vegetation with native riparian vegetation. The intent of the project is to create an educational opportunity to demonstrate natural stream function, enhance angling opportunity for youth and improve habitat for native fish species. This project is expected to cost \$11,601.00. Of this total, the Future Fisheries Improvement Program would be contributing up to \$4,872.00.

IV. Environmental Impact Checklist:

Please see attached checklist.

V. Explanation of Impacts to the Physical Environment

1. Terrestrial and aquatic life and habitats.

Re-naturalizing approximately 370 feet of Pattee Creek is expected to create healthier habitat for

aquatic life. Habitat for riparian dependent wildlife also would be locally improved by converting vegetation within the riparian corridor to a native assemblage.

2. Water quantity, quality and distribution.

Short-term increases in turbidity will occur during project construction. To minimize turbidity, construction will occur during a low flow period and operation of equipment in the stream channel will be minimized to the extent practicable. The Department of Environmental Quality will be contacted to determine narrative conditions required to meet short-term water quality standards and protect aquatic biota. A 310 permit (Natural Streambed and Land Preservation Act) will be obtained from the local conservation district and the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers will be contacted to determine the requirements needed to meet the federal Clean Water Act.

3. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture.

Soils along the stream margin would be disturbed during channel construction, but would quickly stabilize following proposed re-vegetation efforts.

4. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality.

Riparian vegetation and cover would be disturbed during the period of construction. However, the proposed conversion to a native species assemblage would act to mitigate these disturbances.

5. Aesthetics.

Aesthetics would be negatively impacted during project construction due to ground disturbance and the presence of heavy equipment. In the long term, aesthetics would be improved by re-naturalizing straightened sections of Pattee Creek within Elms and Lester Parks.

6. Unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources.

Pattee Creek supports genetically pure westslope cutthroat trout, a species of special concern in Montana. The re-naturalization of straightened reaches of Pattee Creek along Elms and Lester parks will enhance habitat diversity and is expected to improve the westslope cutthroat trout population in a localized area.

7. Historic and archaeological sites

This reach of Pattee Creek has been previously disturbed by channelization and by the construction of adjacent residences. As a result, there is a very low likelihood that cultural properties will be impacted as a result of the proposed project. Should cultural materials be inadvertently discovered during the project, the State Historic Preservation Office will be contacted and the site will be investigated.

VI. Explanation of Impacts on the Human Environment.

1. Access to & quality of recreational activities.

The re-naturalization of this short reach of Pattee Creek would be expected to attract fish and improve fishing opportunities in a localized area.

VII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

1. No Action Alternative

If no action is taken, this straightened reach of Pattee Creek will continue to lack biological diversity and educational opportunities to demonstrate natural stream function will be lost.

2. The Proposed Alternative

The proposed alternative is designed to re-naturalize a straightened portion of Pattee Creek along Elms and Lester Parks to create additional biological diversity and provide an educational opportunity to display how a natural stream channel functions.

VIII. Environmental Assessment Conclusion Section

1. Is an EIS required? No.

We conclude from this review that the proposed activities will have a positive impact on the physical and human environment.

2. Level of public involvement.

The proposed project was reviewed and supported by the public review panel of the Future Fisheries Improvement Program. The proposed project also will be reviewed by the Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission and will be contingent upon their approval. Additionally, Montana Trout, Inc. has presented the project at two neighborhood council meetings and conducted a house-to-house survey in the immediate area of the proposed project. The Environmental Assessment (EA) is being distributed to all individuals and groups listed on the cover letter. The EA also will be published on Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks webpage: fwp.state.mt.us.

3. Duration of comment period?

Public comment will be accepted through 5:00 PM on April 15, 2004.

4. Person responsible for preparing the EA.

Mark Lere, Program Officer
Habitat Protection Bureau

Fisheries Division
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
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Helena, MT 59620
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MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF FISH, WILDLIFE AND PARKS
 1420 E 6th Ave, PO BOX 200701, Helena, MT 59620-0701
 (406) 444-2535

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Title Pattee Creek Channel Re-naturalization Project

Division/Bureau Fisheries Division -Future Fisheries Improvement

Description of Project The Future Fisheries Improvement Program is proposing to provide partial funding to a project calling for the re-naturalization of straightened reaches of Pattee Creek within two Missoula city parks. The project site is located at Elms and Lester parks within the city limits of Missoula in Missoula County.

POTENTIAL IMPACT ON PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

	MAJOR	MODERATE	MINOR	NONE	UNKNOWN	COMMENTS ON ATTACHED PAGES
1. Terrestrial & aquatic life and habitats			X			X
2. Water quality, quantity & distribution			X			X
3. Geology & soil quality, stability & moisture			X			X
4. Vegetation cover, quantity & quality			X			X
5. Aesthetics			X			X
6. Air quality				X		
7. Unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources			X			X
8. Demands on environmental resources of land, water, air & energy				X		
9. Historical & archaeological sites				X		X

POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

	MAJOR	MODERATE	MINOR	NONE	UNKNOWN	COMMENTS ON ATTACHED PAGES
1. Social structures & mores				X		
2. Cultural uniqueness & diversity				X		
3. Local & state tax base & tax revenue				X		
4. Agricultural or industrial production				X		
5. Human health				X		
6. Quantity & distribution of community & personal income				X		
7. Access to & quality of recreational and wilderness activities			X			X
8. Quantity & distribution of employment				X		
9. Distribution & density of population & housing				X		
10. Demands for government services				X		
11. Industrial & commercial activity				X		
12. Demands for energy				X		
13. Locally adopted environmental plans & goals				X		
14. Transportation networks & traffic flows				X		

Other groups or agencies contacted or which may have overlapping jurisdiction Missoula County Conservation District, City of Missoula, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Army Corp of Engineers, Montana Department of Environmental Quality, State Historic Preservation Office
 Individuals or groups contributing to this EA Montana Trout, Inc.
 Recommendation concerning preparation of EIS No EIS required.
 EA prepared by: Mark Lere
 Date: March 3, 2004