

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  
Park Conservation District, 5242 Highway 89 South, Livingston, MT 59047  
Natural Resource and Conservation Service, 5242 Highway 89 South, Livingston, MT 59047  
U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Helena  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Helena  
State Historic Preservation Office, Helena  
Joe Brooks Chapter Trout Unlimited, 271 Old Clyde Park Road, Livingston, MT 59047  
Richard and Dreska Kinkie, 769 East River Road, Pray, MT 59065

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 stream restoration project calling for the restoration of a 2,500-foot channelized reach of Emigrant Spring Creek, a small tributary to the upper Yellowstone River. This proposed project is located approximately three miles southwest of the community of Emigrant in Park 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](mailto:mlere@state.mt.us)

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT  
Fisheries Division  
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks  
Emigrant Spring Creek Channel Restoration 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 providing funding for 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. Additionally, the 1999 Montana Legislature amended statute sections 87-1-273, 15-38-202 and Section 5, Chapter 463, Laws of 1995 to create a bull trout and cutthroat trout enhancement program. The program calls for the enhancement of bull trout and cutthroat trout through habitat restoration, natural reproduction and reductions in species competition by way of the Future Fisheries Program.

The Future Fisheries Improvement Program is proposing to provide partial funding for a project calling for restoration of a 2,500-foot channelized reach of Emigrant Spring Creek, a small tributary to the Yellowstone River. The intent of the project is to enhance spawning, rearing and resident fish habitat for salmonids, including the Yellowstone cutthroat trout (a species of special concern in Montana). The project site is located approximately three miles southwest of the community of Emigrant in Park County (Attachment 1).

I. Location of Project: This project will be conducted on a Emigrant Spring Creek located approximately three miles southwest of the community of Emigrant within Township 6 South, Range 8 East, Section 8 in Park 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 fisheries habitats” by implementing habitat restoration projects and administering the Future Fisheries Improvement Program to restore important habitats on private and public lands. This proposed project would help meet this goal.

A 2,500-foot reach of Emigrant Spring Creek was channelized during the 1950’s, resulting in an over-widened, silt-laden channel that provides very poor habitat for fish. Additionally, the riparian habitat along a significant portion of the spring creek has been degraded by past livestock use. The recruitment of salmonids to the upper Yellowstone River appears to be limited by the quantity of spawning and rearing habitat found in the tributaries. This proposed project is expected to approximately double the amount of spawning and rearing habitat in Emigrant Spring Creek, resulting in increases in the density of trout in the stream and the number of fish recruited to the Yellowstone River.

III. Scope of the Project:

This project is part of a larger Natural Resources and Conservation Service EQIP (Environmental Quality Incentives Program) project involving upgrades in irrigation efficiency, off channel stock water development and fencing the riparian corridor. This proposed project calls for restoring the dimension, pattern and profile of a channelized 2,500-foot reach of Emigrant Spring Creek to an “E” channel as classified by Rosgen (Attachment 2). The new channel would range between 2 and 4 feet in width with a sinuosity of 1.5. The existing straightened channel will be narrowed and deepened in a meandering pattern

by excavating deposited silts, importing appropriately sized gravel and lining the new channel with wetland sods and riparian shrubs. A few pools initially will be over-sized to act as short-term silt traps until the newly created channel stabilizes and riparian vegetation becomes established. Riparian fencing will be installed along the riparian corridor, with the exception of a single “hardened” water gap for livestock, to protect streamside vegetation. Additionally, approximately 100 feet of channel located downstream of the project area will be enhanced by excavating approximately five pools reaches and by adding woody debris for habitat complexity and maintaining pool scour. Also, a historical pond will be further excavated and two new shallow waterfowl ponds will be created to enhance wetlands and to provide for wetland sods needed in the re-construction of the channelized reach. This project, including all of the EQIP components, is expected to cost \$110,552.00. Of this total, the Future Fisheries Improvement Program would be contributing up to \$18,969.00.

#### IV. Environmental Impact Checklist:

Please see attached checklist.

#### V. Explanation of Impacts to the Physical Environment

##### 1. Terrestrial and aquatic life and habitats.

Restoring a 2,500-foot channelized reach of Emigrant Spring Creek to a proper dimension, pattern and profile and enhancing the riparian community with fencing and re-vegetation is expected to create significantly healthier habitat for aquatic life by increasing the length of the channel, improving environmental diversity, and enhancing spawning and rearing habitat. A healthier aquatic habitat is expected to enhance salmonid recruitment to the Yellowstone River. Habitat for riparian dependent wildlife also would be improved by providing better management of livestock grazing within the riparian corridor through fencing, enhancing the woody riparian community along the stream margin and creating additional shallow wetland ponds.

##### 2. Water quantity, quality and distribution.

Short-term increases in turbidity will occur during project construction. To minimize turbidity, the operation of equipment in the active 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 will be obtained from the local conservation district and the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers will be contacted to determine the need to meet 404 provisions of the Clean Water Act.

In the long term, this project is expected to improve water quality in Emigrant Spring Creek by creating a healthier riparian corridor.

##### 3. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture.

Soils along the stream margin would be disturbed during construction of the new channel, but would quickly stabilize following proposed re-vegetation efforts. Re-vegetation efforts would involve placement of salvaged sod and seeding with native sedges and grasses, as well as planting

riparian shrubs. Soils would be further stabilized with the installation of fencing along the riparian corridor to protect streamside vegetation from livestock grazing.

4. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality.

Riparian vegetation and cover, primarily non-native grasses, would be disturbed during the period of construction. However, proposed re-vegetation efforts, in conjunction with fencing the riparian corridor, would result in an overall improvement to the riparian vegetative community.

5. Aesthetics.

In the short term, aesthetics would be adversely impacted due to ground disturbance and the presence of heavy construction equipment. In the long term, aesthetics would be enhanced by returning a channelized reach of spring creek to a more natural configuration. In addition, the riparian vegetative community would be enhanced by riparian plantings and by improved grazing management with the installation of riparian fencing.

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

The Yellowstone cutthroat trout is classified as a “Species of Special Concern” in Montana due to their limited numbers and shrinking distribution. This project is expected to enhance spawning and rearing habitat for Yellowstone cutthroat trout in Emigrant Spring Creek, leading to greater recruitment of these fish to the upper Yellowstone River.

7. Historic and archaeological sites

This reach of Emigrant Spring Creek has been previously disturbed by channel straightening and farming activities. Consequently, there is a very low likelihood that cultural properties will be impacted as a result of this proposed project. Should cultural material 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.

Emigrant Spring Creek is a tributary to the Yellowstone River, a body of water that supports a very popular recreational fishery, including Yellowstone cutthroat trout, rainbow trout, brown trout and mountain whitefish. Salmonid recruitment in the upper Yellowstone River is strongly dependent upon spawning and rearing habitat found in the tributaries. The intent of this project is to improve habitat conditions in Emigrant Spring Creek to enhance recruitment of salmonids to the Yellowstone River. This improved recruitment is expected to enhance the recreational fishery in both the spring creek and the river.

VII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

1. No Action Alternative

If no action is taken, a 2,500-foot reach of Emigrant Spring Creek will continue to be nearly devoid of aquatic habitat and will provide little or no recruitment of fish to the upper Yellowstone River. The riparian habitat also will remain impaired. Additionally, recreational opportunities associated with fish and wildlife resources will remain reduced and aesthetics will continue to be impaired.

2. The Proposed Alternative

The proposed alternative is designed to restore the aquatic and riparian habitat in Emigrant Spring Creek. This alternative would increase the length of the existing channel and would greatly improve the diversity of aquatic habitat in a 2,500-foot channelized reach of the stream. The intent of the project is to improve spawning and rearing habitat for salmonids in Emigrant Spring Creek and to improve the vegetative community within the riparian corridor. This alternative would improve fish and wildlife habitat, aesthetics and water quality within the project area and would be expected to increase trout populations both in the spring creek and in the upper Yellowstone River.

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 webpage: [fwp.state.mt.us](http://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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**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 Emigrant Spring Creek Channel Restoration Project

Division/Bureau Fisheries Division -Future Fisheries Improvement  
 Description of Project The Future Fisheries Improvement Program is proposing to provide partial funding for a project calling for the restoration of a 2,500-foot reach of Emigrant Spring Creek, a small tributary to the upper Yellowstone River. The intent of the project is to enhance spawning, rearing and resident fish habitat for salmonids. The project site is located approximately three miles southwest of the community of Emigrant in Park 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 Park Conservation District, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Army Corp of Engineers, Montana Department of Environmental Quality, Natural Resource and Conservation Service, State Historic Preservation Office

Individuals or groups contributing to this EA Pat Byorth, MFWP; Land and Water Consulting, Inc.

Recommendation concerning preparation of EIS No EIS required.  
EA prepared by: Mark Lere  
Date: February 13, 2004