

March 20, 2007
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 Division
Missoula Office

Montana State Library, Helena
MT Environmental Information Center
Montana Audubon Council
Montana Wildlife Federation, P.O. Box 1175, Helena, MT 59624, Attn: Larry Copenhaver
North Powell Conservation District, 1 Hollenback Road, Deer Lodge, MT 59722
U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Helena
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Helena
State Historic Preservation Office, Helena
Big Blackfoot Chapter Trout Unlimited, P.O. Box 1, Ovando, MT 59854
Gary and Sharon Jacobsen, Ovando, MT 59854
John and Linda Enders, Ovando, MT 59854

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 on upper Jacobsen Spring Creek, a tributary to the North Fork Blackfoot River. The intent of the project is to enhance spawning, rearing and over-winter habitat for salmonids to increase recruitment of fish to the North Fork and main stem Blackfoot rivers. The proposed project potentially could contribute to the recovery of bull trout, a species listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. This proposed project is located approximately six miles east of the town of Ovando in Powell County and is a continuation of restoration efforts that were completed on downstream reaches in 2006.

Please submit any comments that you have by 5:00 P.M., April 20, 2007 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
Upper Jacobsen 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 the restoration of approximately one mile of Jacobsen Spring Creek, a tributary to the North Fork Blackfoot River. Restoration would involve narrowing and deepening the channel, increasing sinuosity, installing in-stream wood, and enhancing the riparian vegetative community. Presently, the project site exhibits an over-widened stream channel, elevated water temperatures and excessive sediment input and accumulations. The intent of the project is to enhance spawning, rearing and over-wintering habitat for salmonids, including westslope cutthroat trout (a species of special concern in Montana) and potentially bull trout. This proposed project would be a continuation of the restoration work successfully completed on the lower 14,000 feet of the spring creek in 2006. The project site is located approximately six miles east of the town of Ovando in Powell County (Attachment 1).

I. Location of Project: This project will be conducted on Jacobsen Spring Creek located approximately six miles east of the town of Ovando within Township 14 North, Range 11 West, Section 6 and Township 15 North, Range 11 West Section 31 in Powell 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.

This proposed project is intended to compliment channel restoration work that was completed on 14,000 feet of the lower reach of the stream in 2006. Despite the current degraded condition, upper Jacobsen Spring Creek possesses the basic habitat attributes needed to support a significant fishery. These attributes include cold groundwater springs, a base flow of approximately 9 cubic feet per second, a gravel channel bottom and a surrounding spruce forest that could provide shading and the input of woody debris for channel complexity. Presently, the stream supports only low densities of brown trout, brook trout and rainbow trout. Similar to downstream reaches of the stream, this spring creek has the potential to support both bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout recruitment. This fishery potential is especially significant when this proposed project is considered in context with the restoration work that successfully was completed in the downstream reaches in 2006.

III. Scope of the Project:

This proposed project calls for restoring the habitat condition of approximately one mile of upper Jacobsen Spring Creek. Although specific designs have not been completed, the project calls for narrowing and deepening the channel with the use of heavy equipment; increasing channel sinuosity, replacing an existing perched culvert; placing instream woody debris and sod mats and making changes in grazing management, including the installation of riparian fencing, water gaps, and the development of a grazing management plan. The proposed project will mirror work successfully completed on downstream reaches of the stream in 2006. This project is expected to cost \$71,175.00. Of this total, the Future Fisheries Improvement Program would be contributing up to \$24,025.00.

IV. Environmental Impact Checklist:

Please see attached checklist.

V. Explanation of Impacts to the Physical Environment

1. Terrestrial and aquatic life and habitats.

Restoring spawning, rearing, and over-winter habitat conditions within a spring creek tributary to the North Fork Blackfoot River is expected to enhance recruitment of salmonids to both the stream and the river and has the potential to contribute to the recovery of bull trout, a species listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. Habitat for riparian dependent wildlife also would be improved by providing better management of livestock grazing within the riparian corridor through fencing and by enhancing the riparian vegetative community along the stream margin.

2. Water quantity, quality and distribution.

Presently, this degraded reach of the spring creek displays elevated water temperatures and excessive fine sediment accumulations due to the over-widened and shallow nature of the channel. The proposed restoration project is expected to reduce water temperatures and increase the sediment transport capability of the channel. 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 and any new channel would be constructed "in the dry". 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 to determine the need to meet 404 provisions of the Clean Water Act.

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

and sprigging native riparian shrubs. Soils would be further stabilized with the installation of fencing and the implementation of a plan to protect streamside vegetation from livestock grazing.

4. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality.

Riparian vegetation and cover would be disturbed during the period of construction. However, proposed re-vegetation efforts, in conjunction with fencing and implementation of a grazing plan, 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 degraded spring creek back to a more natural configuration. In addition, the riparian vegetative community would be enhanced by riparian plantings and by improved grazing management.

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

Jacobsen Spring Creek currently supports non-native salmonids, including brown trout, brook trout and rainbow trout. However, this proposed restoration project has the potential to create habitat that could support bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout. The North Fork Blackfoot River, of which Jacobsen Spring Creek is a tributary, is a primary spawning tributary for fluvial bull trout and is classified as a core area for bull trout recovery. Because Jacobsen Spring Creek has the potential to support bull trout, a species listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act, the project will be included in Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Section 6 plan with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

7. Historic and archaeological sites

The proposed project may 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. Funding will not be released until a cultural clearance is granted.

VI. Explanation of Impacts on the Human Environment.

1. Access to & quality of recreational activities.

Presently, this spring creek contributes no appreciable recruitment of salmonids to the North Fork or main stem of the Blackfoot rivers, both bodies of water that support popular recreational fisheries. The intent of this project is to enhance spawning, rearing and over-winter habitat for salmonids and increase the recruitment of fish found in these downstream waters.

VII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

1. No Action Alternative

If no action is taken, the upper one mile of Jacobsen Spring Creek will continue to be nearly devoid of aquatic habitat and will provide little or no recruitment of fish to the North Fork or main stem Blackfoot rivers. The riparian habitat also will remain degraded. 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 a one mile degraded reach of Jacobsen Spring Creek, a tributary to the North Fork Blackfoot River. The intent of the project is to improve spawning, rearing and over-wintering habitat for salmonids and to improve the vegetative community within the riparian corridor. This alternative would improve fish and wildlife habitat and aesthetics within the project area and has the potential to contribute toward the recovery of bull trout. This alternative compliments previous restoration work that has been completed in the drainage.

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. 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.mt.gov.

3. Duration of comment period?

Public comment will be accepted through 5:00 PM on April 20, 2007.

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 Upper Jacobsen 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 approximately one mile of Jacobsen Spring Creek, a tributary to the North Fork Blackfoot River. The intent of the project is to improve spawning, rearing and over-winter habitat for salmonids, including westslope cutthroat trout and potentially bull trout. This proposed project would be a continuation of restoration work that was successfully completed on downstream reaches in 2006. The project site is located approximately six miles east of the town of Ovando in Powell 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 North Powell 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 Ryen Aasheim, Big Blackfoot Chapter of Trout Unlimited

Recommendation concerning preparation of EIS No EIS required. EA prepared by: Mark Lere

Date: February 28, 2007