

March 7, 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
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
Lolo National Forest, Ft. Missoula, Bldg 24, Missoula, MT 59804
The Chutney Foundation, P.O. Box 8688, Missoula, MT 59807

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 floodplain and riparian restoration project located on a reach of Dunham Creek, a tributary to Monture Creek and ultimately the Blackfoot River. The project calls for creating diverse habitat conditions to facilitate successional re-vegetation on a one mile reach of the stream that had been reconstructed during 2001. The floodplain on this reconstructed reach of stream had been left in a fairly uniform condition, limiting the establishment of desired native vegetation. The project proposes to construct a series of floodplain swales, install a number of coarse woody debris piles, import some larger diameter pieces of wood onto the floodplain, control existing weed infestations, plant containerized shrubs and trees and install a series of soil lifts and coir logs. The intent of the project is to restore the riparian vegetative community and enhance habitat for bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout. This proposed project is located on the Lolo National Forest approximately 9 miles northwest of the community of Ovando in Powell County.

Please submit any comments that you have by 5:00 P.M., April 8, 2008 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
Dunham Creek Riparian Enhancement 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 to a floodplain and riparian restoration project located on a reach of Dunham Creek, a tributary to Monture Creek within the Blackfoot River drainage. The intent of the project is to restore the riparian vegetative community and enhance habitat for westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout. The project site is located approximately 9 miles northwest of the community of Ovando in Powell County (Attachment 1).

I. Location of Project: This project will be conducted on a one mile reach of Dunham Creek located within Township 15 North, Range 13 West, Sections 4 and 5 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.

During 2001, the Blackfoot watershed cooperators reconstructed approximately one mile of Dunham Creek, a reach of stream that had been channelized in the past. This restoration project proved to be effective at meeting a number of habitat objectives. Unfortunately, the constructed floodplain was left under a uniform condition that has limited the recovery of native riparian vegetation. The existing stream banks and floodplain are comprised of cobble and gravel substrate with little topographic diversity that are more prone to weed infestations than the re-establishment of native vegetation. A healthy riparian vegetative community would provide for a more stabilized channel, reduced sediment delivery and improved instream habitat for bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout.

III. Scope of the Project:

This proposed project would involve a one-mile reach of Dunham Creek. Within this reach, the primary areas in need of additional re-vegetation treatments are the floodplain surfaces that are too high relative to the existing channel features and areas that are deficient in micro-topography resulting in the lack of refugia for colonizing vegetation. Treatments would include the construction of small floodplain swales oriented perpendicular to the channel; the placement of coarse woody debris piles to entrain sediment and seed; installation of larger diameter wood to encourage scour during flooding and further create microhabitat sites; control of weed infestations, primarily spotted knapweed, using herbicide and hand

pulling; planting of containerized native shrubs and trees; and the installation of coir logs and vegetated soil lifts along stream banks subject to higher shear stresses (Attachment 2). This project is expected to cost \$61,120.00. Of this total, the Future Fisheries Improvement Program would be contributing up to \$15,000.00.

IV. Environmental Impact Checklist:

Please see attached checklist.

V. Explanation of Impacts to the Physical Environment

1. Terrestrial and aquatic life and habitats.

Restoring the riparian habitat on this reach of Dunham Creek is expected to enhance resident and migratory populations of bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout. Habitat for riparian dependent wildlife also would be improved. This work would complement previous habitat work that has been completed in the drainage.

2. Water quantity, quality and distribution.

Presently, the poor condition of the riparian vegetative community contributes to sediment accumulations and possible elevated thermal regimes in Dunham Creek. Over the long term, this proposed restoration project is expected to provide for a more stable channel regime and reduce water temperatures. 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 (318 authorization). A 124 permit (Montana Stream Protection Act) will be obtained from Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks 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.

Alluvium along portions of the stream margin and floodplain would be disturbed during implementation of the project. In the long term, floodplain soils and stream banks would be stabilized as a result of the restoration of the riparian vegetative community.

4. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality.

The existing sparse riparian vegetation and cover would be disturbed during the period of construction. Vegetation on the floodplain currently is dominated by spotted knapweed. The proposed project would result in a significant 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, restoring the riparian corridor would enhance aesthetics.

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

Dunham Creek currently supports bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout. Bull trout are listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act and westslope cutthroat trout are considered a species of special concern in Montana. Because Dunham Creek supports bull trout, a species listed as threatened, the project will be included in Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Section 6 plan with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The project is expected to benefit both bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout populations.

9. Historic and archaeological sites

Because the project is directly associated with a recent past channel re-construction, there is a very low likelihood that cultural properties will be impacted by the proposed work. 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.

Presently, this segment of Dunham Creek provides a source of recruitment for bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout to the Monture Creek drainage and ultimately the Blackfoot River. Facilitating the recovery of the riparian vegetative community is expected to improve the overall aquatic habitat and enhance existing trout populations. As a result, the recreational fishery is expected to improve.

VII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

1. No Action Alternative

If no action is taken, this reach of Dunham Creek will continue to support a limited riparian vegetative community that is dominated by spotted knapweed. The poor condition of the riparian community would continue to contribute additional sediment accumulations into the channel and possibly could contribute to elevated thermal regimes. The aquatic and riparian habitat 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 the riparian vegetative community on a one-mile reach of Dunham Creek. A healthy riparian vegetative community would provide for a more stabilized channel, reduced sediment delivery and improved instream habitat for bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout. This alternative would enhance fish and wildlife habitat and aesthetics within the project area and has the potential to contribute toward the recovery of bull trout.

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 Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission also will review the proposed project 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 8, 2008.

4. Person responsible for preparing the EA.

Mark Lere, Program Officer
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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 Dunham Creek Riparian Enhancement 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 the riparian vegetative community on a one-mile reach of Dunham Creek, a tributary to Monture Creek in the Blackfoot River drainage. The intent of the project is to restore the riparian vegetative community and enhance habitat for westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout. The project site is located approximately 9 miles northwest of the community 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, Lolo National Forest, 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 and Geum Environmental Consulting, Inc.

Recommendation concerning preparation of EIS No EIS required.

EA prepared by: Mark Lere

Date: February 22, 2008