March 15, 2004
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
Bozeman Office
Montana State Library, Helena
MT Environmental Information Center
Montana Audubon Council
Jefferson Valley Conservation District
U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Helena
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Helena
State Historic Preservation Office, Helena
Trout Unlimited, Jefferson River Project Coordinator, 101 Manor Drive, Townsend, MT 59644
Mr. Joe Adams, 266 Gallup Trail, Kerrville, Texas 78028

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 to for a project calling for the restoration of a degraded reach of Willow Springs Creek, a tributary to the Jefferson River. This project would be a continuation of work completed in the mid-1980s that involved the restoration of the lower reach of the spring creek. The intent of this proposed project is to further increase available salmonid spawning habitat and increase recruitment of fish to the Jefferson River. The project site is located on property owned by Joe Adams approximately 12 miles south of the town of Whitehall in Madison County (Attachment 1).

Please submit any comments that you have by 5:00 P.M., April 15, 2004 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. 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 Bureau
Fisheries Division
e-mail: mlere@state.mt.us

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
Fisheries Division
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Willow Springs Creek Spawning Habitat Enhancement 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 for a project calling for the restoration of a degraded reach of Willow Springs Creek, a tributary to the Jefferson River. This project would be a continuation of work completed in the mid-1980s that involved the restoration of the lower reach of the spring creek. The intent of this proposed project is to further increase available salmonid spawning habitat and increase recruitment of fish to the Jefferson River. The project site is located on property owned by Joe Adams approximately 12 miles south of the town of Whitehall in Madison County (Attachment 1).

I. Location of Project: This project will be conducted on lower Nevada Spring Creek located approximately 12 miles south of the town of Whitehall within Township 1 South, Range 5 West, Section 13 in Madison County.

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.

Presently, salmonid populations in the Jefferson River appear to be limited, at least in part, by the lack of spawning and rearing habitat in the tributaries. Previous restoration work completed on Willow Springs Creek during the mid-1980s successfully created a spawning tributary to the Jefferson River. This spring creek is now one of only two rainbow trout spawning tributaries in the drainage. Currently, all available spawning habitat is being utilized in Willow Springs Creek. Spawning rainbow trout are now super-imposing redds on one another, indicating that the population could further expand should additional spawning habitat be made available. This proposed project would create additional spawning habitat in the spring creek resulting in a greater number of young fish recruiting to the Jefferson River.

III. Scope of the Project:

The project proposes to improve spawning habitat within a 2,220-foot reach of Willow Springs Creek, as well as within an additional 2,260 feet of smaller tributary channels. The proposed work calls for creating a more narrow and deep channel to improve the capability of the stream to transport fine sediment. Clean gravel would then be added to the channel bed for spawning habitat. The new bank line will be created by the placement and staking of weed-free straw bales. Excavated fine sediment from the existing channel would then be placed behind the new bank line and would be re-vegetated with borrowed sod and native seed. Approximately 620 cubic yards of clean gravel then would be placed into the restored channel to provide for spawning habitat. Finally, a deteriorating riparian fence will be removed and replaced with a

new fence to protect a portion of the restoration work from over-grazing by livestock. This project is expected to cost $50,661.00. Of this total, the Future Fisheries Improvement Program would be contributing up to $35,061.00.

IV. Environmental Impact Checklist:

Please see attached checklist.

V. Explanation of Impacts to the Physical Environment

1. Terrestrial and aquatic life and habitats.

Creating a more narrow and deep channel is expected to provide a healthier habitat for aquatic life by improving spawning habitat for salmonids. A healthier aquatic habitat is expected to enhance salmonid recruitment to the Jefferson River, as well as resident fish populations in the spring creek.

2. Water quantity, quality and distribution.

Short-term increases in turbidity will occur during project construction. 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 and the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers will be contacted to determine the need to meet 404 provisions of the Clean Water Act.

In the long term, this project is expected to improve water quality and water temperatures in Willow Springs Creek.

3. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture.

Soils along the stream margin would be disturbed during construction, but would quickly stabilize following proposed re-vegetation efforts. Re-vegetation efforts would involve placement of salvaged sod and seeding with native sedges and grasses.

4. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality.

Riparian vegetation and cover, primarily non-native grasses, would be disturbed during the period of construction. However, proposed re-vegetation efforts, in conjunction with replacing a dilapidated fence along a portion of the riparian corridor, would result in an overall improvement to the riparian vegetative community.

5. Aesthetics.

In the short term, aesthetics would be adversely impacted due to the on-site construction activities and the presence of heavy equipment. In the long term, aesthetics would be enhanced by restoring an over-widened and shallow reach of stream to a healthier and more natural stream environment.

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

Spring creeks are a valuable and limited resource in Montana, providing a combination of clean, productive water, relatively constant temperatures and stable flows. This project calls for restoring a degraded spring creek to a more healthy and natural stream environment.

7. 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. The project will not begin until a cultural clearance is granted.

VI. Explanation of Impacts on the Human Environment.

1. Access to & quality of recreational activities.

The Jefferson River currently supports a limited recreational fishery. The intent of the project is to improve habitat conditions and recruitment of salmonids to both Willow Springs Creek and the Jefferson River. As a result, the recreational fishery in the river is expected to improve.

VII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

1. No Action Alternative

If no action is taken, the upper reaches of Willow Springs Creek and its associated tributaries will remain over-widened, shallow and laden with fine silt. Spawning habitat will remain limited and fish populations will remain suppressed.

2. The Proposed Alternative

The proposed alternative is designed to enhance spawning habitat in about 4,480 feet of Willow Springs Creek and its associated tributaries. The intent of the project is to improve spawning habitat and increase the recruitment of salmonids into the Jefferson River. This alternative is expected to increase trout populations both in the spring creek and in the Jefferson River.

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 also will be published on Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks webpage: fwp.state.mt.us.

3. Duration of comment period?

Public comment will be accepted through 5:00 PM on April 15, 2004.

4. Person responsible for preparing the EA.

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

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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 Willow Springs Creek Spawning Habitat Enhancement Project
Division/Bureau Fisheries Division -Future Fisheries Improvement
Description of Project The Future Fisheries Improvement Program is proposing to provide partial funding for a project calling for the enhancement of spawning habitat within a degraded reach of Willow Springs Creek, a tributary to the Jefferson River. This project would be a continuation of successful work completed in the mid-1980s involving the restoration of the lower reach of the spring creek. The intent of the project is to further increase available salmonid spawning habitat and increase recruitment of young fish to the Jefferson River. The project site is located on property owned by Joe Adams approximately 12 miles south of the town of Whitehall in Madison 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 Jefferson Valley 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 Bruce Rehwinkel, Montana Trout Unlimited

Recommendation concerning preparation of EIS No EIS required.

EA prepared by:Mark Lere
Date: February 20, 2004