

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
Bozeman Office

Montana State Library, Helena
MT Environmental Information Center
Montana Audubon Council
Broadwater Conservation District, 415 S. Front Street, Townsend, MT 59644
U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Helena
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Helena
State Historic Preservation Office, Helena
Hydrotech Water Resource Consultants, 2031 11th Avenue, Suite 211, Helena, MT 59601
Don and Charlotte Lewis, 8 Litening Barn Road, Townsend, MT 59644
Frank and Leisa McArthur, 574 Lower Deep Creek Road, Townsend, MT 59644
Pat Antonick, 726 Lower Deep Creek Road, Townsend, MT 59644
Rob Dagnall, 48 Clopton Lane, Townsend, MT 59644
Jim and Amanda Domino, 43 Clopton Lane, Townsend, MT 59644

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Please find enclosed an Environmental Assessment prepared for the Future Fisheries Improvement Program. The Program tentatively plans to provide partial funding for a project designed to repair and protect a series of bank stabilization efforts on Deep Creek that originally were completed in 1996 and 1997 as part of the Deep Creek Watershed Restoration Project. This proposed project is located on properties owned by six separate landowners approximately 5 miles southeast of the community of Townsend in Broadwater 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.

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
Deep Creek Bank Stabilization Repair 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 designed 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 repair or prevention of damage on 54 separate bank stabilization sites that were originally treated in 1996 and 1997 as part of Deep Creek watershed restoration project. A total of approximately 1,300 feet of eroding or threatened stream bank on Deep Creek will be treated using a variety of methods. To repair or maintain stable banks at these 54 sites, the work calls for re-sloping eroding banks, re-establishing proper channel width and slope, planting grass seed and riparian shrubs, installing erosion control cloth and re-installing juniper revetment where necessary. The project sites are located on properties owned by six separate landowners approximately 5 miles southeast of the town of Townsend in Broadwater County (Attachment 1).

I. Location of Project: This project will be conducted on Deep Creek located approximately 5 miles southeast of the town of Townsend in Broadwater County. The reach of stream starts downstream at the U.S. Highway 287 bridge (Township 6 N, Range 2 E, Section 8) and proceeds upstream approximately 8 miles to Township 7 N, Range 3 E, Section 36.

II. Need for the Project: One goal within Montana Department of 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 would help meet this goal.

Deep Creek has been the past focus of a local watershed restoration effort involving the Clean Water Act Section 319 Program and the Future Fisheries Improvement Program. Bank stabilization and riparian restoration work conducted between 1996 and 1998 on 176 separate sites were directed at improving water quality and enhancing fisheries habitat in the stream. However, isolated livestock damage, poor riparian vegetation establishment, changes in channel morphology and channel alterations caused by beaver activity have caused failure or threaten to cause failure at 54 of these stabilized sites. This proposed project would serve to reduce or prevent further damage to these past restoration efforts.

III. Scope of the Project:

The project proposes to restore and protect a series of 56 stream bank reaches on Deep Creek that were treated in the past as part of the Deep Creek Watershed Project. Treatment at each site would vary but proposed treatments include re-sloping eroding stream banks to a stable angle of repose, re-establishing channel width and slope, sowing grass seed and planting shrubs, installing erosion control cloth and re-installing juniper revetment (Attachment 2). The length of stream bank proposed for maintenance work totals approximately 1,300 feet. This project is expected to cost \$33,687.00. Of this total, the Future Fisheries Improvement Program would be contributing up to \$12,000.00.

IV. Environmental Impact Checklist:

Please see attached checklist.

V. Explanation of Impacts to the Physical Environment

1. Terrestrial and aquatic life and habitats.

Stabilizing a series of eroding stream banks, as well as maintaining a series of bank sites that appear to be susceptible to failure in the near future, using “soft” stabilization techniques are expected to create a healthier habitat for aquatic life. Monitoring of past restoration efforts in the Deep Creek drainage have shown that the number of resident brown trout, based on redd counts, have increased significantly over per-project numbers. The work proposed in this project would help maintain these habitat improvements.

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 for requirements needed to meet the federal Clean Water Act (404 permit). In the long term, stabilizing a series of eroding banks on Deep Creek would reduce the contribution of fine sediment into downstream waters.

3. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture.

Soils along the stream margin would be disturbed during construction, but would be stabilized with erosion control fabric and proposed re-vegetation efforts. Overall, the project is expected to reduce bank erosion and improve channel stability by restoring and maintaining past bank stabilization efforts on Deep Creek.

4. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality.

Riparian vegetation and cover, primarily grasses, would be disturbed during the period of construction. However, proposed re-vegetation efforts would act to mitigate these disturbances.

5. Aesthetics.

Aesthetics would be negatively affected during project construction due to ground disturbance and the presence of heavy equipment. In the long term, aesthetics of the area would not be affected.

6. Historic and archaeological sites

The sites identified for treatment on Deep Creek have been previously disturbed by former watershed restoration efforts undertaken between 1996 and 1998. As a result, there is a very low likelihood that cultural properties will be impacted as a result of this 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.

Deep Creek supports a recreational fishery for brown trout, rainbow trout and brook trout. The proposed maintenance of past stream restoration efforts, as called for in this project, is expected improve or maintain overall aquatic habitat within this reach of stream. Consequently, the project is expected to improve fishing opportunities in the Deep Creek watershed.

2. Locally adopted environmental plans and goals.

This project involves maintaining past efforts that have been undertaken as part of the Deep Creek Watershed Restoration Project. A watershed group was formed by representatives of the local conservation district, local landowners, and state and federal agencies.

VII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

1. No Action Alternative

If no action is taken, past bank stabilization and riparian enhancement efforts will continue to degrade and erosion rates will begin to accelerate. Recreational opportunities associated with fish and wildlife resources also may begin to degrade.

2. Rip-rap Alternative

The series of degrading stream banks could be armored with rock rip-rap or other “hard” stabilization materials to prevent further erosion. However, armoring the stream bank with rock would inhibit the recovery of riparian vegetation, encourage entrenchment of the channel, and pass erosion energy downstream to unprotected areas.

3. The Proposed Alternative

The proposed alternative is designed to repair or prevent damage at a series of bank stabilization sites that were originally treated in 1996 and 1997 as part of Deep Creek watershed restoration project. This proposed maintenance work would maintain water quality and aquatic habitat and would protect previous investments in the restoration of the Deep Creek watershed.

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. 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 web page: 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
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Fisheries Division
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
1420 East 6th Avenue
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 Deep Creek Bank Stabilization Repair Project

Division/Bureau Fisheries Division -Future Fisheries Improvement

Description of Project The project is being proposed to repair or prevent damage at 54 separate bank stabilization sites on Deep Creek that were originally treated in 1996 and 1997 as part of a larger watershed restoration project. The project sites are located on properties owned by six separate landowners approximately 5 miles southeast of the town of Townsend in Broadwater 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		
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		X
14. Transportation networks & traffic flows				X		

Other groups or agencies contacted or which may have overlapping jurisdiction Broadwater Conservation District, 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 Steve Trallis, Hydrotech Water Resource Consultants

Recommendation concerning preparation of EIS No EIS required.
EA prepared by: Mark Lere
Date: Febraury 11, 2004