



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT AND DECISION NOTICE FOR THE CRYSTAL LAKES DIVERSION FISH SCREEN PROJECT

September 17, 2009

Project Proposal and Justification:

Deep Creek is a 9.9-mile-long (16 km) tributary to the Tobacco River, which flows into Lake Koocanusa a trans-boundary (USA-Canada) impoundment on the Kootenai River. The upper portion of Deep Creek, above the project location, is a relatively steep and confined stream channel that flows exclusively through USFS land. The lower portion of Deep Creek is lower gradient and less confined, and flows through farm and saw mill properties. Deep Creek originates in a high elevation basin within the Whitefish Mountain Range, and the flow regime consists of a snowmelt runoff generally in late May/early June, and a high elevation spring flows throughout the rest of the year. Deep Creek maintains a relatively consistent year-round temperature, rarely exceeding 59°(15 C).

Westslope cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarki lewisi*), bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*), brook trout (*Salvelinus fontinalis*), and rainbow trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) all exist in Deep Creek, but bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout are the primary species upstream of the Crystal Lakes diversion. Bull trout are currently listed as a threatened species on the Endangered Species List for the Kootenai River Drainage. There has not been a confirmed observation of bull trout spawning in Deep Creek; however, anecdotal information suggests that bull trout did spawn in Deep Creek prior to the 1980s.

Several water rights exist on Deep Creek. However, the largest single water user (Crystal Lakes Fish Hatchery and Golf Course) currently does not have a functioning fish screen on the diversion. The proposed project would install a turbulent fountain fish screen to eliminate fish entrainment and decrease screen maintenance on the irrigation system. This project also proposes to replace an inadequate culvert where the irrigation ditch crosses the NFD 368 Road to decrease the potential for erosion.

Location of Project:

This project will be constructed on Deep Creek, located approximately 3 miles northeast of the city of Fortine, Montana. Specifically, the project is located within Township 35 North, Range 25 West, Section 20, Lincoln County, Montana. The project will occur entirely on US Forest land.

Environmental and Social Impacts of Project:

There may be short-term increases in turbidity during the project construction phase, but these impacts are expected to be minor and not impact aquatic life in Deep Creek. During project construction, all reasonable and applicable Best Management Practices will be employed to minimize sedimentation to Deep Creek. For example, we will minimize turbidity by 1) scheduling construction to occur during a low flow period, 2) installing the fish screen in the dry to every practicable extent, and 3) filtering water across the vegetated floodplain areas that drain away from the active channel during construction. Riparian vegetation disturbance during project implementation is expected to be minimal to nonexistent and will not impact the overall health of the riparian community. This project is expected to improve the productivity of all resident fish populations within Deep Creek by reducing mortality caused by entrainment into the irrigation system.

Public Involvement:

In compliance with the Montana Environmental Policy Act, Montana FWP prepared and circulated an environmental assessment for public comment from August 3 through September 2, 2009. Notices were placed in two local newspapers, and notification was mailed to local landowners affected by the project, local conservation groups, local timber companies, selected businesses, and natural resource agencies. Copies of the EA were made available at three local libraries, the Montana FWP Region 1 headquarters in Kalispell, and the Montana FWP internet web site. We did not receive any comments on this environmental assessment.

Decision Notice:

Based on the lack of comments we received during the public comment period for the draft environmental assessment for the Crystal Lakes Diversion Fish Screen Project, we have prepared the final environmental assessment for this project. No changes were made to the draft environmental assessment; therefore, the draft will become the final document. Due to the urgent need to reduce native salmonid entrainment and mortality associated with the inadequately screened irrigation diversion, I recommend that the proposed project be implemented as needed.

James R. Satterfield, Jr.

9/18/09

James R. Satterfield, Jr., Ph.D.
Regional Supervisor

Date