August 26, 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
Missoula Office
Montana State Library, Helena
MT Environmental Information Center
Montana Audubon Council
Montana Wildlife Federation
Montana River Action, 304 N 18th Avenue, Bozeman, MT 59715
Missoula Conservation District, 3550 Mullan Road, Suite 106, Missoula, MT 59808
U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Helena
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Helena
State Historic Preservation Office, Helena
Cramer Creek School, Inc., 12508 Cramer Creek Road, Clinton, MT 59825

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 reactivating and restoring approximately 1,500 feet of the West Fork Cramer Creek, a tributary to Cramer Creek and ultimately the Clark Fork River. This reach of stream was diverted from its historic channel approximately 40 years ago. The intent of the project is to return the stream to its historic channel and improve spawning and rearing habitat for westslope cutthroat trout and brook trout, and possible other species of salmonids. The proposed project is located approximately 6 miles southeast of the community of Clinton in Missoula County.

Please submit any comments that you have by 5 P.M., September 26, 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 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
West Fork Cramer Creek Channel Reactivation 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 purposes 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 for a project calling for relocating approximately 1,500 feet of the West Fork Cramer Creek back into its historic channel. This reach of stream had been diverted into main-stem Cramer Creek about 40 years ago with the construction of a 350-foot diversion channel, resulting in a significant loss of aquatic habitat. Restoring this 1,500-foot reach of stream would enhance spawning and rearing habitat for salmonids, including westslope cutthroat trout and brook trout. The project site is located on property owned by Cramer Creek, Inc. approximately 6 miles southeast of the community of Clinton (Attachment 1).

I. Location of Project: This project will be conducted on West Fork Cramer Creek located approximately 6 miles southeast of the community of Clinton within Township 12 North, Range 16 West, Section 35 in Missoula 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 the Future Fisheries Improvement Program to restore important habitats on public and private lands. This proposal would help achieve this goal.

West Fork Cramer Creek currently supports westslope cutthroat trout and brook trout. The lower reach of the stream was shortened by about 1,100 feet approximately 40 years ago by diverting the channel into the main-stem via a 350-foot constructed channel, resulting in the loss of a significant amount of aquatic habitat. Re-activating the historic channel would restore spawning and rearing habitat for salmonids, enhance riparian wildlife habitat and provide a unique educational opportunity to children attending Cramer Creek School whereby they would assist in implementation and monitoring.

III. Scope of the Project:

The project proposes to reactivate the lower reach of the West Fork Cramer Creek back to its historic channel (Attachment 2). Prior to breaching the existing diversion berm that currently diverts all flow into the main-stem, the historic channel would be restored to proper dimensions and profile, erosion control fabric would be installed on banks vulnerable to excessive erosion rates and the stream banks would be re-vegetated with native seed and riparian shrubs. Flow would be returned to the historic channel following completion of the restoration by removing the berm and filling in the diversion channel. This project is expected to cost $35,745.00. Of this total, the Future Fisheries Improvement Program would be contributing up to $7,912.00.

IV. Environmental Impact Checklist:

Please see attached checklist.

V. Explanation of Impacts to the Physical Environment

1. Terrestrial and aquatic life and habitats.

The intent of the project is to restore about 1,100 feet of aquatic habitat in the West Fork Cramer Creek. The project would increase channel length, improve spawning and rearing habitat for salmonids, and enhance riparian wildlife habitat.

2. Water quantity, quality and distribution.

Short-term increases in turbidity will occur when the existing berm is breached and the old channel is re-activated. To minimize turbidity, construction and re-vegetation in the historic channel will occur in the dry, with the stream continuing to flow through the diverted reach until construction is fully completed. 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 (Natural Streambed and Land Protection Act) 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).

3. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture.

Soils along the stream margin would be disturbed during project construction, but would stabilize quickly following proposed re-vegetation and channel restoration efforts. Overall, the project is expected to improve channel stability.

4. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality.

Riparian vegetation and cover would be disturbed during the period of construction. However, re-vegetation efforts, in conjunction with channel restoration efforts, would result in an overall improvement to the riparian vegetative community.

5. Aesthetics.

In the short term, aesthetics would be adversely affected due to ground disturbance and the presence of heavy equipment.

9. Historic and archaeological sites

Re-activation of the old channel will cause minimal ground disturbance. As a result, there is a low likelihood that cultural properties will be adversely 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.

It is anticipated that the reactivation the lower reach of West Fork Cramer Creek would improve spawning and rearing habitat for salmonids. Consequently, the project has the potential to enhance the recreational fishery within adjacent reaches of the Clark Fork River. West Fork Cramer Creek is too small to provide for a local recreational fishery.

VII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

1. No Action Alternative

If no action were taken, a 1,100-foot reach of West Fork Cramer Creek will remain dry. The potential for additional aquatic habitat, enhanced riparian wildlife habitat, and the development of educational opportunities will be unrealized.

2. The Proposed Alternative

The proposed alternative is designed to reactivate approximately 1,100 feet of the West Fork Cramer Creek. This alternative will increase existing channel length, improve spawning and rearing habitat for salmonids, enhance riparian wildlife habitat and create a unique educational opportunity for children attending Cramer Creek School.

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 web page: fwp.mt.gov.

3. Duration of comment period?

Public comment will be accepted through 5 P.M. on September 26, 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 West Fork Cramer Creek Channel Reactivation 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 relocating approximately 1,500 feet of the West Fork Cramer Creek back into its historic channel. Restoring this reach of stream would increase channel length, improve spawning and rearing habitat for salmonids, enhance riparian wildlife habitat and create unique educational opportunities to children attending Cramer Creek School. The proposed project is located on property owned by Cramer Creek, Inc. approximately 6 miles southeast of the community of Clinton in Missoula 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		
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 Missoula 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 McKay, Cramer Creek School.

Recommendation concerning preparation of EIS No EIS required.

EA prepared by: Mark Lere

Date: August 5, 2008