

March 13, 2006
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
 Native Species Coordinator, Fisheries
 Bozeman Office
Montana State Library, Helena
MT Environmental Information Center
Montana Audubon Council
Montana Wildlife Federation, P.O. Box 1175, Helena, MT 59624
Beaverhead Conservation District
U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Helena
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Helena
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 420 Barrett St., Dillon, MT 59725
State Historic Preservation Office, Helena
Jerry Scheid, 5584 West 33rd North, Idaho Falls, ID 83402
Daniel and Leslie Dennis, 14185 SW 144th Avenue, Tigard, OR 97224

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Please find enclosed an Environmental Assessment prepared for the Future Fisheries Improvement Program. The Program tentatively plans to provide partial funding toward a stream channel restoration project located on an altered reach of Bean Creek, a tributary to the Red Rock River. This proposed project is located approximately 14 miles east of the community of Monida in Beaverhead County.

Please submit any comments that you have by 5:00 P.M., April 13, 2006 to the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks in Helena at the address listed above. Funding for this project through the Future Fisheries Improvement Program 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@mt.gov

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
Fisheries Division
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Bean Creek Channel Restoration Project

General Purpose: The 1995 Montana Legislature enacted statute 87-1-272 through 273 which 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. 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 the restoration of a 900-foot channelized and over-grazed reach of Bean Creek, a tributary to the Red Rock River. The straightened, shallow and over-widened channel would be restored to a proper dimension, pattern and profile by re-activating numerous historic meanders, creating scour pools and planting riparian vegetation. The intent of this project is to improve over-all aquatic habitat in a short reach of Bean Creek and enhance a resident population of genetically pure westslope cutthroat trout. The project site is located approximately fourteen miles east of the community of Monida in Beaverhead County (Attachment 1).

I. Location of Project: This project will be conducted on Bean Creek, a tributary to the Red Rock River, located approximately fourteen miles east of the community of Monida within Township 9 South, Range 4 West, Sections 1 and 2 in Madison County. The project site is located on properties owned by Jerry Scheid and Daniel and Leslie Dennis.

II. Need for the Project: One goal within Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks six-year plan of operation for the fisheries program is to “restore and enhance degraded habitat” 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 achieve this goal.

Bean Creek supports a population of genetically pure westslope cutthroat trout, a species of special concern in Montana. Historically, a 900-foot section of Bean Creek was straightened and overgrazed, resulting in a shallow and over-widened channel that provides for poor fish habitat. Restoring healthy aquatic habitat in this short reach of Bean Creek would enhance overall habitat for a resident westslope cutthroat trout population.

III. Scope of the Project:

The project proposes to restore a 900-foot channelized reach of Bean Creek by re-activating numerous historic meanders, creating a series of scour pools and planting vegetation within the riparian corridor (Attachments 2 and 3). Additionally, approximately 600 feet of riparian fencing with a water gap will be installed to protect the riparian area from grazing by livestock. Part of a corral system will be moved away from the stream and three diversion control structures will be replaced with more fish friendly structures. All restoration materials will be gathered from on-site, including cobbles and sedge mats within the project

area and willow sprigs collected from the Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge. All work is proposed to take place in late summer or early fall 2006. This project is expected to cost \$29,208.00. Of this total, the Future Fisheries Improvement Program would be contributing up to \$16,000.00 to complete the project. The project calls for a professional stream restoration consultant to provide design and oversight.

IV. Environmental Impact Checklist:

Please see attached checklist.

V. Explanation of Impacts to the Physical Environment

1. Terrestrial and aquatic life and habitats.

Returning the existing straightened channel to a proper dimension, pattern and profile is expected to create healthier habitat for aquatic life by lengthening the channel and by creating greater environmental complexity. Expected improvements in the aquatic habitat should enhance the resident fisheries in Bean Creek. Habitat for riparian dependent wildlife also would be improved by restoring the riparian vegetative community by planting riparian shrubs and by protecting the corridor with fencing to exclude livestock.

2. Water quantity, quality and distribution.

Short-term increases in turbidity will occur during project construction. To minimize turbidity, construction of the new channel will occur when the stream is flowing at a base level. Operation of equipment in the active stream channel would 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 (318 authorization). A 310 permit 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, restoring the existing channel would reduce sediment and nutrient contributions to downstream areas, thereby improving the overall quality of downstream waters.

3. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture.

Soils along the stream margin would be disturbed during construction of the new channel, but would be stabilized with re-vegetation efforts. Overall, the project is expected to improve channel stability by returning the stream to a natural dimension, pattern and profile.

4. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality.

Riparian vegetation would be disturbed during the period of construction. However, proposed re-vegetation efforts, in conjunction with implementing a livestock grazing enclosure, would result in a significant overall improvement to the riparian vegetative community.

5. Aesthetics.

During the period of construction, estimated to be about 7 working days in length, aesthetics would be adversely impacted due to on-site construction activities, including ground disturbance and the presence of heavy equipment. In the long term, aesthetics would be enhanced by restoring a straightened reach of Bean Creek to a healthier and more natural stream environment.

Additionally, the riparian vegetative community would be enhanced by riparian plantings and by fencing the riparian corridor to exclude livestock.

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

The upper reaches of Bean Creek support a genetically pure population of westslope cutthroat trout, classified a species of special concern in Montana. Restoration of a 900-foot straightened reach of the stream would augment the usable habitat for this resident population of cutthroat trout.

7. Historic and archaeological sites

The proposed project likely will require an individual Army Corp of Engineers 404 permit. Therefore, the State Historic Preservation Office will be contacted to determine the need for compliance with the federal historic preservation regulations. The project will not begin until a cultural clearance is granted.

VI. Explanation of Impacts on the Human Environment.

1. Transportation networks and traffic flows.

Restoration of the stream channel and the replacement of the diversion structures are expected to reduce the frequency of ice build-up at the established county road crossing during the cold winter months.

VII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

1. No Action Alternative

If no action is taken, this short reach of Bean Creek will remain straightened and will continue to provide poor aquatic habitat for a genetically pure population of westslope cutthroat trout. Additionally, habitat for riparian dependent wildlife will remain in a degraded condition.

2. The Proposed Alternative

The proposed alternative is designed to restore a straightened reach of Bean Creek, providing for more diverse aquatic habitat. This alternative would lengthen the existing channel and is expected to augment habitat for a resident population of genetically pure westslope cutthroat trout. The proposed alternative also would improve the vegetation within the riparian corridor. This alternative would improve fish and wildlife habitat, aesthetics and water quality within the project area.

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 funding will be contingent upon their approval. Personnel from the Montana Partners for Fish and Wildlife, through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, are directly involved with this proposed project and the Service is contributing financially to the project. The Environmental Assessment (EA) is being distributed to all individuals and groups listed on the cover letter. The EA will be published on Montana Fish, Wildlife and Park's web page.

3. Duration of comment period?

Public comment will be accepted through 5:00 PM on April 13, 2006.

4. Person responsible for preparing the EA.

Mark Lere, Program Officer
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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 Bean 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 straightened reach of Bean Creek, a tributary to the Red Rock River, by re-activating numerous historic meanders. The intent is to restore proper channel function and improve aquatic habitat for a resident population of genetically pure westslope cutthroat trout. The project site is located on two ranch properties approximately 14 miles east of the community of Monida in Beaverhead 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		
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			X

Other groups or agencies contacted or which may have overlapping jurisdiction Beaverhead 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 Jeffery Everett, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Confluence Consulting, Inc.
 Recommendation concerning preparation of EIS No EIS required.

EA prepared by: Mark Lere
Date: March 9, 2006
