Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

January 29, 2010
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 Bureau
Endangered Species Coordinator
Native Species Coordinator, Fisheries Division
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 Network, 304 N 18th Ave., Bozeman, MT 59715
Lewis and Clark Conservation District
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
Stew and Delores Schwartz, 597 Upper Millegan Road, Great Falls, MT 59405

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 project calling to replace three undersized and perched culverts located on Sauerkraut Creek, a tributary to the Blackfoot River, with three pre-cast concrete bridges. The intent of the project is to restore migratory connectivity between the stream and the river. These proposed culvert replacements are located approximately 3.5 miles west of the town of Lincoln in Lewis and Clark County.

Please submit any comments that you have by 5:00 P.M., March 3, 2010 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 Section
Fisheries Bureau
e-mail: mlere@mt.gov

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
Fisheries Division
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Sauerkraut Creek Culvert Replacement 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 project calling for replacement of three undersized and perched culverts located on road crossings on Sauerkraut Creek with pre-cast concrete bridges. The intent of the project is to enhance upstream fish passage at these road crossings to improve migratory connectivity to the upper 7 miles of the stream. The project site is located on three road crossings approximately 3.5 miles west of the town of Lincoln in Lewis and Clark County (Attachment 1).

I. Location of Project: This project will be conducted on three existing road crossings on Sauerkraut Creek located within Township 14 North, Range 9 West, Sections 29 and 32 in Lewis and Clark 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.

Sauerkraut Creek is a second order tributary to the Blackfoot River that supports adfluvial westslope cutthroat trout that are genetically pure, as well as limited bull trout rearing. Three existing road crossings located on the Sunnyslope Grazing Association and Greg Sutherland properties are undersized and perched and create partial passage barriers for upstream migrating fish, especially during high water events. The existing culverts consist of three 18-inch pipes at the upper crossing, a single 24-inch pipe at the middle crossing and a 48-inch pipe near the mouth. Velocities at all three culverts were measured at 7 feet per second or higher during the westslope cutthroat trout migration period in 2009. As a result, migratory connectivity to the upper seven miles of the stream is impaired. This project calls for replacing these existing culverts with free span, pre-cast concrete bridges.

III. Scope of the Project:

This proposed project would replace three existing undersized culverts with pre-cast concrete

bridges. The three bridges would free span a total of 14 feet. Reference reach data indicate that the bankfull width of the channel is about 12 feet. The bridges have been designed to satisfy conveyance at the 100-year flow event and will meet stream simulation guidelines to provide unimpeded passage for all aquatic organisms. This project is expected to cost $179,774.00. Of this total, the Future Fisheries Improvement Program would be contributing up to $67,250.00. The remainder of the funding would come from outside sources and in-kind services.

IV. Environmental Impact Checklist:

Please see attached checklist.

V. Explanation of Impacts to the Physical Environment

1. Terrestrial and aquatic life and habitats.

Replacing three existing undersized and perched culverts with properly sized concrete bridges would create more stable stream crossings that would enhance upstream passage for all aquatic organisms and improve migratory connectivity with the upper 7 miles of the stream. This work would complement previous habitat enhancement work that was completed in the drainage during 2009.

2. Water quantity, quality and distribution.

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 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 need to meet 404 provisions of the Clean Water Act.

3. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture.

Soils along the stream margin would be temporarily disturbed during construction. All disturbed areas would be re-vegetated with a native grass seed mix.

5. Aesthetics.

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

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

Enhancing migratory connectivity to the upper seven miles of Sauerkraut Creek has the potential to benefit both bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout populations.

9. Historic and archaeological sites

The three sites previously have been disturbed by the construction and maintenance of the existing stream crossings. As a result, there is a very low likelihood that cultural properties will be impacted by 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.

14. Transportation networks & traffic flows.

Traffic on a portion of the road likely would be delayed, interrupted, or re-routed during construction. The period of construction is expected to take no longer than three weeks.

VII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

1. No Action Alternative

If no action is taken, these road crossings on Sauerkraut Creek will continue to act as partial fish migration barriers and migratory connectivity to the upper seven miles of the stream will remain impaired.

2. The Proposed Alternative

The proposed alternative is designed to replace three existing undersized culverts on Sauerkraut Creek with free span concrete bridges. The new bridges would be sized to adequately meet stream simulation guidelines, providing passage for all aquatic organisms. This work would complement previous habitat enhancement work that has been completed in the drainage. The project is expected to improve migratory connectivity for native westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout, as well as non-native brown trout and brook 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 March 3, 2010

4. Person responsible for preparing the EA.

Mark Lere, Program Officer
Habitat Protection Section
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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 Sauerkraut Creek Culvert Replacement Project
Division/Bureau Fisheries Bureau -Future Fisheries Improvement
Description of Project The Future Fisheries Improvement Program is proposing to provide partial funding for a project calling for replacing three undersized and perched culverts located on Sauerkraut Creek with pre-cast concrete bridges. The intent of the project is to enhance upstream fish passage, improving migratory connectivity to the upper 7 miles of the stream. The project site is located at three road crossings approximately 3.5 miles west of the town of Lincoln in Lewis and Clark 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		
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			X

Other groups or agencies contacted or which may have overlapping jurisdiction Lewis and Clark 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 Ryen Aasheim, Big Blackfoot Chapter of Trout Unlimited

Recommendation concerning preparation of EIS No EIS required.

EA prepared by: Mark Lere

Date: January 20, 2010