

March 3, 2008
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
 Endangered Species Coordinator
 Fisheries Division
 Kalispell Office
Montana State Library, Helena
MT Environmental Information Center
Montana Audubon Council
Montana Wildlife Federation
Lincoln Conservation District, 655 Highway 93 North, Eureka, MT 59917
U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Helena
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Helena
State Historic Preservation Office, Helena
Montana Trout, P.O. Box 8871, Missoula, MT 59807-8871
Kootenai National Forest, 1437 North Highway 2, Troy, MT 59935
Lincoln County, 1210 Missoula Ave., Troy, MT 59935

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Please find enclosed an Environmental Assessment prepared for the Future Fisheries Improvement Program. The Program tentatively plans to provide partial funding to a project calling for the replacement of an undersized and perched culvert under County Road #176 on Feeder Creek, a tributary to Kilbrennan Lake. The intent of the project is to provide upstream fish passage for redband rainbow trout residing in the Kilbrennan Lake, opening about 0.5 miles of stream for spawning and rearing. This proposed project is located approximately 8.5 miles north of the town of Troy in Lincoln County.

Please submit any comments that you have by 5:00 P.M., March 31, 2008 to the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks in Helena at the address listed above. Project funding 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
Feeder Creek Culvert Replacement 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 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 to a project calling for the replacement of an undersized and perched culvert, located underneath County Road #176 on Feeder Creek, a tributary to Kilbrennan Lake. The intent of the project is to provide upstream fish passage for redband rainbow trout residing in the Kilbrennan Lake, opening approximately 0.5 miles of new spawning and rearing habitat. This stream crossing is located on a county owned road approximately 8.5 miles north of the town of Troy in Lincoln County (Attachment 1).

I. Location of Project: This project will be conducted at County Road crossing #176 on Feeder Creek located approximately 8.5 miles north of the town of Troy within Township 33 North, Range 33 West, Section 33 in Lincoln 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 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 achieve this goal.

County Road #176 crosses Feeder Creek approximately 600 feet upstream of the confluence with Kilbrennan Lake. Currently, the stream crossing consists of an undersized culvert that is perched about 3 feet above the streambed at the outlet. The perched nature of this culvert effectively blocks upstream migration for fish residing in Kilbrennan Lake. In an attempt to restore native redband rainbow trout to a portion of its historic range, all fish were removed from Kilbrennan Lake in 2006 by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks and the lake was re-stocked with these native rainbow trout during 2007. Redband rainbow trout are considered a species of special concern in Montana. Replacement of this perched culvert will open approximately 0.5 miles of Feeder Creek for spawning and rearing habitat to these fluvial rainbow trout, reliant on tributary streams for spawning.

III. Scope of the Project:

The project proposes to replace an existing undersized and perched culvert located on County Road #176 crossing over Feeder Creek with a 10-foot diameter pipe that would be 40 feet in length. Installation of this new culvert would be undertaken by Lincoln County and the Kootenai National Forest Engineering staff would provide oversight and design. The new culvert would be installed below stream grade to facilitate upstream fish passage for all aquatic organisms. This project is expected to cost approximately \$38,541.00. Of this total, the Future Fisheries Improvement Program would be contributing up to \$9,636.00.

IV. Environmental Impact Checklist:

Please see attached checklist.

V. Explanation of Impacts to the Physical Environment

1. Terrestrial and aquatic life and habitats.

Providing fish passage on Feeder Creek by replacing an undersized and perched culvert with a larger pipe installed below stream grade is expected to increase the likelihood of re-establishing a self-sustaining population of redband rainbow trout in Kilbrennan Lake.

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 (318 authorization). A 124 permit (Stream Protection Act) will be obtained from Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks and the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers will be contacted for requirements needed to meet the federal Clean Water Act (404 permit).

3. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture.

Soils within the immediate project area would be disturbed during construction, but would be stabilized with re-vegetation efforts (sowing seed).

4. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality.

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

5. Aesthetics

Aesthetics of the site would be degraded during the time frame of construction due to ground disturbance and the presence of heavy equipment. Long-term impacts to aesthetics would be negligible.

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

Redband rainbow trout are considered a species of special concern and are Montana's only native rainbow trout. Providing upstream fish passage in Feeder Creek, the only tributary to Kilbrennan Lake, is expected to increase the likelihood of re-establishing a self-sustaining population of these fish into the lake.

9. Historic and archaeological sites

This site has been previously disturbed by the construction and maintenance of County Road #176. As a result, there is a very low likelihood that cultural properties will be impacted by the completion of the 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.

7. Access to & quality of recreational activities.

The re-establishment of a self-sustaining population of redband rainbow trout will provide for an enhanced fishing opportunity to catch Montana's only native rainbow trout. Providing a source of recruitment for young redband rainbow trout is expected to enhance the fishery in Kilbrennan Lake.

14. Transportation networks and traffic flows.

Traffic in this portion of County Road #176 likely would be delayed or interrupted during the period of construction. Lincoln County may deem it necessary to re-route traffic or install a temporary crossing during the period of construction.

VII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

1. No Action Alternative

If no action is taken, the crossing at County Road #176 will continue to block upstream fish passage in Feeder Creek. As such, the potential for the recruitment of redband rainbow trout to Kilbrennan Lake will be lost.

2. The Proposed Alternative

The proposed alternative is designed to provide for upstream fish passage in Feeder Creek at the stream crossing underneath County Road #176. Feeder Creek has the potential to provide important spawning and rearing habitat for redband rainbow trout residing in Kilbrennan Lake. The project is expected to provide a source of recruitment of redband rainbow trout into Kilbrennan Lake.

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 will be published on Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks web page: fwp.mt.gov.

3. Duration of comment period?

Public comment will be accepted through 5:00 PM on March 31, 2008.

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 Feeder Creek Culvert Replacement Project

Division/Bureau Fisheries Division -Future Fisheries Improvement

Description of Project The Future Fisheries Improvement Program is proposing to provide partial funding to a project calling for the replacement of an undersized and perched culvert, located underneath County Road #176 on Feeder Creek, with an adequately sized pipe installed below stream grade. The intent of the project is to enhance upstream passage for redband rainbow trout residing in Kilbrennan Lake. The stream crossing is located approximately 8.5 miles north of the town of Troy in Lincoln 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			X

Other groups or agencies contacted or which may have overlapping jurisdiction Lincoln County, Kootenai National Forest, Lincoln 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 John Zelazny, Montana Trout.

Recommendation concerning preparation of EIS No EIS required.

EA prepared by: Mark Lere
Date: February 14, 2008