January 27, 2012
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
Kalispell Office
Montana State Library, Helena
Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
MT Environmental Information Center
Montana Audubon Council
Montana Wildlife Federation
Wayne Hadley, 1016 Eastside Road, Deer Lodge, MT 59722
Montana River Action, 304 N 18th Avenue, Bozeman, MT 59715
Flathead Conservation District, 133 Interstate Lane, Kalispell, MT 59901
U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Helena
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Helena
State Historic Preservation Office, Helena
City Manager, City of Whitefish, P.O. Box 158, Whitefish, MT 59937
Montana Watercourse, P.O. Box 170575, Bozeman, MT 59717
Kent Reimer, 250 Reimer Lane, Whitefish, MT 59937
Kurt Reimer, 415 Missy Lane, whitefish, MT 59937

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Please find enclosed an Environmental Assessment prepared for the Future Fisheries Improvement Program. The Program tentatively plans to provide partial funding for a project calling for the stabilization of approximately 1,200 feet of Haskill Creek, a tributary to the Whitefish River. The project calls for stabilizing five individual reaches of Haskill Creek by excavating the existing high stream banks to create floodplain benches and by implementing a riparian and floodplain re-vegetation plan. The intent of the project is to improve water quality and fish populations in a portion of Haskill Creek and to demonstrate the use to two differing techniques for stream bank stabilization. The project site is located southeast of the town of Whitefish on property owned by Kurt and Kent Reimer in Flathead County.

Please submit any comments that you have by 5:00 P.M., February 27, 2012 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 Section
Fisheries Bureau
e-mail: mlere@mt.gov

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
Fisheries Division
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Haskill Creek Channel Stabilization Project

General Purpose: The 1995 Montana Legislature enacted statute 87-1-272 through 273 which 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 Program is proposing to provide partial funding to a project designed to stabilize approximately 1,222 feet of Haskill Creek, a tributary to the Whitefish River. The intent of this project is to improve water quality and fish populations within a reach of Haskill Creek and provide a demonstration of two different types of bank stabilization techniques. The project site is located approximately 2 miles southeast of the town of Whitefish in Flathead County.

I. Location of Project: This project will be conducted on a reach of Haskill Creek located approximately 2 miles southeast of the town of Whitefish within Township 30 North, Range 21 West, Section 4 in Flathead County (Attachment 1). The project site is located on properties owned by Kurt and Kent Reimer.

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 meet this goal.

Haskill Creek is a tributary to the Whitefish River that supports brook trout in the lower drainage and hybridized westslope cutthroat trout in the headwaters. Portions of Haskill Creek have been straightened in the past, and the woody vegetation has been actively removed from the riparian corridor. In response to these past disturbances, portions of Haskill Creek have incised and become disconnected from the floodplain, causing an accelerated rate of bank erosion (Attachment 2). This proposed project would construct new floodplain benches, stabilize eroding stream banks and create a healthy riparian community. The proposed work also would provide a demonstration of two differing techniques used for bank stabilization.

III. Scope of the Project:

This project calls for stabilizing 1,222 feet of Haskill Creek, composed of 5 individual reaches, by constructing floodplain benches along the toe of existing high stream banks and by re-vegetating with woody riparian shrubs and native grass seed. The newly constructed stream banks would be stabilized using two different bio-engineering techniques. Re-vegetated sod banks with installed toe wood and large woody debris jams would be used to stabilize stream banks at sites 1, 2, 3 and 5 (Attachment 3). On site 4, stream banks would be stabilized using vegetated soil lifts with conifer fascines placed at the toe (Attachment 4). Approximately 300 containerized shrub seedlings and 6,000 willow cuttings would be used for re-vegetation. Containerized plants would be protected with browse protectors and 3-foot by 3-

foot weed mats. Planting densities would approximate 1 plant per 40 square feet of floodplain. A riparian management plan would be implemented to ensure the establishment of a healthy riparian buffer from existing agricultural lands.

This project is expected to cost $74,602.00. Of this total, the Future Fisheries Improvement Program would be contributing up to $10,909.00. The remaining funding would come from other sources and from in-kind services:

Contributor	In-kind service	In-kind cash
MT DNRC		$10,000.00
MT DEQ 319 Program		$27,000.00
Flathead Conservation District		$3,000.00
Landowners and others	$22,545.00	
River Design Group	$1,147.00	

IV. Environmental Impact Checklist:

Please see attached checklist.

V. Explanation of Impacts to the Physical Environment

1. Terrestrial and aquatic life and habitats.

This reach of Haskill Creek currently supports primarily brook trout and a few hybridized westslope cutthroat trout. Stabilizing 1,222 feet of the stream, constructing floodplain benches and enhancing the associated riparian corridor are expected to improve aquatic habitat diversity and increase existing fish populations. The proposed floodplain and riparian re-vegetation efforts also are expected to enhance habitat for riparian dependent wildlife.

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 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 requirements to meet the federal Clean Water Act (404 permit). In the long term, water quality is expected to be improved by reducing stream bank erosion rates within this reach of the stream.

3. Geology, soil quality and moisture.

Soils within the footprint of the project area would be disturbed during construction (less than 0.5 acres), but would be stabilized using coir fabric, in combination with re-vegetation (seeding and the planting of riparian shrubs and trees).

4. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality.

Vegetation within the footprint of the project area would be disturbed during construction, primarily involving non-native grasses. Re-vegetation efforts and implementation of a riparian management plan would mitigate for this disturbance.

5. Aesthetics.

Aesthetics would be negatively impacted during project construction due to ground disturbance and the presence of heavy equipment. In the long term, aesthetics would be enhanced by restoring a degraded reach of stream to a healthier and more natural stream environment.

9. Historic and archaeological sites

The proposed project may require an individual Army Corp of Engineers 404 permit. Therefore, the State Historic Preservation Office will be contacted to determine the need for compliance with the federal historic preservation regulations. Future Fisheries funding will not be made available until a cultural clearance is granted.

VI. Explanation of Impacts on the Human Environment.

7. Access to & quality of recreational activities.

The intent of the project is to improve aquatic habitat diversity within a reach of Haskill Creek to improve water quality and enhance populations of coldwater fish. One of the landowners is active with the Boy Scouts of America and plans to continue to host boy scouts events on the property.

VII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

1. No Action Alternative

If no funding was provided, the applicant would have to either seek additional sources of funding to complete the project or this portion of Haskill Creek would remain degraded. The opportunity to create a demonstration site for bio-engineering techniques would be lost. Water quality will continue to be impaired from excessive stream bank erosion and vegetation within the riparian corridor would remain degraded.

2. The Proposed Alternative

The proposed alternative would provide partial funding to a project designed to stabilize approximately 1,222 feet of Haskill Creek. This alternative is expected to reduce excessive bank erosion, improve water quality, enhance aquatic habitat and fish populations, and improve the riparian vegetative community. This alternative also would provide a demonstration of two differing bio-engineering techniques used to stabilize stream banks.

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 project application to the Future Fisheries Improvement Program has been posted on the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Park webpage for public comment. No comments have been received to date. 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 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 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 February 27, 2012.

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 Haskill Creek Channel Stabilization 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 designed to stabilize 1,222 feet of Haskill Creek, a tributary to the Whitefish River. The intent of the project is to improve water quality and fish populations within the stream reach and provide a demonstration of two differing bio-engineering techniques for bank stabilization. The project site is located approximately 2 miles southeast of the town of Whitefish in Flathead 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

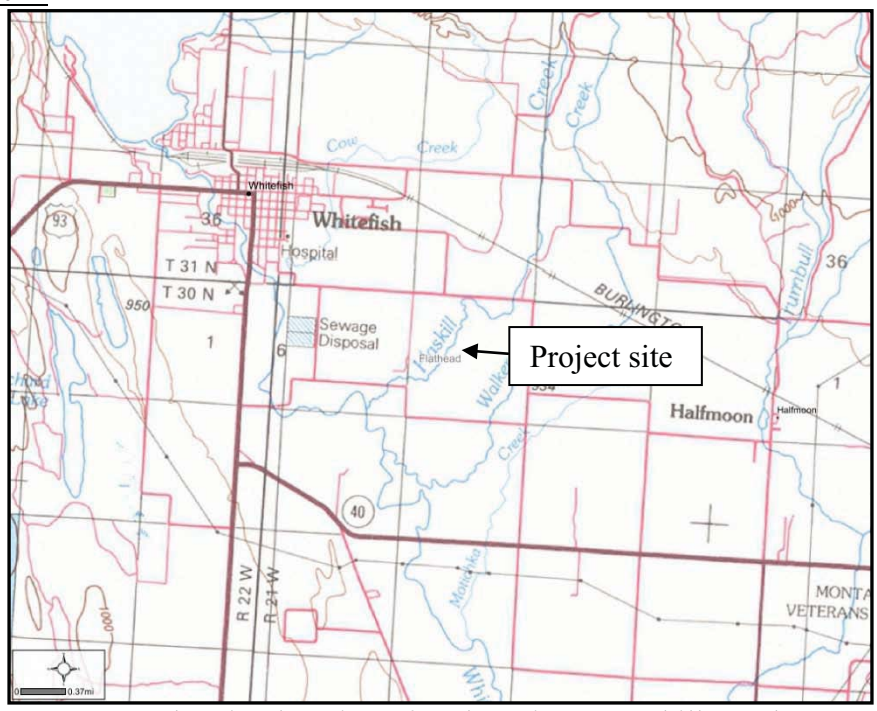
POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

	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		

Other groups or agencies contacted or which may have overlapping jurisdiction Flathead Conservation District, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Army Corp of Engineers, Montana Department of Environmental Quality, State Historic Preservation Office

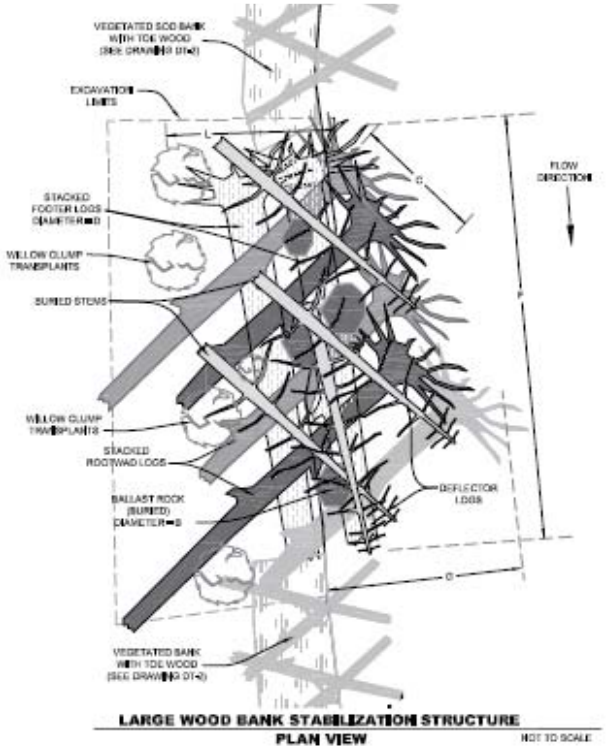
Individuals or groups contributing to this EA Flathead Conservation District; River Design Group.

Recommendation concerning preparation of EIS No EIS required.
EA prepared by: Mark Lere
Date: January 24, 2012



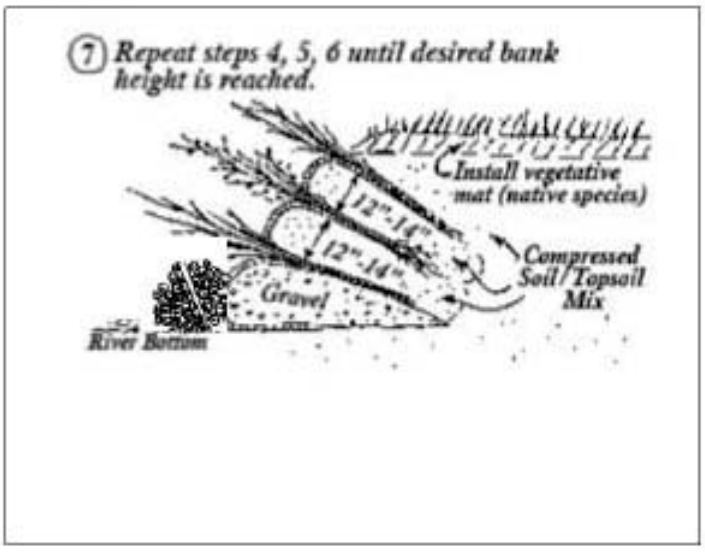
Map showing location of project site on Haskill Creek
ATTACHMENT 1

ATTACHMENT 2



ATTACHMENT 3

Phase 4



ATTACHMENT 4