

March 13, 2006
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
Native Species Coordinator, Fisheries
Missoula Office

Montana State Library, Helena
MT Environmental Information Center
Montana Audubon Council
Montana Wildlife Federation, P.O. Box 1175, Helena, MT 59624
Missoula County Conservation District, 3550 Mullan Road, Suite 106, Missoula, MT 59808
U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Helena
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Helena
State Historic Preservation Office, Helena
Marie Ann Zens Kimerly, 17155 Lolo Creek Road, Lolo, MT 59847

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 bank stabilization project on approximately 450 feet of Lolo Creek. This proposed project is located on property owned by Marie Ann Zens Kimerly approximately seven miles west of the town of Lolo in Missoula County.

Please submit any comments that you have by 5:00 P.M., April 13, 2006 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@mt.gov

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
Fisheries Division
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Lolo Creek Bank Stabilization 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 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 stabilization of approximately 450 feet of Lolo Creek to reduce sediment input from ongoing bank erosion and to create additional pool habitat for the resident fisheries. The project site is located on property owned by Marie Ann Zens Kimerly approximately seven miles west of the town of Lolo in Missoula County (Attachment 1).

I. Location of Project: This project will be conducted on a 450-foot reach of Lolo Creek located approximately seven miles west of the town of Lolo within Township 12 North, Range 21 West, Section 34 in Missoula 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 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 met this goal.

Lolo Creek supports a mixed assemblage of salmonids, including brook trout, rainbow trout, brown trout, westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout. A significant portion of Lolo Creek has been altered in the past by highway construction, residential development, livestock grazing and vegetation removal. The reach of Lolo Creek paralleling U.S. Highway 12, where this proposed project is located, displays poor diversity in aquatic habitat and has a significant scarcity of pools. Currently, a 450-foot reach of stream bank at the project site is displaying accelerated erosion. The landowners are interested in stabilizing this eroding stream bank and, at the same time want to enhance the fisheries by creating some associated pool habitat. They will be required to adopt land management practices intended to restore the woody vegetation within the riparian corridor as part of the project.

III. Scope of the Project:

The project proposes to restore a 450-foot reach of Lolo Creek by back sloping the eroding bank; installing one j-hook shaped rock vane, 7 to 9 root wads placed at approximately 40-foot intervals, 7 to 9 deflector logs; and planting approximately 200 riparian shrubs (Attachment 2). Additionally, salvaged sod mats will be transplanted along the stream margin disturbed by construction to provide bank stability and encourage re-vegetation. All areas disturbed during construction will be seeded with native grasses. This project is expected to cost \$12,660.00. Of this total, the Future Fisheries Improvement Program would be contributing up to \$3,165.00.

IV. Environmental Impact Checklist:

Please see attached checklist.

V. Explanation of Impacts to the Physical Environment

1. Terrestrial and aquatic life and habitats.

Stabilizing a 450-foot reach of Lolo Creek is expected to locally reduce sediment input into the stream and create some holding water for adult fish. Habitat for riparian dependent wildlife also would be improved by restoring the riparian vegetative community through planting riparian shrubs and through protecting the corridor from over-grazing by livestock.

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 (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 needed to meet the federal Clean Water Act. In the long term, stabilizing an eroding stream bank within this reach of Lolo Creek would reduce sediment contributions 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 during channel construction, but would quickly stabilize following proposed re-vegetation efforts. Overall, the project is expected to reduce bank erosion by stabilizing an actively eroding stream bank and restoring the riparian vegetative community.

4. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality.

Riparian vegetation and cover would be disturbed during the period of construction. However, proposed re-vegetation efforts would act to mitigate these disturbances. Improved land management practices within the riparian corridor would encourage the recovery of woody shrubs along the stream margin.

5. Aesthetics.

Aesthetics would be negatively impacted during project construction due to ground disturbance and the presence of heavy equipment. Project construction is expected to occur over a one-week period. In the long term, stabilizing an eroding stream bank on Lolo Creek and improving vegetation within the riparian corridor would enhance aesthetics.

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

Surveys have documented that a small bull trout population resides in Lolo Creek. Because Lolo Creek supports bull trout, a species listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act, the project will be included in Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Section 6 conservation plan with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

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.

Stabilizing a 450-foot reach of Lolo Creek is expected to improve overall aquatic habitat, and consequently, would be expected to attract fish and improve fishing opportunities in a localized area.

VII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

1. No Action Alternative

If no action is taken, this reach of Lolo Creek will continue to be relatively unstable, sloughing banks will continue to add sediment into the stream and habitat for fish and riparian dependent wildlife will remain in a degraded condition.

2. Bank stabilization using blanket rock rip-rap

Rock rip-rap would provide greater resistance to the existing shear stresses. However, blanket rip-rap would eliminate riparian vegetation on this section of stream and diminish the over-all natural function of the stream channel.

3. The Proposed Alternative

The proposed alternative is designed to enhance a 450-foot reach of Lolo Creek by stabilizing an eroding cut-bank with the installation of a j-hook rock vane, rootwads and tree revetment; transplanting salvaged sods and planting riparian shrubs along the stream margin. While stabilization of this relatively short reach of stream likely will have little impact on overall fish populations, enhancement efforts are expected to attract fish and reduce sediment input in a localized area.

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.mt.gov.

3. Duration of comment period?

Public comment will be accepted through 5:00 PM on April 13, 2006.

4. Person responsible for preparing the EA.

Mark Lere, Program Officer
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Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
1420 East 6th Avenue
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 Lolo Creek Bank Stabilization 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 stabilization of approximately 450 feet of actively eroding stream bank on Lolo Creek. The project site is located on property owned by Marie Ann Zens Kimerly approximately seven miles west of the town of Lolo 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, 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 NRCS
 Recommendation concerning preparation of EIS No EIS required.

EA prepared by: Mark Lere
Date: March 9, 2006
