

September 15, 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 Office  
    Missoula Office  
Montana State Library, Helena  
MT Environmental Information Center  
Montana Audubon Council  
Montana Wildlife Federation  
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  
Double Arrow Enterprises, P.O. Box 747, Seeley Lake, MT 59868  
Double Arrow Homeowners Association

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Please find enclosed an Environmental Assessment prepared for the Future Fisheries Improvement Program. The Program tentatively plans to provide partial funding to a project calling for modification of a diversion structure to enhance upstream fish passage and the installation of a self-cleaning fish screen in the ditch to eliminate entrainment of fish. This diversion is located at stream mile 1.5 on Trail Creek, a tributary to Morrell Creek and ultimately the Clearwater River. The intent of the project is to enhance connectivity between Trail Creek and the Clearwater River for migratory westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout and to eliminate entrainment mortality into the ditch system. The project site is located on Trail Creek approximately 1 mile southeast of the community of Seeley Lake in Missoula County.

Please submit any comments that you have by 5:00 P.M., October 16, 2006 to the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks in Helena at the address listed above. Funding for 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  
Email: [mlere@mt.gov](mailto:mlere@mt.gov)

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT  
Fisheries Division  
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks  
Trail Creek Diversion Fish Screen and Passage Enhancement 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 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. Additionally, the 1999 Montana Legislature amended statute sections 87-1-273, 15-38-202 and Section 5, Chapter 463, Laws of 1995 to create a bull trout and cutthroat trout enhancement program. The program calls for the enhancement of bull trout and cutthroat trout through habitat restoration, natural reproduction and reductions in species competition by way of the Future Fisheries Program.

The Future Fisheries Improvement Program is proposing to provide partial funding for a project calling for the installation of a self-cleaning fish screen in an irrigation ditch located at stream mile 1.5 on Trail Creek, a tributary to Morrell Creek and ultimately the Clearwater River. The project also calls for modifying the existing diversion structure to enhance upstream fish passage. The intent of this project is to enhance migratory populations of westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout. The diversion is owned and operated by Double Arrow Enterprises and is located approximately one mile southeast of the community of Seeley Lake in Missoula County (Attachment 1).

I. Location of Project: This project will be conducted at a diversion on Trail Creek, a tributary to Morrell creek, located approximately one mile southeast of the community of Seeley Lake within Township 16 North, Range 15 West, Section 12 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 meet this goal.

Trail Creek is a relatively pristine tributary to Morrell Creek. Trail and Morrell creeks are classified as part of a bull trout core area and observations of redds by MFWP personnel indicate that these two drainages provide one of the most important habitat areas for bull trout in the Clearwater/Blackfoot river systems. Bull trout are listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. Trail Creek also supports westslope cutthroat trout, a species of special concern in Montana.

Currently, there is only one active diversion on Trail Creek. This pin and plank diversion provides water to the golf course at the Double Arrow Resort. The diversion acts as a seasonal barrier to upstream migrating fish and entrains downstream migrating fish during the irrigation season.

III. Scope of the Project:

The project proposes to replace the existing pin and plank diversion structure with a more fish-friendly rock step-pool design and to install a self-cleaning style fish screen in the ditch located immediately downstream of the existing headgate. The screen will be designed to deliver up to 2 cubic feet per second

of flow and a small overflow channel/pipe would be necessary to return entrained fish and debris back to the main channel. This project is expected to cost \$27,938.00. Of this total, the Future Fisheries Improvement Program would be contributing up to \$8,855.00.

IV. Environmental Impact Checklist:

Please see attached checklist.

V. Explanation of Impacts to the Physical Environment

1. Terrestrial and aquatic life and habitats.

The project is expected to save numerous fish from being lost into the Double Arrow canal. Additionally, the installation of a fish friendly diversion structure will allow for year round upstream fish passage, enhancing approximately 7 miles of upper Trail Creek. Eliminating entrainment of fish from this irrigation diversion and improving upstream fish passage is expected to enhance fish populations in Trail Creek and the Clearwater River drainage.

2. Water quantity, quality and distribution.

The fish screen will be installed during the non-irrigation season when the ditch is shut down. Short-term increases in turbidity may occur during installation of the by-pass pipe for the fish screen and the installation of a more fish friendly diversion structure. To minimize turbidity, 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 124 permit (Stream Protection Act) will be obtained from the Missoula office of Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks and the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers will be contacted for requirements to meet the federal Clean Water Act (404 permit).

3. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture.

Soils along the ditch and stream bank would be disturbed during the construction, but would quickly stabilize following proposed re-vegetation efforts. Re-vegetation efforts call for re-seeding disturbed areas with native grasses.

4. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality.

Vegetation cover would be disturbed along the ditch and stream bank during the period of construction. Proposed re-vegetation efforts would act to mitigate these disturbances.

5. Aesthetics.

Aesthetics would be adversely impacted during construction due to ground disturbance and the presence of heavy equipment. In the long term, aesthetics would not be adversely affected.

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

Installation of the fish screen will eliminate entrainment of fish from a diversion on Trail Creek. Additionally, the installation of a more fish friendly diversion structure will enhance upstream fish passage, providing migratory fish access to approximately seven miles of upper Trail Creek. The creek currently supports migratory bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout and the project area has been classified as a bull trout core area. Bull trout are listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. Because Trail Creek and the Clearwater drainage support bull trout, 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

This fish screen would be installed within the existing ditch and installation would cause only minimal ground disturbance. Modification of the existing diversion, installed in the early 1990's, also would only cause minimal ground disturbance. As a result, there is a very low likelihood that cultural properties could be impacted. Should cultural materials be inadvertently discovered during the project, the State Historic Preservation Office will be contacted and the site will be investigated.

## VI. Explanation of Impacts on the Human Environment.

1. Access to & quality of recreational activities.

This fish screen is expected to enhance fish populations in Trail Creek and the Clearwater River. As a result, this project is expected to improve the recreational fishery that these water bodies provide.

## VII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

1. No Action Alternative

If no action is taken, the diversion on Trail Creek will continue to entrain downstream migrating fish and migratory connectivity to Morrell Creek and the Clearwater River will continue to be diminished.

2. The Proposed Alternative

The proposed alternative calls for installing a self-cleaning fish screen in an irrigation diversion located on Trail Creek and replacing the existing pin and plank structure with a more fish-friendly rock step-pool design. The intent of the project is to decrease entrainment of downstream migrating fish into the canal system and enhance upstream stream passage for migratory fish. The project is expected to enhance the fluvial life history component for both westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout populations. This project also is expected to enhance the recreational fishery found in both Trail Creek and the Clearwater 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 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](http://fwp.mt.gov).

3. Duration of comment period?

Public comment will be accepted through 5:00 PM on October 16, 2006.

4. Person responsible for preparing the EA.

Mark Lere, Program Officer  
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Fisheries Division  
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks  
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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 Trail Creek Diversion Fish Screen and Passage 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 installation of a self-cleaning fish screen into a diversion located at stream mile 1.5 on Trail Creek, a tributary to Morrell Creek and ultimately the Clearwater River. The project also calls for modifying the existing diversion structure to enhance upstream fish passage. The intent of the project is to restore connectivity between Trail Creek and the Clearwater drainage for migratory fish.

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 None

Recommendation concerning preparation of EIS No EIS required.  
EA prepared by: Mark Lere  
Date: August 29, 2006