

March 20, 2007  
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 Division  
Missoula Office

Montana State Library, Helena  
MT Environmental Information Center  
Montana Audubon Council  
Montana Wildlife Federation, P.O. Box 1175, Helena, MT 59624, Attn: Larry Copenhaver  
Lewis and Clark Conservation District, 790 Colleen Street, Helena, MT 59601  
Natural Resource and Conservation Service  
U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Helena  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Helena  
State Historic Preservation Office, Helena  
Big Blackfoot Chapter Trout Unlimited, P.O. Box 1, Ovando, MT 59854  
Grosfield Ranch, Lincoln, MT 59639

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 a stream restoration project on a nearly two-mile reach of Lincoln Spring Creek, a tributary to Keep Cool Creek in the Blackfoot River drainage. The intent of the project is to enhance spawning, rearing and over-winter habitat for salmonids. This proposed project is located immediately northeast of the town of Lincoln in Lewis and Clark County.

Please submit any comments that you have by 5:00 P.M., April 20, 2007 to the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks in Helena at the address listed above. Funding for this project through the Future Fisheries Improvement Program 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](mailto:mlere@mt.gov)

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT  
Fisheries Division  
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks  
Lincoln Spring Creek Channel Restoration 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 approximately 9,000 feet of Lincoln Spring Creek, a tributary to Keep Cool Creek in the Blackfoot River drainage. Restoration would involve narrowing and deepening the channel, increasing sinuosity, installing sod mats and in-stream wood, removal of three undersized culverts and enhancing the riparian vegetative community. Presently, the project site exhibits an over-widened stream channel, elevated water temperatures and excessive sediment input and accumulations. The intent of the project is to enhance spawning, rearing and over-wintering habitat for salmonids, including brown trout, brook trout and potentially westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout. The project site is located near the town of Lincoln in Lewis and Clark County (Attachment 1).

I. Location of Project: This project will be conducted on a reach of Lincoln Spring Creek located near the town of Lincoln within Township 14 North, Range 9 West, Section 13 and Township 14 North, Range 8 West Section 18 in Lewis and Clark 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.

Despite the current degraded condition, Lincoln Spring Creek possesses the basic habitat attributes needed to support a significant fishery. These attributes include cold groundwater springs, flows of up to 30 cubic feet per second, a gravel channel bottom and a surrounding spruce forest that could provide shading and the input of woody debris for channel complexity. Presently, the stream supports only low densities of brown trout and brook trout. Current habitat impairments include the placement of undersized culverts, as well as areas of channel over-widening, elevated water temperatures and excessive sediment accumulations due to past overgrazing by livestock.

III. Scope of the Project:

This proposed project calls for reconstructing approximately 9,000 feet of Lincoln Spring Creek by narrowing and deepening the channel, increasing channel sinuosity and placing instream wood and sod mats along the stream banks. Additionally, the proposed project would include the removal of three existing undersized culverts, implementation of a re-vegetation plan and development of a grazing management plan. Specific designs have not been completed, but work would mirror recently successfully completed restoration work in Jacobsen Spring Creek, a stream in the Blackfoot drainage displaying

similar characteristics to that of Lincoln Spring Creek. This project is expected to cost \$197,500.00. Of this total, the Future Fisheries Improvement Program would be contributing up to \$52,000.00.

IV. Environmental Impact Checklist:

Please see attached checklist.

V. Explanation of Impacts to the Physical Environment

1. Terrestrial and aquatic life and habitats.

Restoring spawning, rearing, and over-winter habitat conditions within a spring creek tributary to Keep Cool Creek, and ultimately the Blackfoot River, is expected to enhance recruitment of salmonids to both the stream and the river and has the potential to contribute to the recovery of bull trout, a species listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. Habitat for riparian dependent wildlife also would be improved by providing better management of livestock grazing within the riparian corridor through fencing and by enhancing the riparian vegetative community along the stream margin.

2. Water quantity, quality and distribution.

Presently, this degraded spring creek displays elevated water temperatures and excessive fine sediment accumulations due to the over-widened and shallow nature of the channel. The proposed restoration project is expected to reduce water temperatures and increase the sediment transport capability of the channel. Short-term increases in turbidity will occur during project construction. To minimize turbidity, the operation of equipment in the active stream channel will be minimized to the extent practicable and any new channel would be constructed "in the dry". The Department of Environmental Quality will be contacted to determine narrative conditions required to meet short-term water quality standards and protect aquatic biota (318 authorization). A 310 permit (Montana 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 need to meet 404 provisions of the Clean Water Act.

3. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture.

Soils along the stream margin would be disturbed during construction of the new channel, 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, as well as planting and sprigging native riparian shrubs. Soils would be further stabilized with the installation of fencing and the implementation of a plan to protect streamside vegetation from livestock grazing.

4. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality.

Riparian vegetation and cover would be disturbed during the period of construction. However, proposed re-vegetation efforts, in conjunction with fencing and implementation of a grazing plan, would result in an overall improvement to the riparian vegetative community.

5. Aesthetics.

In the short term, aesthetics would be adversely impacted due to ground disturbance and the presence of heavy construction equipment. In the long term, aesthetics would be enhanced by returning a degraded spring creek back to a more natural configuration. In addition, the riparian vegetative community would be enhanced by riparian plantings and by improved grazing management.

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

Lincoln Spring Creek currently supports non-native salmonids, including brown trout and brook trout. However, this proposed restoration project has the potential to create habitat that could support bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout. Because Lincoln Spring Creek has the potential to support 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 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. Funding will not be released until a cultural clearance is granted.

VI. Explanation of Impacts on the Human Environment.

1. Access to & quality of recreational activities.

Presently, this spring creek contributes no appreciable recruitment of salmonids to Keep Cool Creek or the Blackfoot River. The Blackfoot River supports a very popular recreational fishery. The intent of this project is to enhance spawning, rearing and over-winter habitat for salmonids and increase the recruitment of fish found in these downstream waters.

VII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

1. No Action Alternative

If no action is taken, a nearly two-mile reach of Lincoln Spring Creek will continue to be nearly devoid of aquatic habitat and will provide little or no recruitment of fish to Keep Cool Creek or the Blackfoot River. The riparian habitat also will remain degraded. 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 restore a nearly two-mile degraded reach of Lincoln Spring Creek, a tributary to Keep Cool Creek and ultimately the Blackfoot River. The intent of the project is to improve spawning, rearing and over-wintering habitat for salmonids and to improve the vegetative community within the riparian corridor. This alternative would improve fish and wildlife habitat and aesthetics within the project area and has the potential to contribute toward the recovery of bull trout.

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 also 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 April 20, 2007.

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  
e-mail: [mlere@mt.gov](mailto:mlere@mt.gov)

**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 Lincoln Spring Creek Channel Restoration 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 restoration of nearly a two-mile reach of Lincoln Spring Creek, a tributary to Keep Cool Creek and ultimately the Blackfoot River. The intent of the project is to improve spawning, rearing and over-winter habitat for salmonids. The project site is located near the town of Lincoln in Lewis and Clark 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 Lewis and Clark 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 Ryen Aasheim, Big Blackfoot Chapter of Trout Unlimited  
 Recommendation concerning preparation of EIS No EIS required. EA prepared by: Mark Lere  
 Date: February 28, 2007