

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT  
FOR THE ESSEX COUNTY WATER AND SEWER DISTRICT  
WATER IMPROVEMENTS PROJECT**

**TO: ALL INTERESTED PERSONS**

Date: September 25, 2009

Action: Constructing a new wellhouse and connecting pipe for the Essex water system

Location of Project: Essex, Montana

DWSRF Funding: \$275,000

Total Project Cost: \$310,804

An environmental review has been conducted by the Montana Department of Environmental Quality for the proposed improvements to the water system in Essex. The purpose of the project is to make improvements to the water district's water system that are needed to ensure an adequate supply of water meeting state and federal drinking water rules.

The affected environment will primarily be in the vicinity of the wellhouse construction site and along the connecting pipeline street right-of-way. The human environment affected will include Essex and the surrounding area. Based on the information provided in the references below, the project is not expected to have any significant adverse impacts upon terrestrial and aquatic life or habitat, including endangered species, water quality or quantity, air quality, geological features, cultural or historical features, or social quality.

This project will be funded in part with a low-interest loan from the Montana Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF) Program, administered by the Montana Department of Environmental Quality and the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation.

The Department of Environmental Quality utilized the following references in completing its environmental review of this project:

- Preliminary Engineering Report, Essex Water and Sewer District Project, May 1998, prepared by Neil Consultants, Inc., Great Falls, Montana.
- Uniform Application for Montana Public Facility Projects, May 2009, prepared by Fraser Management and Consulting, PLLC, Kalispell, Montana
- Essex Water Improvements Project, Engineering Design Report, August 2009, prepared by Robert Peccia and Associates, Kalispell, Montana
- Contract Documents and Specifications, Essex Water Improvements Project, September 2009, prepared by Robert Peccia and Associates, Kalispell, Montana.

These references are available for review upon request by contacting:

Gary J. Wiens, P.E.  
Department of Environmental Quality  
P.O. Box 200901  
Helena, Montana 59620-0901  
Phone: (406) 444-7838  
Email: [gwiens@mt.gov](mailto:gwiens@mt.gov)

Tod O'Connell  
Secretary  
Essex County Water and Sewer District  
P.O. Box 643  
Essex, Montana 59916  
[todotter@gmail.com](mailto:todotter@gmail.com)

Comments on this finding or on the environmental assessment may be submitted to the Department of Environmental Quality at the above address. Comments must be postmarked no later than October 30, 2009. After evaluating all substantive comments received, the department will revise the environmental assessment or determine if an environmental impact statement is necessary. Otherwise, this finding of no significant impact will stand if no substantive comments are received during the comment period or if substantive comments are received and evaluated and the environmental impacts are still determined to be non-significant.

Signed,

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Todd Teegarden, Chief  
Technical & Financial Assistance Bureau

c: file

ESSEX COUNTY WATER AND SEWER DISTRICT  
WATER IMPROVEMENTS WELL PROJECT

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

I. COVER SHEET

A. PROJECT IDENTIFICATION

Applicant: Essex County Water and Sewer District  
Address: P.O. Box 643  
Essex, MT 59916  
Project Number: Not yet assigned

B. CONTACT PERSON

Name: Tod O'Connell, Secretary  
Essex County Water and Sewer District  
Address: P.O. Box 643  
Essex, MT 59916  
Telephone: (406) 888-9067

C. ABSTRACT

The Essex water system provides potable water to a population of approximately 38. The water supply, currently obtained from Essex Creek and treated solely with chlorine gas, does not comply with state and federal drinking water rules. The district is under an administrative order from the Department of Environmental Quality to bring the water system into compliance with the Safe Drinking Water Act. Pursuant to this action, on October 26, 2006, the district submitted plans and specifications to the department for approval of a new water source. After preparation of an environmental assessment checklist, those plans and specifications were subsequently approved by the department. On July 9, 2009, the Chambers Drilling Company completed a well to a depth of 240 feet and pump tested it to demonstrate a flow rate of 100 gallons per minute.

The proposed project involves the construction of a new wellhouse for the well and pumping facilities. Although chlorination is not proposed as part of this project, the wellhouse will have sufficient space to install chlorination facilities if deemed necessary.

The proposed water system improvements will enable the town to return to compliance with the Safe Drinking Water Act and will ensure that an adequate supply of drinking water meeting state and federal regulations will be safely and reliably provided to all consumers.

The project will be funded in part by a Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan. Environmentally sensitive characteristics such as wetlands, floodplains and threatened or endangered species are not expected to be adversely impacted as a consequence of the proposed project. No significant long-term environmental impacts were identified during the preparation of this document.

D. COMMENT PERIOD

Thirty calendar days.

II. PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

A. EXISTING FACILITIES

The current source of water supply, Essex Creek, is chlorinated surface water and is not considered safe for human consumption without additional treatment. Source water quality fluctuates seasonally and dramatic increases in turbidity may occur during spring runoff. The chlorination facility is unsafe and does not comply with state standards for public water supplies.

Water storage is provided by an old 100,000-gallon elevated storage tank located on Burlington Northern Santa Fe railroad property. The water distribution system is also old and in questionable condition.

B. PROPOSED PROJECT

The proposed project includes the following components:

1. Furnishing and installing a new submersible well pump,
2. Construction of a new wellhouse, and
3. Connection to the district's water distribution system with approximately 800 feet of 6-inch diameter water main.

Construction of these improvements will ensure that an adequate quantity of safe water will be delivered to the users of the system and public health and safety with respect to the water supply will be ensured.

III. ALTERNATIVES INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION

A. WATER SUPPLY ALTERNATIVES

Several alternatives for addressing the town's water supply needs were considered:

1. NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE – This alternative was considered unacceptable since it would perpetuate potentially unsafe conditions

within the water system. Continued use of the district's surface water supply could threaten public health and safety.

2. **GROUNDWATER BY DEEP WELL ALTERNATIVE** – This alternative, the proposed action, was selected from the options identified in the district's 2006 preliminary engineering report. The district drilled and tested a deep production well in January 2009. This well produces satisfactory water and meets the water quality requirements of the Department of Environmental Quality.
3. **SURFACE WATER TREATMENT PLANT ALTERNATIVE** – Continued use of surface water from Essex Creek or the Middle Fork of the Flathead River is an option. Construction of a water treatment facility would be necessary in order to meet state and federal regulations governing the provision of drinking water.

#### B. COST COMPARISONS

Table 1 provides a cost comparison of alternative approaches to increasing water supply for the district.

**Table 1. Alternative Cost Comparison**

<b>Source of Supply</b>	<b>Capital Cost for Facility</b>
No Action	\$0
Groundwater by Deep Well	\$682,300
Surface Water Treatment Plant	\$1,437,400

Although estimated costs have changed somewhat since this analysis was performed, the second alternative is still clearly the most economical alternative that protects public health.

#### C. TOTAL ESTIMATED COSTS

The revised estimated total cost of the current phase of the proposed project is \$310,804, based on construction of the preferred alternative. The district anticipates receiving a Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan of \$275,000. The monthly cost for each user is projected to be \$44.43 in order to adequately fund these improvements to the district's water system.

#### IV. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

##### A. PLANNING AREA

Essex is an unincorporated town located in Flathead County, 26 miles southeast of West Glacier, along the Middle Fork of the Flathead River and near the southern tip of Glacier National Park. The district water system provides drinking water to seven year-round residences, eighteen seasonal residences, the BNSF maintenance facility and the Izaak Walton Inn, which has 33 hotel rooms. No proposed service extensions are anticipated. Full development of vacant lots within the district is predicted to result in a maximum of ten additional service connections.

Construction of the proposed project will take place in the fall of 2009. Construction is expected to affect primarily the immediate vicinity of the proposed wellhouse and along the route of the transmission main.

##### B. FLOW PROJECTIONS

Based on data presented in the district's August 2009 engineering design report, peak water consumption ranges from 11 gallons per minute during shoulder seasons to 27 gallons per minute measured during peak seasons. For design purposes, peak water consumption at the current level of development was calculated to be 35 gallons per minute. At full buildout, peak water consumption is expected to be 44 gallons per minute.

##### C. NATURAL FEATURES

Essex is located north of Essex Creek near its confluence with the Middle Fork of the Flathead River. Annual temperatures range from mild during summer to very cold during winter. The warmest month of the year is July, while the coldest month is January. Temperature variations between night and day tend to be relatively large during summer and moderate during winter. Rainfall is evenly distributed throughout the year.

None of the project area lies within any designated 100-year floodplain, as defined by the Federal Emergency Management Agency maps.

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service identifies seven species in Montana as endangered and seven species as threatened. The endangered animal species include the whooping crane, Eskimo curlew, black-footed ferret, pallid sturgeon, white sturgeon, least tern and gray wolf. Threatened animal species in the state include the grizzly bear, Canada lynx, piping plover and bull trout. Threatened plant species are the Spalding's catch-fly, water howellia and Ute Ladies'-tresses. Additionally, three animal species, the warm springs beetle, yellow-billed cuckoo and arctic grayling, and one plant species, the slender moonwort, are listed as

candidate species for a threatened or endangered designation.

All construction will take place on previously-disturbed ground. No native vegetation is expected to be disturbed by the construction. Similarly, the construction sites do not provide prime habitat for wildlife, and as a result, no impacts on wildlife are anticipated.

V. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF PROPOSED PROJECT

A. DIRECT AND INDIRECT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

1. Housing and Commercial Development – Developed land use within the district limits includes both residential and commercial. Although intended to accommodate some anticipated growth, the proposed improvements are not expected to have an impact on housing or commercial development.
2. Future Land Use – No adverse impacts to land use are expected from the proposed project.
3. Floodplains and Wetlands – None of the project area lies within the 100-year floodplain. No wetlands have been identified on the proposed construction site.
4. Cultural Resources – The construction site is previously-disturbed land.
5. Fish and Wildlife – No impacts on biological resources in the area are anticipated by the proposed project.
6. Water Quality – Any impacts on water quality are expected to be minor and short-term. Short-term impacts on surface and groundwater quality can be controlled through proper construction practices.
7. Air Quality - Short-term minor negative impacts on air quality may occur from heavy equipment, dust and exhaust fumes during project construction. Construction practices and dust abatement measures will be implemented during construction to control dust, thus minimizing this problem.
8. Public Health – The proposed project is not expected to have adverse impacts on public health, and should instead enhance public health by improving source water quality.
9. Energy - During construction of the proposed project, additional energy will be consumed, causing a direct short-term impact on this resource.

10. Noise - Short-term impacts from increased noise levels may occur during construction of the proposed project improvements. Construction activities are anticipated to occur for three months during daylight hours only.

#### B. UNAVOIDABLE ADVERSE IMPACTS

Short-term construction-related impacts, such as noise, dust and traffic disruption, may occur, but can be minimized through proper construction management. Energy consumption during construction cannot be avoided. No permanent direct, indirect or cumulative adverse impacts are anticipated as a result of the proposed action.

#### VI. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

A public hearing was held by the district on May 21, 1998, to consider the proposed work on the water system and reach a consensus on moving ahead with grant applications. A meeting was held on September 11, 2009, to pass a special assessment resolution. A protest meeting is scheduled for 7:00 pm on Friday, October 16, 2009.

#### VII. REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

The following documents were used in the environmental review of this project and are considered part of the project file:

- A. Preliminary Engineering Report, Essex Water and Sewer District Project, May 1998, prepared by Neil Consultants, Inc., Great Falls, Montana.
- B. Uniform Application for Montana Public Facility Projects, May 2009, prepared by Fraser Management and Consulting, PLLC, Kalispell, Montana.
- C. Essex Water Improvements Project, Engineering Design Report, August 2009, prepared by Robert Peccia and Associates, Kalispell, Montana.
- D. Contract Documents and Specifications, Essex Water Improvements Project, September 2009, prepared by Robert Peccia and Associates, Kalispell, Montana.

#### VIII. AGENCIES CONSULTED

No federal or state agencies were contacted for comments regarding the proposed construction of this project. This environmental assessment will be circulated to the following agencies during the public comment period:

- A. The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks.
- B. The Montana Environmental Quality Council.

- C. The Montana Department of Transportation.
- D. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
- E. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.
- F. The Montana Historical Society's Historic Preservation Office.
- G. The Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation.
- H. The Montana Department of Environmental Quality.

IX. AGENCY ACTION, APPLICABLE REGULATIONS AND PERMITTING AUTHORITIES

The district must have approval from the Department of Environmental Quality to construct and operate the water system improvements outlined in this environmental assessment. In addition, the proposed action may require other permits that must be obtained by the town's construction contractor, as described in the project manual approved by the department. The contractor will be required to submit the necessary documentation, including a notice of intent and storm water pollution prevention plan, to the department's storm water permitting program prior to beginning construction.

X. RECOMMENDATION FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

- EIS       More Detailed EA       No Further Analysis

EA prepared by:

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Name Date

EA reviewed by:

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Name Date