

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
 Endangered Species Coordinator
 Fisheries Division
 Native Species Coordinator, Fisheries
 Bozeman Office
Montana State Library, Helena
MT Environmental Information Center
Montana Audubon Council
Montana Wildlife Federation
Beaverhead Conservation District, 420 Barrett Street, Dillon, MT 59725
U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Helena
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Helena
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 420 Barrett Street, Dillon, MT 59725
State Historic Preservation Office, Helena
Madison County, P.O. Box 278, Virginia City, MT 59755

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 the replacement of an undersized and deteriorating culvert under East Bench Road on Spring Creek, a tributary to the Beaverhead River. The intent of the project is to improve upstream fish passage for salmonids residing in the Beaverhead River. This proposed project is located near Point of Rocks approximately 15 miles northeast of the town of Dillon in Madison 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. Project funding 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

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
Fisheries Division
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Spring Creek Culvert Replacement 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 replacement of an undersized and deteriorating culvert, located underneath East Bench Road on Spring Creek, with an 83-inch by 128-inch squash pipe. The intent of the project is to improve upstream fish passage for salmonids residing in the Beaverhead River. This stream crossing is located on a county owned road approximately 15 miles northeast of the town of Dillon in Madison County (Attachment 1).

I. Location of Project: This project will be conducted at the East Bench Road crossing on Spring Creek located near Point of Rocks within Township 5 South, Range 7 West, Section 27 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 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 achieve this goal.

East Bench Road crosses Spring Creek approximately three-tenths miles upstream of the confluence with the Beaverhead River. Currently, the stream crossing consists of a deteriorating 48-inch round culvert. A 50-year flood analysis performed by the Natural Resources and Conservation Service revealed that this existing culvert is significantly undersized. This undersized culvert has caused upstream channel aggradation and downstream channel degradation. The culvert acts as a partial migration barrier to upstream migrating fish. Replacing the culvert with a larger sized squash pipe would enhance upstream fish passage and eliminate the ongoing channel changes associated with the crossing.

III. Scope of the Project:

The project proposes to replace an existing deteriorating and undersized culvert with an 83-inch by 128-inch squash pipe that would be 46 feet in length. Installation of this new culvert would be undertaken by Madison County and the culvert would be installed below stream grade to facilitate upstream fish passage. The size of the proposed new culvert has been determined to be adequate for the drainage and would eliminate the ongoing channel changes associated with the existing culvert. Completion of this proposed project would compliment a stream channel restoration project that is under future consideration for Spring Creek. This project is expected to cost approximately \$20,975.00. Of this total, the Future Fisheries Improvement Program would be contributing up to \$15,660.00.

IV. Environmental Impact Checklist:

Please see attached checklist.

V. Explanation of Impacts to the Physical Environment

1. Terrestrial and aquatic life and habitats.

Enhancing fish passage in Spring Creek by replacing an under-sized culvert with a large squash pipe is expected to increase recruitment of salmonids and other species of fish to the Beaverhead River.

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 (318 authorization). A 124 permit (Stream Protection Act) will be obtained from Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks and the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers will be contacted for requirements needed to meet the federal Clean Water Act (404 permit).

3. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture.

Soils within the immediate project area would be disturbed during construction, but would be stabilized with re-vegetation efforts (sowing seed).

4. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality.

Riparian vegetation and cover would be disturbed within the immediate project area during the period of construction. However, proposed re-vegetation efforts would act to mitigate these disturbances.

5. Aesthetics

Aesthetics of the site would be degraded during the time frame of construction due to ground disturbance and the presence of heavy equipment. Long-term impacts to aesthetics would be negligible.

6. Historic and archaeological sites

This site has been previously disturbed by the construction and maintenance of East Bench Road. As a result, there is a very low likelihood that cultural properties will be impacted by the completion of the proposed project. 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.

Spring Creek is a perennial tributary to the Beaverhead River that has the potential to provide important spawning and rearing habitat for salmonids and other species of fish. Additionally, Spring Creek provides thermal refugia for salmonids residing in the Beaverhead River during low flow conditions in the heat of the summer. Enhancing fish passage at the East Bench Road crossing is expected to increase recruitment of fish to the Beaverhead River.

2. Transportation networks and traffic flows.

Traffic in this portion of East Bench Road likely would be delayed or interrupted during the period of construction. Madison County may deem it necessary to re-route traffic or install a temporary crossing during the period of construction.

VII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

1. No Action Alternative

If no action is taken, the crossing at East Bench Road will continue to impede upstream fish passage and will continue to cause channel instability problems both upstream and downstream from the existing culvert. As such, the potential for recruitment of salmonids and other species of fish in Spring Creek will remain reduced.

2. The Proposed Alternative

The proposed alternative is designed to enhance fish passage and restore natural channel function at the stream crossing underneath East Bench Road on Spring Creek. Spring Creek has the potential to provide important spawning and rearing habitat for salmonids and other species of fish and provides a thermal refuge for fish residing in the Beaverhead River. The project is expected to increase recruitment of fish to the Beaverhead River and eliminate a cause for upstream and downstream channel instability. The project also would compliment a stream channel restoration project proposed for Spring Creek in the near future.

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 web page: 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
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Fisheries Division
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 Spring Creek Culvert Replacement Project

Division/Bureau Fisheries Division -Future Fisheries Improvement

Description of Project The Future Fisheries Improvement Program is proposing to provide partial funding to a project calling for the replacement of an undersized and deteriorating culvert, located underneath East Bench Road on Spring Creek, with an adequately sized squash pipe. The intent of the project is to enhance upstream passage for salmonids and other species of fish. The stream crossing is located approximately 15 miles northeast of the town of Dillon 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		
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			X

Other groups or agencies contacted or which may have overlapping jurisdiction Madison County, Beaverhead 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 Beaverhead Conservation District.

Recommendation concerning preparation of EIS No EIS required. EA prepared by: Mark Lere

Date: March 1, 2007