

February 20, 2009  
1420 East 6<sup>th</sup> 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  
    Missoula Office  
Montana State Library, Helena  
MT Environmental Information Center  
Montana Audubon Council  
Montana Wildlife Federation  
Wayne Hadley, 1016 Eastside Road, Deer Lodge, MT 59722  
Montana River Action, 304 N 18<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Bozeman, MT 59715  
Bitterroot Conservation District  
Bitterroot Chapter Trout Unlimited, P.O. Box 262, Hamilton, MT 59840  
U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Helena  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Helena  
State Historic Preservation Office, Helena  
Robert Bertch, 21906 NE 140<sup>th</sup> Way, Woodinville, WA 98077

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Please find enclosed an Environmental Assessment prepared for the Future Fisheries Improvement Program. The Program tentatively plans to provide partial funding for a project calling for the re-naturalization of a channelized reach of Cameron Creek, a tributary to the East Fork Bitterroot River. The intent of the project is to enhance the diversity in aquatic habitat in a 450-foot reach of Cameron Creek to benefit wild fish, including fluvial bull trout. The project site is located approximately 0.5 miles north of the community of Sula in Ravalli County.

Please submit any comments that you have by 5:00 P.M., March 23, 2009 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  
Cameron Creek Channel Re-naturalization Project

General Purpose: The 1995 Montana Legislature enacted statute 87-1-272 through 273 which 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. 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 Program is proposing to provide partial funding for a project designed to re-naturalize a 450-foot channelized reach of Cameron Creek, a tributary to the East Fork Bitterroot River. The intent of this project is to enhance fish habitat by creating greater aquatic habitat diversity and to move the channel away from the existing highway borrow pit to eliminate sand and salt road treatments from entering the active waterway. The project site is located approximately 0.5 miles north of the community of Sula in Ravalli County (Attachment 1).

- I. Location of Project: This project will be conducted on Cameron Creek, a tributary to the East Fork Bitterroot River, located within Township 1 North, Range 19 West, Section 8 in Ravalli 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 meet this goal.

A 450-foot reach of Cameron Creek was channelized in the past and now flows down the borrow pit of State Highway 472. The existing ditched channel lacks habitat diversity for fish populations and continues to receive cast-off of salt and sand that is placed on the highway for road treatment. Radio transmitter tracking by local fisheries biologists have identified fluvial bull trout temporarily entering lower Cameron Creek prior to moving to other waters for spawning purposes. This project is intended to re-naturalize this channelized reach of stream and move it away from the highway borrow pit to enhance aquatic habitat.

III. Scope of the Project:

This project calls for restoring a 450-foot channelized reach of Cameron Creek by excavating a new channel away from the highway borrow pit and in the approximate location of the historic channel (Attachment 2). The new channel will be constructed using an analog approach whereby design details will match the dimension, pattern and profile of adjacent natural reaches of the stream. The new stream banks will be temporarily stabilized using coir fabric wraps that are seeded with native grasses and sprigged with approximately 500 willow cuttings. The newly constructed stream reach will be fenced to exclude livestock.

This project is expected to cost \$34,540.00. Of this total, the Future Fisheries Improvement Program would be contributing up to \$19,090.00.

IV. Environmental Impact Checklist:

Please see attached checklist.

V. Explanation of Impacts to the Physical Environment

1. Terrestrial and aquatic life and habitats.

Cameron Creek supports a mixed fish assemblage, including rainbow trout, rainbow trout X westslope cutthroat trout hybrids, brown trout, brook trout, bull trout, longnose sucker and longnose dace. Re-naturalizing this channelized reach of stream and moving it away from the highway are expected to improve water quality, increase aquatic habitat diversity and enhance existing fish populations. The proposed streamside fencing and the planting of native riparian shrubs are expected to enhance habitat for riparian dependent wildlife.

2. Water quantity, quality and distribution.

Short-term increases in turbidity will occur during project construction. To minimize turbidity, construction of the new channel will be completed 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 (Natural Streambed and Land Preservation Act) will be obtained from the local conservation district and the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers will be contacted to determine the requirements to meet the federal Clean Water Act (404 permit).

3. Geology, soil quality and moisture.

Soils within the footprint of the re-naturalized channel would be disturbed during construction, but would be stabilized using wraps of coir fabric along newly formed stream banks, re-vegetation efforts and the installation of riparian fencing.

4. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality.

Vegetation within the footprint of the re-naturalized channel would be disturbed during construction. Re-vegetation efforts associated with the new channel construction and the installation of riparian fencing would mitigate for this disturbance.

5. Aesthetics.

Aesthetics would be negatively impacted during project construction due to ground disturbance and the presence of heavy equipment. In the long term, aesthetics would be enhanced by restoring a degraded reach of stream to a healthier and more natural stream environment.

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

Fluvial bull trout have been documented moving into lower Cameron Creek in the past using radio telemetry. Bull trout are listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act and are considered a species of special concern in Montana. Because Cameron Creek has supported bull trout in the past, 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 bull trout that utilize this reach of the stream.

7. Historic and archaeological sites

This reach of stream channel previously was disturbed when it was placed into the borrow pit adjacent to the highway. As a result, there is a low likelihood that cultural properties will be adversely impacted by the completion of the proposed project (returning the ditched channel back to its historic location). 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.

1. Access to & quality of recreational activities.

The intent of the project is to improve aquatic habitat diversity within a 450-foot reach of Cameron Creek. The project may enhance recruitment of salmonids to the East Fork Bitterroot River. As a result, the recreational fishery on this reach of Cameron Creek, and possibly the East Fork, may exhibit some improvement.

## VII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

1. No Action Alternative

If no action is taken, this reach of Cameron Creek will remain in the borrow pit ditch adjacent to the highway. Water quality will continue to be degraded from persistent cast-off of road treatment materials and aquatic habitat will continue to lack diversity. 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 re-naturalize a channelized reach of Cameron Creek. This alternative would move the ditched channel away from the highway, reducing the quantity of road treatment materials (salt and sand) entering into the active channel. Additionally, the proposal would increase habitat diversity for fish populations utilizing this reach of stream and may enhance recreational fishing opportunities. Riparian plantings and the installation of fencing are expected to enhance habitat for riparian dependent wildlife.

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 webpage: [fwp.mt.gov](http://fwp.mt.gov).

3. Duration of comment period?

Public comment will be accepted through 5:00 PM on March 23, 2009.

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 Cameron Creek Channel Re-naturalization 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 designed to re-naturalize a 450-foot reach of Cameron Creek, a tributary to the East Fork Bitterroot River. The project calls for moving a ditched channel away from the highway borrow pit and returning it to its historic location. The intent of the project is to enhance aquatic habitat diversity and improve water quality. The project site is located approximately 0.5 miles north of the community of Sula in Ravalli 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 Bitterroot 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 Chris Clancy, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

Recommendation concerning preparation of EIS No EIS required.

EA prepared by: Mark Lere

Date: January 28, 2008