Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

DECISION NOTICE:
Fish Creek Habitat Enhancement Project

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Region 2 Office
3201 Spurgin Road, Missoula, MT 59804
(406) 542-5500

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED PROJECT

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes to install large woody debris features on a portion of main stem Fish Creek (in Mineral County, ~37 miles west of Missoula) that lies within state ownership. The purpose is to improve habitat for native fish, restore natural stream processes, and enhance the quality fishing in the project reach.

Alternative A: No Action

If no action is undertaken, the project reaches would continue to function in their current state--with limited complexity and limited habitat for fish.

Preferred Alternative B: Proposed Action

Under this alternative, approximately 20-25 logjams (consisting of 80-140 trees total) would be installed using a tracked excavator to provide increased habitat complexity to stream reaches where habitat is limited. Logjams would be passively anchored at each site. Ground disturbance and damage existing riparian vegetation is expected to be minimal based on similar applications on nearby streams.

PUBLIC PROCESS AND COMMENT

A Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for the proposed Fish Creek Habitat Enhancement project was made available for public review and comment from July 20, 2012 through August 3, 2012. Legal notices of the proposal and the Draft EA availability were published in the following newspapers (date): *Independent Record* (Helena, July 20), *Mineral Independent* (Plains, July 25), and *Missoulian* (July 20). FWP distributed 27 copies of the EA to adjacent landowners and interested individuals, groups and agencies. The EA was available for public review on FWP's web site (http://fwp.mt.gov/), under "Recent Public Notices" beginning July 20. FWP issued a statewide news release regarding this proposal on July 26, 2012.

FWP received 6 written and/or emailed comments (Appendix A), representing 4 people (2 from Alberton, 2 unknown) and 2 group/agencies (Clark Fork Coalition, Mineral County Commissioners). All comments supported the habitat enhancement proposal. No concerns were raised that would bring the environmental analysis into question, and the draft EA is therefore accepted as final.

DECISION

Based on the analysis in the Draft Environmental Assessment (EA), along with the public comments and the applicable laws, regulations and policies, it is my decision to proceed with the proposed action to install large woody debris features on a portion of main stem Fish Creek.

I have determined that the decision to proceed with the proposed action will not have a significant negative effect on the natural or human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared. By notification of this Decision Notice, the draft EA is hereby made the final EA. The draft EA with Decision Notice may be viewed at or obtained from Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks at the address on page 1. The EA is still available for review on FWP's web site (http://fwp.mt.gov/) under "Public Notices" (enter "habitat enhancement" in Search Public Notices).

For Mack Long

Mack Long
Regional Supervisor

8/8/12

Date

APPENDIX A. All comments recieved by FWP on the proposed habitat enhancement project for Fish Creek. (All comments received via email.)

Commenter #	Via[a]	Paragraph	Comment
1	E		I strongly support the placing of large woody debris into Fish Creek to enhance habitat. Thank-you FWP for being such good stewards to Fish Creek!
2	E	1	I whole heartedly support the plan to improve fish habitat on Fish Creek by strategically placing woody debris.
		2	I remember a few years ago that a similar project was proposed and installed, I think, on Rock Creek.
		3	The quality of fishing and the fish population in Rock Creek is internationally renowned. I see no reason why Fish Creek can't be it's equal with proper resource management.
		4	Please proceed with installation of this project with all due expediancy
3	E		**See page A-2 (Clark Fork Coalition)**
4	E		I am worried about errosion and ice jams making a bigger mess. What you propose is good if you can be sure these dams won't be destroyed by spring run off and the above.
5	E		The installation of woody debris on Fish Creek is an excellent idea. I fully support this type of work that can help restore the streams natural process.
6	E		**See page A-3 (Mineral County Commissioners)**

CLARK FORK COALITION

July 26, 2012

Mack Long, Region 2 Director
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
3201 Spurgin Road
Missoula, MT 59804

Re: Fish Creek Habitat Enhancement Draft EA

Dear Mr. Long,

The Clark Fork Coalition appreciates the opportunity to write in support of the proposal to install large woody debris in Fish Creek laid out in the "Fish Creek Habitat Enhancement Draft EA." The Proposed Action to construct approximately 20 logjams on a 2-mile reach of Fish Creek will improve fish habitat and restore stream function in this critical tributary to the middle Clark Fork River.

The Clark Fork Coalition is an organization supported by 2,700 members dedicated to protecting and restoring the 22,000 square-mile Clark Fork watershed. The Fish Creek drainage is important habitat for the native fish and the diverse wildlife in our basin. The project proposed by FWP in partnership with TU and DNRC will enhance public property, and improve stream habitat that is vital for fish and wildlife populations.

We support the Fish Creek Habitat Enhancement Project because it will restore vital stream habitat. Constructing logjams will improve channel morphology, the connection between the stream, floodplain, and groundwater, and restore functioning instream habitat for native fish. This project will also augment the Montana Legacy Project's goals for purchasing this land, and complement dozens of habitat restoration and cleanup projects now underway from the Clark Fork River's headwaters near Butte to its mouth at Lake Pend Oreille, enhancing the basin's overall health.

We're excited about the collaborative progress made to-date restoring Fish Creek, and believe that implementing the Proposed Action will build momentum to enhance even more floodplains, wetlands, and streams in the Middle Clark Fork watershed. We applaud the efforts of FWP, DNRC, and TU to protect our watershed's celebrated streams, as well as the fish, wildlife, and communities they support.

Thank you for your time, and please feel free to call me with any questions.

Best regards,

Brianna Randall

Brianna Randall
Water Policy Director

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406/542-5632 Fax

MINERAL COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

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July 31, 2012

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Attn: Sharon Rose
Region 2 Headquarters
3201 Spurgin Road
Missoula, MT 59804

Re: Fish Creek Habitat Enhancement Project

Dear Ms. Rose:

Thank you for the information regarding the Fish Creek Habitat Enhancement Project that proposes to place large woody debris features in a portion of Fish Creek near the Big Pine Fishing Access site in Mineral County.

We have no negative concerns relative to this proposal; rather, we are pleased to encourage its implementation which will result in improved fish habitat, improved fishing quality, and will help in restoring natural stream processes in the area. We are also pleased to note that funding for the project will be provided by PP&L and Trout Unlimited rather than from DNRC's limited funds.

Fish creek is a focal recreational and tourist attraction in Mineral County, and we are always happy to support improvements on public lands that enhance the economic opportunities arising from these interests, particularly with our faltering economy.

Sincerely,
Mineral County Commissioners

Duane Simons, Chairman

Clark Conrow, Member

Roman Zylawy, Member