



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

September 9, 1999

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 Division
Endangered Species Coordinator
Nongame Coordinator
Ken McDonald, Native Species Coordinator
Missoula Office

Montana State Library, Helena
MT Environmental Information Center
Montana Audubon Council
Missoula County Conservation District
U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Helena
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Helena
State Historic Preservation Office, Helena
Ms. Carolyn Demin, 24255 Nine Mile Rd., Huson, MT 59846

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Please find enclosed an Environmental Assessment prepared for a **Future Fisheries Project** tentatively planned to stabilize eroding stream banks and install riparian fencing within a 1.75 mile reach of **Ninemile Creek**. This proposed project is located approximately 9 miles northwest of the town of Huson in **Missoula County**.

Please submit any comments that you have by 5 P.M., October 12, 1999 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.

Sincerely,

Mark Lere, Program Officer
Habitat Protection Bureau
Fisheries Division

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
Fisheries Division
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Ninemile Creek Bank 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. This project is being proposed to stabilize eroding stream banks and install riparian fencing within a 1.75 mile reach of Ninemile Creek. Ninemile Creek contains rainbow trout, brown trout, westslope cutthroat trout and is an important spawning tributary for rainbow trout migrating from the Clark Fork River. The stream also historically supported bull trout. The project site, involving a single property owner, is located approximately 9 miles northwest of the town of Huson in Missoula County (Attachment 1).

I. Location of Project: This project will be conducted on Ninemile Creek located approximately 9 miles northwest of the town of Huson within Township 16 North, Range 23 West, Section 35 in Missoula County.

II. Need for the Project: Department Goal C indicates that a Fisheries Division objective is to "provide and support programs to conserve and enhance high quality aquatic habitat and protect native aquatic species." The Future Fisheries Improvement Program is a tool to help achieve that objective.

A portion of Ninemile Creek has been degraded by past grazing management and bank stabilization practices, as well as from channel adjustments associated with a county bridge of insufficient capacity necessary to pass bedload. Past grazing management practices have reduced the erosion resistance of the stream banks and bank stabilization measures have reduce access to the floodplain and, in some cases, accelerated bank erosion. The bridge has caused the channel to aggrade, resulting in further bank erosion. This project proposes to stabilize a series of eroding stream banks within a 1.75 mile reach of stream by installing both tree and rock revetment, planting native vegetation along the margin of the channel, and installing fencing.

III. Scope of the Project:

The proposal calls for stabilizing a series of eroding stream banks with a 1.75 mile reach of stream. "Soft" stabilization techniques will involve cabling rootballs against cutbanks and planting native vegetation behind the treatment. Stabilization techniques used to protect the Cedar Creek Road and bridge will involve the placement of rock rip-rap, a requirement under the Missoula County Floodplain Permit. The proposal also calls for the installation of 10,400 feet of riparian fencing to protect both sides of the stream from grazing by livestock. This project is expected to cost \$19,325.00. Of this total, the Future Fisheries Improvement Program would be contributing up to \$5,000.00.

IV. Environmental Impact Checklist:

Please see attached checklist.

V. Explanation of Impacts to the Physical Environment

1. Terrestrial and aquatic life and habitats.

Stabilizing eroding stream banks and installing riparian fencing is expected to create a more healthy habitat for aquatic life by reducing sediment input and protecting the riparian corridor from over-grazing by livestock. Expected improvements in the aquatic habitat should enhance both resident trout populations in the stream and migrant populations from the Clark Fork River. Habitat for riparian dependent wildlife would also be improved by protecting the riparian corridor with fencing.

2. Water quantity, quality and distribution.

Short term increases in turbidity will occur during project construction. To minimize turbidity, construction will occur during a low flow period and operation of equipment in the 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. A 310 permit will be obtained from the local Conservation District. In the long term, stabilizing the existing channel would reduce the sediment contribution to downstream areas, thereby improving the overall quality of downstream waters.

3. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture.

Soils along the stream margin would be disturbed by the installation of tree and rock revetment, but would stabilize quickly following proposed re-vegetation efforts. Overall, the project is expected to reduce bank erosion and improve channel stability.

4. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality.

Riparian vegetation and cover would be improved by creating a more stable stream channel, planting native vegetation along the stream corridor, and protecting the riparian corridor from livestock over-grazing with fencing.

5. Aesthetics.

The placement of rock rip-rap on several eroding stream banks will not be aesthetically pleasing. However, the overall project would enhance aesthetics by restoring an unstable reach of stream and the riparian corridor to a more healthy and natural environment.

7. Unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources

Ninemile Creek supports westslope cutthroat trout, a species petitioned for listing under the Endangered Species Act. The stream also historically supported bull trout, a species listed as threatened under the Act. Because Ninemile Creek contains historic bull trout habitat, the project will be included in Montana Fish, Wildlife and Park's Section 6 conservation plan with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The proposal calls for stabilizing eroding stream banks and installing riparian fencing, activities that will reduce sediment input into the stream and enhance vegetation within the riparian corridor. These activities are expected to improve aquatic habitat for westslope cutthroat trout and other species of fish.

9. Historic and archaeological sites

The proposed project will likely require an individual Army Corp of Engineers 404 permit. Therefore, the State Historic Preservation Office has been contacted to determine the need for compliance with the federal historic preservation regulations. The project will not begin until a cultural clearance is granted.

VI. Explanation of Impacts on the Human Environment.

7. Access to & quality of recreational activities.

It is anticipated that the installation of riparian fencing and the stabilization of eroding stream banks along a 1.75 mile reach of Ninemile Creek would improve overall aquatic habitat and, as a result, would enhance trout populations residing in the stream. Consequently, the recreational fishery in Ninemile Creek would be expected to be improved. Fishing access is provided to the public by permission from the landowner.

VII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

1. No Action Alternative

If no action is taken, this reach of Ninemile Creek will remain unstable and vegetation within the riparian corridor will continue to be over-grazed by livestock. Ongoing bank erosion will continue to contribute to excessive sediment loading and the associated loss of fish habitat. Recreational opportunities associated with fish and wildlife resources will remain reduced and aesthetics will continue to be impaired.

2. The Proposed Alternative

The proposed alternative is designed to stabilize eroding stream banks and protect the riparian corridor along a 1.75 mile reach of Ninemile Creek. Stream banks would be stabilized using natural revetment where possible. Where cut-banks threaten the security of the county road and bridge, stream banks would be stabilized with rock rip-rap. Fencing would be installed along approximately 10,400 feet of stream margin to protect riparian vegetation from livestock grazing. Restoration of the riparian vegetation would

enhance the erosion resistance of the stream banks and provide shading and over-head cover for aquatic life. Planting native vegetation along the stream margin also would create more diverse habitat for riparian dependent wildlife. This alternative would improve riparian habitat, aesthetics and water quality within the project area and would be expected to increase trout populations in Ninemile Creek.

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 the Montana Electronic Bulletin Board.

3. Duration of comment period?

Public comment will be accepted through 5 P.M. on October 12, 1999.

4. Person responsible for preparing the EA.

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

Telephone: (406) 444-2432

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 Ninemile Creek Bank Stabilization Project

Division/Bureau Fisheries Division -Future Fisheries Improvement

Description of Project The project is being proposed to stabilize eroding stream banks and install riparian fencing within a 1.75 mile reach of Ninemile Creek. Ninemile Creek contains rainbow trout, brown trout, westslope cutthroat trout and is an important spawning tributary for rainbow trout migrating from the Clark Fork River. The stream also historically supported bull trout. The project site, involving a single landowner, is located approximately 9 miles northwest of the town of Huson in Missoula 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			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 Missoula County Conservation District, NRCS, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Army Corp of Engineers, Montana Department of

Environmental Quality, State Historic Preservation Office

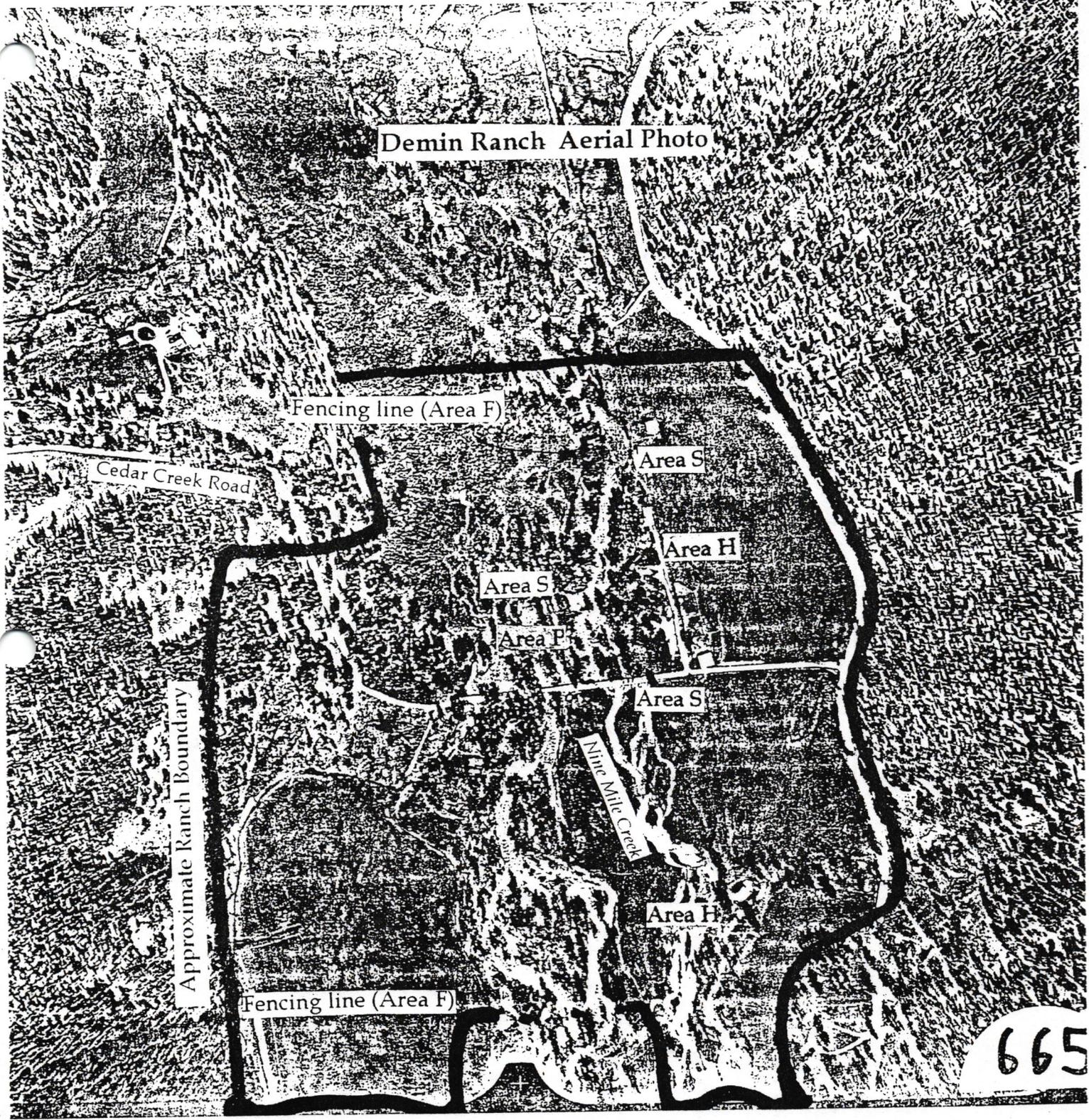
Individuals or groups contributing to this EA None

Recommendation concerning preparation of EIS No EIS required.

EA prepared by : Mark Lere

Date: August 19, 1999

Demin Ranch Aerial Photo



Cedar Creek Road

Fencing line (Area F)

Area S

Area H

Area S

Area P

Area S

Nur Milt Creek

Area H

Fencing line (Area F)

Approximate Ranch Boundary

665

ATTACHMENT 1