



**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT DECISION NOTICE  
for the  
UPPER MISSOURI WATERSHED BEAVER RELOCATION PROJECT**

**Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks  
Region 3 - Bozeman  
September 2, 2010**

**Preface**

In November 2009, FWP Region 3 was contacted by a landowner in the Elkhorn Mountains about restoration of wetlands on her property in the Strawberry Lookout area. An initial site visit was conducted by the landowner and Tom Hinz, Montana Wetlands Legacy Partnership Coordinator on April 21, 2010. It was determined that the site had ample surface water for maintaining of a beaver colony on site as evidenced by a number of relict beaver dams and lodges on the property. Willows, aspen, and cottonwood appeared to be sufficiently abundant to sustain a beaver colony on the property. There was no indication based on field observations at this time nor through discussion with the landowner that the flowage patterns on the property had changed since the time that beaver were present. Subsequent site visits involving the landowner and personnel from Montana Natural Heritage Program, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP), and Montana Department of Environmental Quality continued to indicate that the site held promise as a beaver relocation area.

Subsequent to these site evaluations, FWP Region 3 personnel began discussing options for securing live beaver for release on the property. Generally, it was understood that were the project to be implemented, the animals would be released into the largest stream on the property from nearby source areas in the Upper Missouri Watershed.

The FWP Commission discussed the proposed relocation during a conference call on August 31, 2010. The project was brought before the Commission because FWP, when proposing the transplantation of any wildlife must secure the Commission's approval, while demonstrating that based upon scientific investigation and after a public hearing, that a species of wildlife poses no harm to native wildlife and plants or to agricultural production and that the transplantation of that species has significant public benefits [MCA 87-5-711(1)]. The Commission endorsed the project following its discussion of the proposal.

**Proposed Action**

FWP proposes to relocate live beaver from the Upper Missouri River drainage to a location in the Elkhorn Mountains to reestablish extirpated populations and restore wetlands in the McClellan Creek watershed to enhance wildlife habitat and surface water availability.

## Public Process and Comments

FWP is required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) to assess potential impacts of a proposed action to the human and physical environment. In compliance with MEPA, an Environmental Assessment (EA) was completed for the proposed project by FWP and released for public comment on August 16, 2010.

Public comments on the proposed action were taken for 15 days (through August 31, 2010). Legal notices were printed in the *Helena Independent Record* and the *Jefferson County Courier*. The EA was also posted on the FWP webpage: <http://fwp.mt.gov/publicnotices/>.

A total of 6 written comments were received in response to the EA. All were supportive of the proposed action. Some were from lifelong residents of the area. None of the comments received were in opposition to the proposed action.

Below is a summary of the comments received and FWP responses to the feedback:

### 1) Restoration of beaver and benefits to wildlife habitat

All comments received referenced the value of wildlife habitat that the presence of beaver in a watershed creates; the need to do something to restore beaver populations; and, the value of restoring wetlands and securing water availability in the watershed. All comments came from residents of the Upper Missouri Watershed and specifically from communities adjoining or residences within the north Elkhorn Mountains.

*FWP response: The Department concurs with statements regarding beaver benefits to wildlife habitat, the value of restoring beaver populations, the need to restore and enhance wetlands, and the value of improving surface water quality and quantity.*

### 2) Public safety

One comment referenced concerns expressed in other jurisdictions and/or previous years about the potential spread of wildlife diseases by relocating beaver. This comment provided a number of scientific references and data including acknowledgment that beaver are a reservoir host species for *Giardia* sp., a known water-borne human pathogen. That same comment referenced the existence of *Giardia* sp. in cattle which are found throughout the McClellan Creek drainage. The inference made was that the proposed action will not introduce a pathogen that is not already present in a number of reservoir host animals already living in the watershed. Safe drinking water is ensured in the watershed through the use of groundwater wells and surface water treated by municipal facilities in communities like East Helena and others.

*FWP response: FWP concurs with these comments and proposes that the planned relocation will not introduce pathogenic organisms that do not already occur in the watershed.*

### 3) Property damage

No comments were received expressing any concern about property damage or loss of agricultural production associated with the proposed release.

4) Evidence of current and historic beaver populations in the watershed

One comment included a map showing potential current and historic beaver sites in the McClellan Creek drainage based on examination of 2009 Color Infrared Aerial Imagery of the watershed. The inference from this information is that there was and is substantial habitat for beaver in the watershed.

*FWP response: FWP will largely base its decision for relocation of beaver into the proposed site on the existence of relict beaver dams and lodges on the property as well as adequate food and water for beaver. Observations by FWP and other agency personnel in the past year have indicated there are no resident beaver on the proposed release property. Comments from area residents indicate that beaver were common in the area in the past. FWP concurs that potential habitat in the area does exist beyond that currently occupied by beaver.*

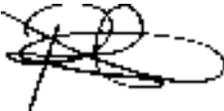
**Final Environmental Assessment**

There are no modifications necessary to the Draft Environmental Assessment based on public comment. The Draft Environmental Assessment, together with this Decision Notice, will serve as the final document for this proposal.

**Decision**

Based on the Environmental Assessment, public comment, and the need to meet the terms of MCA 87-5-711(1) for Commission approval of wildlife transplants in Montana, it is my decision to approve the proposed action for implementation of the Upper Missouri Watershed Beaver Relocation Project.

I find there to be no significant impacts on the human and physical environments associated with this project. Therefore, I conclude that the Environmental Assessment is the appropriate level of analysis, and that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.



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Patrick J. Flowers  
Region 3 Supervisor  
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

9/2/10  
Date