July 14, 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
Great Falls 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, 790 Colleen Street, Helena, MT 59601
U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Helena
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Helena
U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, 7700 Canyon Ferry Road, Helena, MT 59602
State Historic Preservation Office, Helena
Rene Requa, 8445 Canyon Ferry Road, Helena, MT 59602

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 replacing two existing undersized culverts located on Magpie Creek with free span bridges. Magpie Creek is a tributary to Canyon Ferry Reservoir. The intent of the project is to improve upstream fish passage for adfluvial rainbow trout residing in Canyon Ferry Reservoir to access additional spawning and rearing habitat. This proposed project is located on the north end of Canyon Ferry Reservoir approximately 16 miles east of the city of Helena in Lewis and Clark County.

Please submit any comments that you have by 5:00 P.M., August 15, 2010 to the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks in Helena at the address listed above. Completion of this project 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 Section
Fisheries Bureau
e-mail: mlere@mt.gov

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
Fisheries Division
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Magpie Creek Fish Passage Enhancement 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 purpose 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 involving the replacement of two existing undersized culvert crossings located on Magpie Creek with free span bridges. The existing culverts, located on property owned by Rene Requa, are undersized and act as partial barriers to upstream fish migration. Additionally, breeching of these two crossings has been a common occurrence, requiring the continual placement of fill material as maintenance. The intent of the project is to enhance upstream fish passage for migratory rainbow trout residing in Canyon Ferry Reservoir to access additional spawning and rearing habitat. The two culvert crossings are located approximately 16 miles east of the city of Helena in Lewis and Clark County.

I. Location of Project: This project will be conducted on Magpie Creek at two existing culvert crossing located approximately 16 miles east of the city of Helena within Township 10 North, Range 1 West, Section 1 in Lewis and Clark County (Attachment 1).

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 achieve this goal.

The fishery in Canyon Ferry Reservoir is very popular, supporting an estimated 83,000 angler days in 2007. Natural reproduction for rainbow trout in the reservoir is limited to a few tributaries to the reservoir and stocking of hatchery fish primarily supports the fishery. Magpie Creek is one of the few spawning tributaries available for rainbow trout residing in Canyon Ferry Reservoir and has been a site of previous restoration activities, including the installation of a fish ladder and improvements to a US Bureau of Reclamation road crossing. The lower 1.5 miles of Magpie Creek are used for spawning habitat by migratory rainbow trout, with the highest quality spawning habitat located in the upper 0.25 miles of the reach. This high quality habitat is located upstream of a Denil fish ladder that had been installed in the past to allow for fish passage around an in-stream pond. This spawning habitat also is located upstream of the culverts in question (Attachment 2). One of the culvert crossings, located downstream of the ladder, acts as a partial fish barrier. The second culvert crossing, located about 0.1 miles upstream of the ladder, currently appears to be a complete barrier for upstream migration. The intent of the project is to enhance upstream fish passage to allow migratory rainbow trout to reach high quality spawning habitat in Magpie Creek.

III. Scope of the Project:

The project proposes to replace two undersized culverts located on Magpie Creek with free span bridges.

The bridges will be constructed using pre-cast concrete abutments that would act to support recycled wood stringers and decking. This project is expected to cost approximately $7,700.00. Of this total, the Future Fisheries Improvement Program would be contributing up to $5,000.00. The remainder of the funding would come from outside sources and in-kind services:

Contributor	In-kind services	In-kind cash
Landowner		2,700.00
MFWP	Donation of salvaged bridge stringers	

IV. Environmental Impact Checklist:

Please see attached checklist.

V. Explanation of Impacts to the Physical Environment

1. Terrestrial and aquatic life and habitats.

Enhancing fish passage through existing two road crossings on Magpie Creek potentially could increase recruitment of juvenile rainbow trout to Canyon Ferry Reservoir. As a result, the project has the potential to enhance the rainbow trout population in Canyon Ferry Reservoir.

2. Water quantity, quality and distribution.

Short-term increases in turbidity will occur during project construction. To minimize turbidity, operation of equipment in the active 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 124 permit (Stream Protection Act) will be obtained from Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks 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.

The two culvert crossings currently are unstable and require recurrent maintenance involving the placement of additional fill. Replacing these two crossings with free span bridges would act to stabilize the sites.

4. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality.

Riparian vegetation and cover would be disturbed within the immediate project area during the period of construction. However, proposed re-seeding efforts would act to mitigate these disturbances.

5. Aesthetics

Aesthetics of the site would be degraded during the short time frame of construction due to ground disturbance and the presence of heavy equipment. Long-term impacts to aesthetics would be negligible.

9. Historic and archaeological sites

These two sites have been previously disturbed by road construction. As a result, there is a very low likelihood that cultural properties will be impacted as result 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.

Enhancing upstream fish passage in lower Magpie Creek will allow fish from Canyon Ferry Reservoir to more readily access about 1.5 miles of spawning and rearing habitat. As a result, this proposed project has the potential to enhance recruitment and improve recreational fishing in Canyon Ferry Reservoir.

14. Transportation networks & traffic flows.

The two culvert crossings are located on private roads. As such, the project would not interfere with public transportation.

VII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

1. No Action Alternative

If no funding is provided, the applicant would have to either seek other sources of funding to complete the project or the existing undersized culverts on Magpie Creek will continue to act as fish passage barriers and remain under threat of breaching. Access to quality spawning and rearing habitat will continue to be hindered and the potential for recruitment will remain reduced.

2. The Proposed Alternative

The proposed alternative is to provide partial funding through the Future Fisheries Improvement Program toward completion of the culvert to bridge conversion project. The funding would enable the applicant to replace two existing undersized culvert crossings located on Magpie Creek with free span bridges. The intent of the project is to enhance upstream stream fish passage and potentially increase recruitment of rainbow trout to Canyon Ferry Reservoir.

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 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 web page: fwp.mt.gov.

3. Duration of comment period?

   Public comment will be accepted through 5:00 PM on August 15, 2010.

4. Person responsible for preparing the EA.

   Mark Lere, Program Officer
   Habitat Section
   Fisheries Bureau
   Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
   1420 East 6th Avenue
   Helena, MT 59620

   Telephone: (406) 444-2432
   e-mail: mlere@mt.gov

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 Magpie Creek Fish Passage 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 replacing two existing undersized culverts on Magpie Creek, a tributary to Canyon Ferry Reservoir, with free span bridges. The intent of the project is to enhance upstream fish passage for migratory rainbow trout residing in Canyon Ferry Reservoir. The project is located approximately 16 miles east of the city of Helena 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			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

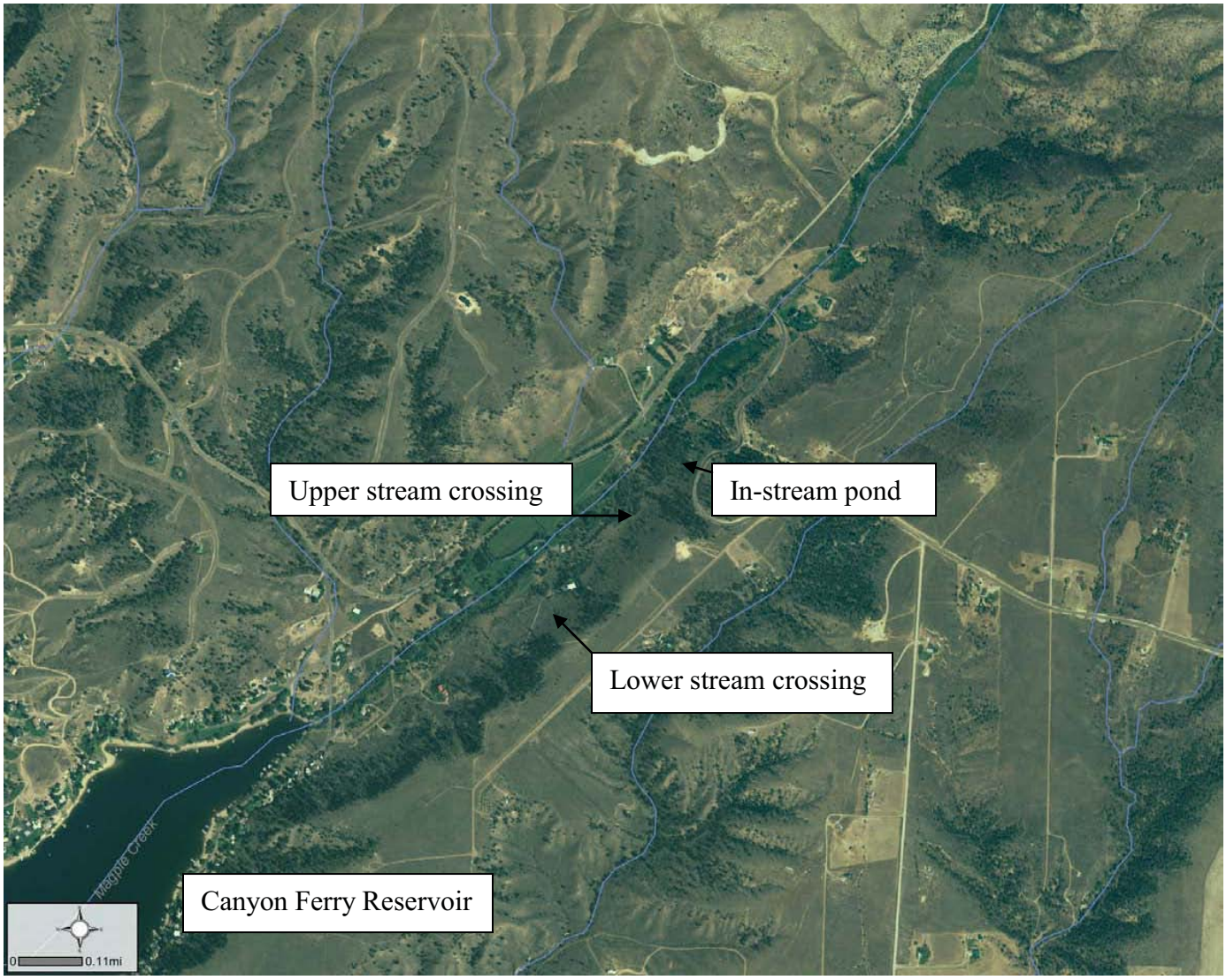
	MAJOR	MODERATE	MINOR	NONE	UNKNOWN	COMMENTS ON ATTACHED PAGES
1. Social structures & mores				X		
2. Cultural uniqueness & diversity				X		
3. Local & state tax base & tax revenue				X		
4. Agricultural or industrial production				X		
5. Human health				X		
6. Quantity & distribution of community & personal 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		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 Eric Roberts, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks

Recommendation concerning preparation of EIS No EIS required. EA prepared by: Mark Lere

Date: July 8, 2010



ATTACHMENT 1. Map of lower Magpie Creek showing locations of stream crossings.

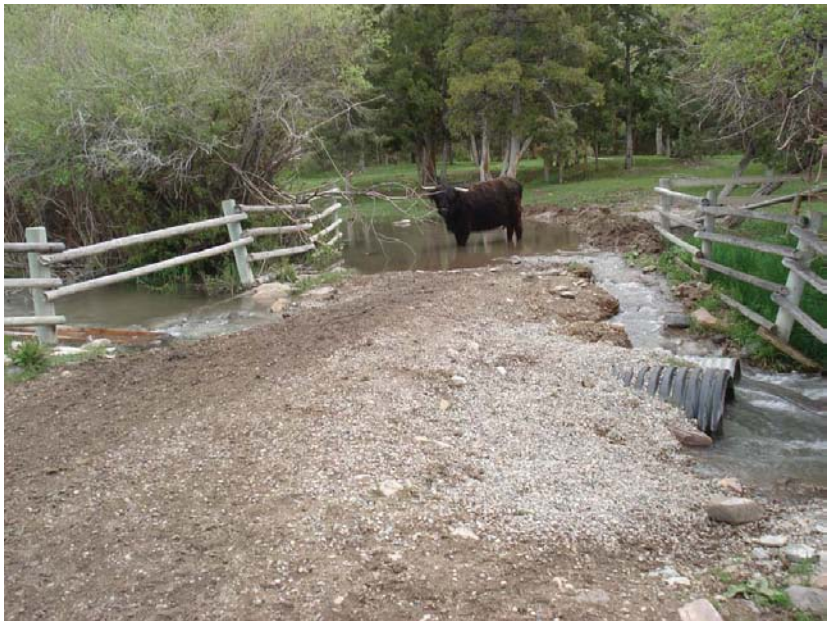


Photo of lower stream crossing

Photo of upper stream crossing

ATTACHMENT 2.