



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

October 3, 2006
P.O. Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620

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

**LEGISLATIVE ENVIRONMENTAL
POLICY OFFICE**

Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, P.O. Box 713, Hamilton, MT 59840
Montana State Library, Helena
MT Environmental Information Center
Montana Audubon Council
Montana Wildlife Federation
Bitterroot Conservation District, 1709 North 1st Street, Hamilton, MT 59840
State Historic Preservation Office
U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Helena
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Helena
Will McDowell, 4660 Spurgin Road, Missoula, MT 59804
Tri-State Water Quality Council, 101 N. Fourth Avenue, Suite 105, Sandpoint, ID 83864
Wheelbarrow Creek Ranch, 1506 Wheelbarrow Creek Road, Stevensville, MT 50870

Ladies and Gentlemen:

In September, you received a draft environmental assessment (EA) prepared for the Future Fisheries Improvement Program. The Program tentatively planned to provide partial funding for a channel and riparian restoration project on a degraded reach of Wheelbarrow Creek, a tributary to Grayhorse Creek and ultimately the Bitterroot River. The intent of the project is to enhance fish and wildlife habitat on a 3,500-foot reach of the stream.

Based on the EA, it is my decision to proceed with providing funding through the Future Fisheries Improvement Program for the Wheelbarrow Creek Channel Stabilization and Riparian Restoration Project. The completed EA and the response to comments in the attached Decision Notice provide an appropriate level of analysis. Please consider the draft EA and Decision Notice as the final document.

Thank you for your consideration and involvement.

Sincerely,

Mark Lere
Habitat Protection Bureau
Fisheries Division

DECISION NOTICE
WHEELBARROW CREEK CHANNEL STABILIZATION AND
RIPARIAN RESTORATION PROJECT

Prepared By
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
October 2, 2006

I. Proposal

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) proposes to provide partial funding through the Future Fisheries Improvement Program to a project calling for channel stabilization and riparian restoration within a 3,500 foot reach of Wheelbarrow Creek, a tributary to Grayhorse Creek and ultimately the Bitterroot River.

II. Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA)

MEPA required FWP to assess the potential consequences of this proposed action for the human and natural environment. The proposal was detailed in an Environmental Assessment (EA) released by FWP August 30, 2006. The 30-day comment period for this EA ended October 2, 2006.

The Draft EA and Decision Notice will serve as the final document.

III. Summary of Public Comment

As of October 2, 2006, FWP had received two written e-mail comments, one from a representative from the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and one from a representative from the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC). Their comments brought up the following issues:

Issue 1. A cultural resource inventory should be conducted in order to determine whether or not sites exist and if they will be impacted.

Response: A cultural resource inventory will be undertaken at the site and work will not begin until a concurrence letter is received from SHPO on the survey findings. Should cultural artifacts be uncovered or discovered during the project, construction will cease and SHPO and DNRC will be notified.

Issue 2. Please identify the number of acres that would be fenced in the riparian area.

Response: According to the project applicant, approximately 50 acres of the riparian corridor will be fenced, involving about 6,500 feet of new fencing.

Issue 3. I believe under "Potential Impacts to Human Environment" there would be minor impacts to #4 Agriculture and industrial production due to a

reduction in AUM's associated with fencing out livestock from the riparian for 5 years and a possible reduction in grass production in favor of riparian shrubs.

Response: We agree with this comment and will make changes to the draft EA as identified in Issue 3 comments. According to the project applicant, the lessee of this state property is agreeable to this reduction in AUM's.

Issue 4. Under "Potential Impact on the Physical Environment, #4Vegetation cover, quantity and quality, please mention that all equipment working on the project will be power washed for weeds and inspected before entering State land.

Response: We too are concerned about the potential for the spread of noxious weeds. We will request that the project applicant require all equipment working on the project be power washed. We will also request that the project applicant contact the Hamilton DNRC Office prior to bringing equipment onto to State land.

IV. Modifications to the Environmental Assessment

Please consider that the Draft EA has been modified as noted under responses to public comment.

V. Decision

After review of the proposal, it is my decision to proceed with providing funding through the Future Fisheries Improvement Program for the Wheelbarrow Creek Channel Stabilization and Riparian Restoration Project. The action will benefit the fishery and riparian wildlife on a reach of Wheelbarrow Creek.

I find there to be no significant impacts associated with this action and conclude that an Environmental Impact Statement is not needed. The completed EA and the Decision Notice provide an appropriate level of analysis.



Mark Lere, Program Officer
Habitat Protection Bureau
Fisheries Division