July 12, 2011
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
Bozeman 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
Beaverhead Conservation District
U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Helena
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Helena
State Historic Preservation Office, Helena
Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, 27820 Southside Centennial Road, Lima, MT 59739
Beaverhead County Commission, 2 South Pacific Street, Ste. #4, Dillon, MT 59725
The Nature Conservancy, 32 South Ewing Street, Helena, MT 59601

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 for a project calling to replace two undersized culverts on two tributaries to the Red Rock River with larger metal corrugated arch pipes. The new culverts would be installed on county road crossings located on Hellroaring and Bear creeks. The intent of the project is to enhance migratory connectivity for native fish, including westslope cutthroat trout, grayling, mountain whitefish and burbot. These culvert replacements also would complement additional road crossing improvements being pursued by The Nature Conservancy on other tributaries to the Red Rock River. These proposed culvert replacements are located approximately 35 miles east of the community of Monida in Beaverhead County.

Please submit any comments that you have by 5:00 P.M., August 12, 2011 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
Centennial Valley 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.

The Future Fisheries Improvement Program is proposing to provide partial funding to a project calling for the replacement of two undersized culverts located at existing road crossings on two tributaries to the Red Rock River with larger corrugated metal arch pipes. The two culvert replacements would be located on Hellroaring and Bear creeks. The intent of the project is to enhance upstream fish passage at these road crossings to improve migratory connectivity for grayling, mountain whitefish and burbot. This proposed project is located on county road crossings approximately 38 miles east of the community of Monida in Beaverhead County.

I. Location of Project: This project will be conducted on two existing county road crossings in Beaverhead County. One of these crossings is located on Hellroaring Creek within Township 14 South, Range 1 East, Section 24 (Attachment 1). The second is located on Bear Creek within Township 14 South, Range 3 West, Section 30 (Attachment 2).

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.

In the Centennial Valley, the road system typically runs perpendicular to nearly all of the tributaries flowing into the Red Rock River. The road crossings typically consist of undersized culverts, creating impediments to upstream fish passage and causing washouts during high flow events. Additionally, a number of these road crossings divert water into road borrow pits during higher flows, where water is either impounded or flows long distances to the next available culvert. Six culvert crossings in the drainage have been identified by The Nature Conservancy as priorities for replacement due to their impacts on hydrologic processes and ecological function. The priority culverts are located on Long, Hellroaring (2), Elk Springs, Bear and Fish creeks. The Future Fisheries Program is proposing to provide partial funding to replace two of these culverts - one located on Hellroaring Creek and one located on Bear Creek. The Nature Conservancy is working collaboratively towards replacing the remaining four priority culverts located on other tributaries in the Red Rock River drainage.

III. Scope of the Project:

This proposed project would replace two existing undersized culverts with larger metal arch pipes located

on existing road crossings on Hellroaring and Bear creeks. The new road crossings would consist of "Eco-Arch" bottomless, galvanized culverts that would be between 10 and 12 feet in width. This project is expected to cost $45,025.00. Of this total, the Future Fisheries Improvement Program would be contributing up to $34,025.00.00. The remainder of the funding would come from in-kind services provided by The Nature Conservancy and Beaverhead County.

IV. Environmental Impact Checklist:

Please see attached checklist.

V. Explanation of Impacts to the Physical Environment

1. Terrestrial and aquatic life and habitats.

Replacing two existing undersized culverts with properly sized, bottomless arch pipes on tributaries to the Red Rock River would create more stable stream crossings and would enhance upstream passage for all aquatic organisms. Migratory connectivity for grayling, mountain whitefish and burbot would be improved. The proposed work would not threaten the genetic integrity of any fish population since the existing culverts currently act only as partial migration barriers.

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 (Montana 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.

9. Historic and archaeological sites

The two sites have been previously disturbed by the construction and maintenance of the existing road 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.

The two culverts proposed to be replaced are located on county road crossings. As such, public transportation and traffic flows potentially would be interrupted for the period of time it would take to replace each culvert. If determined to be needed by county officials, temporary detours would be constructed around each of the work sites to allow for uninterrupted flow of traffic.

VII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

1. No Action Alternative

If no Future Fisheries funding is provided, the applicant would have to either seek other sources of funding to complete the project or road crossings on Hellroaring and Bear creeks will continue to act as impediments for upstream movement of aquatic organisms and hinder hydrologic processes and ecological function.

2. The Proposed Alternative

The proposed alternative is designed to provide partial funding to aid in replacing two existing undersized culverts on Hellroaring and Bear creeks with open-bottomed, metal corrugated arch pipes. The new crossings would be designed to enhance upstream passage for all aquatic organisms and accommodate hydrologic functions of the stream channels. The project is expected to improve migratory connectivity for grayling, mountain whitefish and burbot. This work also would complement culvert replacement projects being pursued by The Nature Conservancy.

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 August 12, 2011

4. Person responsible for preparing the EA.

Mark Lere, Program Officer
Habitat Protection 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 Centennial Valley Culvert Replacement Project
Division/Bureau Fisheries Bureau -Future Fisheries Improvement
Description of Project The Future Fisheries Improvement Program is proposing to provide partial funding to a project calling for replacing two undersized culverts located on Hellroaring and Bear creeks with corrugated metal arch pipes. The intent of the project is to enhance upstream passage for all aquatic organisms and provide for improved hydrologic function. The project sites are located approximately 35 miles east of the community of Monida in Beaverhead County.

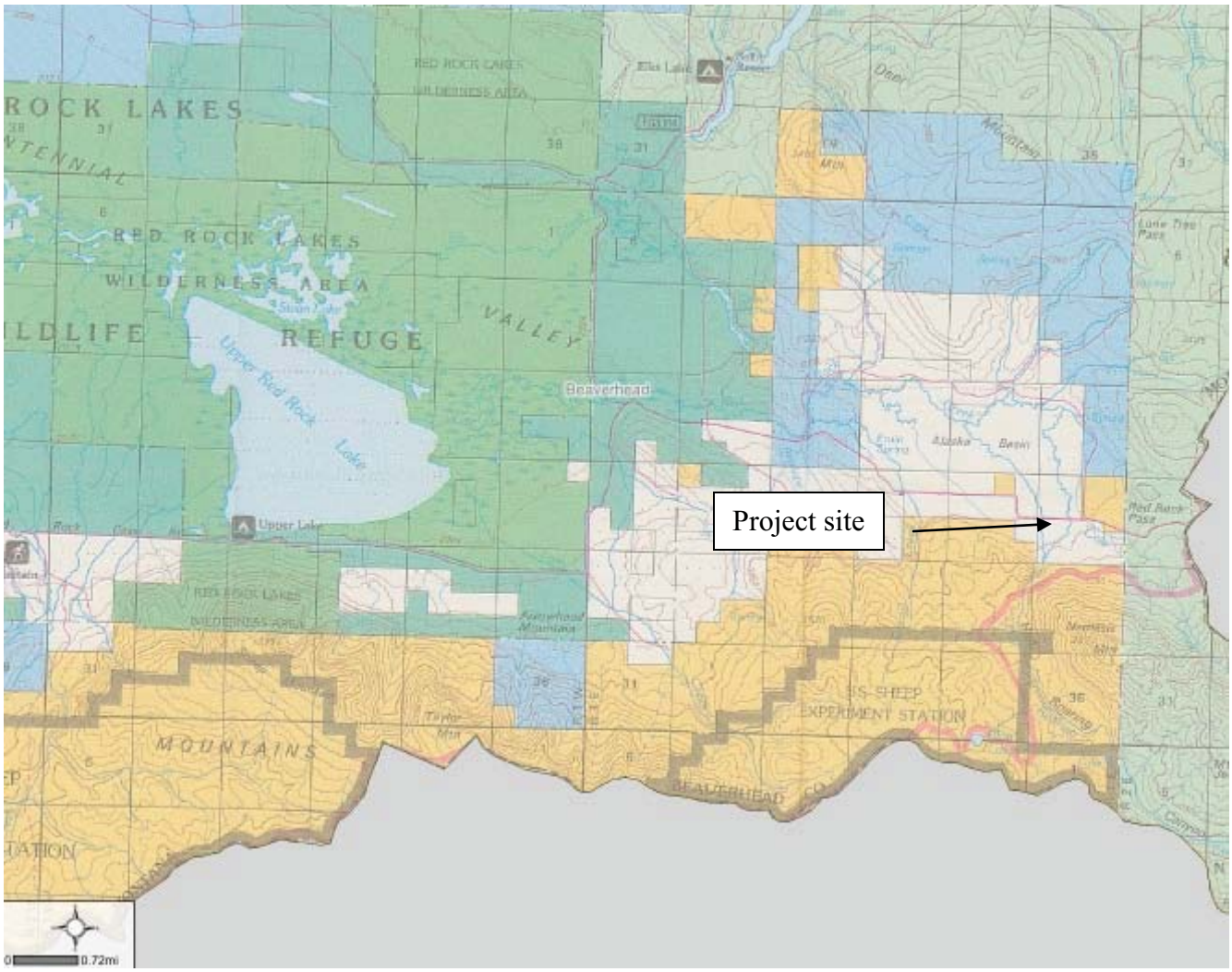
POTENTIAL IMPACT ON PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

	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

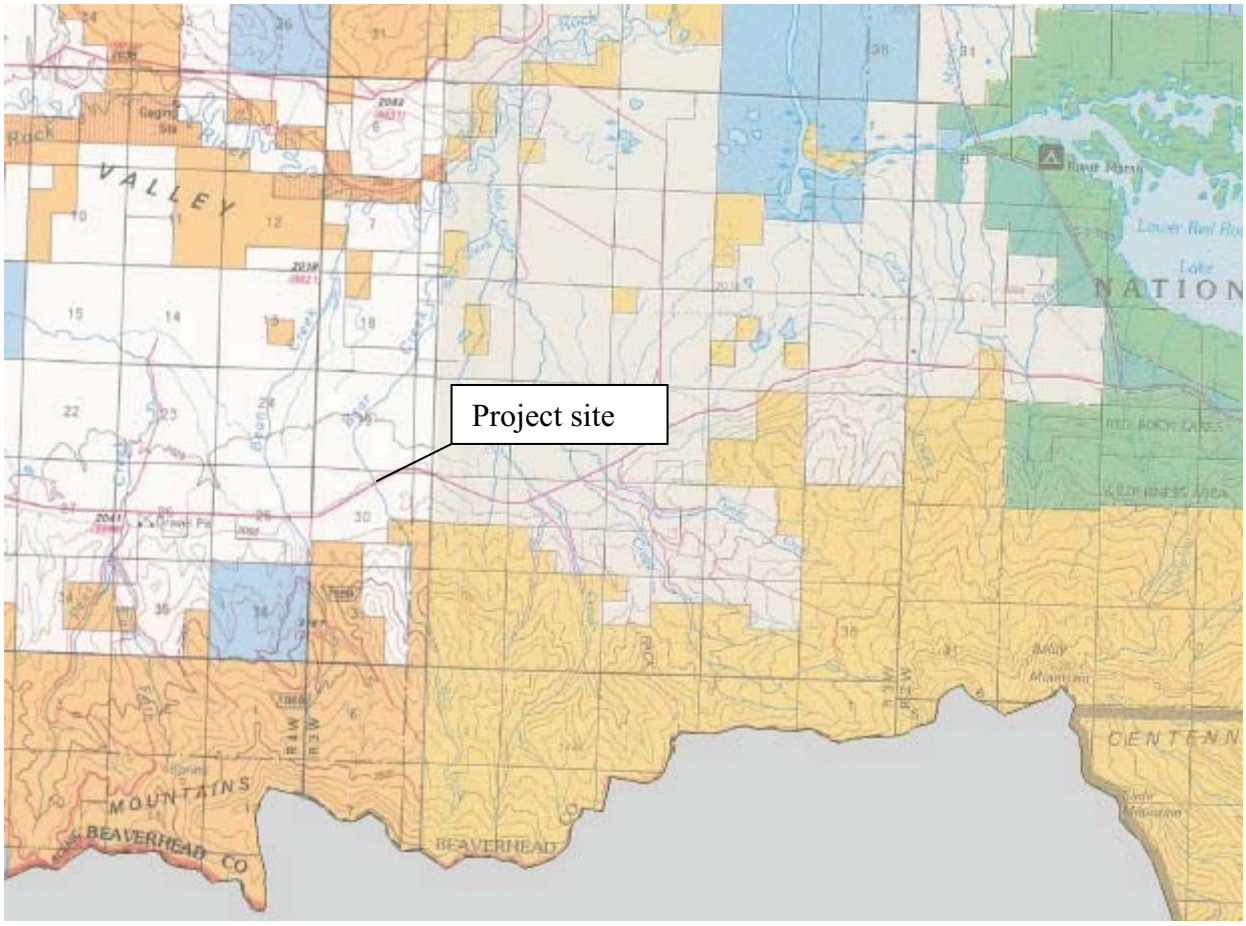
	MAJOR	MODERATE	MINOR	NONE	UNKNOWN	COMMENTS ON ATTACHED PAGES
1. Social structures & mores				X		
2. Cultural uniqueness & diversity				X		
3. Local & state tax base & tax revenue				X		
4. Agricultural or industrial production				X		
5. Human health				X		
6. Quantity & distribution of community & personal 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 Beaverhead 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 Nathan Korb, The Nature Conservancy
Recommendation concerning preparation of EIS No EIS required.
EA prepared by: Mark Lere
Date: July 7, 2011



Map showing location of culvert project on Hellroaring Creek

ATTACHMENT 1



Map showing location of culvert project on Bear Creek

ATTACHMENT 2