

June 28, 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  
Missoula Office

Montana State Library, Helena  
MT Environmental Information Center  
Montana Audubon Council  
Montana Wildlife Federation  
Lewis and Clark Conservation District, 790 Colleen Street, Helena, MT 59601  
Helena National Forest, 2880 Skyway Drive, Helena, MT 59601  
U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Helena  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Helena  
State Historic Preservation Office, Helena  
Lewis and Clark County, P.O. Box 1725, Helena, MT 59624  
Big Blackfoot Chapter Trout Unlimited

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 two deteriorating culverts under Stemple Pass Road on Poorman Creek with a free-span bridge or with a bottomless arch pipe. The intent of the project is to improve upstream fish passage for westslope cutthroat trout, bull trout and other aquatic organisms. This proposed project is located approximately 3 miles south of the town of Lincoln in Lewis and Clark County.

Please submit any comments that you have by 5:00 P.M., July 28, 2007 to the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks in Helena at the address listed above. The Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission have approved partial funding for this project. 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  
Lower Poorman 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. 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 replacement of an undersized, double pipe culvert on Stemple Pass Road that currently acts as a partial upstream barrier to fish and other aquatic organisms. The double culvert will be replaced with either a free-span bridge or a bottomless arch of sufficient size that would provide for stream simulation and, at the same time, maintain the existing road grade. A specific design for the crossing has not yet been developed. The intent of the project is to improve upstream fish passage for bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout. This stream crossing is located approximately 3 miles south of the town of Lincoln in Lewis and Clark County (Attachment 1).

I. Location of Project: This project will be conducted on Poorman Creek located approximately 3 miles south of the town of Lincoln within Township 14 North, Range 9 West, Section 36 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 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.

Poorman Creek is a 3<sup>rd</sup> order tributary to the upper Blackfoot River that has the potential for becoming an important spawning area for fluvial bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout. The stream currently supports a mixed population of brown trout, brook trout, westslope cutthroat trout, bull trout and sculpin. Poorman Creek is one of the highest priority tributaries identified for restoration efforts in the Blackfoot drainage. The culvert crossing proposed for replacement in this project is located approximately 2.5 miles upstream from the mouth. This existing double culvert acts as selective upstream passage barrier for migrating fish and other aquatic species at high flows because of high water velocities and at lower flows due to perched outlets and debris-blocked inlets. Replacing this double culvert with a bridge or an open bottom arch will enhance the passage of migrant spawners and, as a result, likely will lead to enhanced recruitment of trout to the upper Blackfoot River. The upper Blackfoot River is considered to be a recruitment limited system.

III. Scope of the Project:

The project proposes to replace the existing double round culverts (54 X 40 inches) that pass Poorman Creek underneath the Stemple Pass Road with a bridge or bottomless arch that would provide for stream channel simulation and aquatic organism passage. Installation of this structure would follow design requirements as called for by Lewis and Clark County and by the Helena National Forest. The span of the new crossing would exceed the bankfull width of the stream channel. A final design will be completed in 2007 and construction is scheduled for 2008. This project is expected to cost approximately \$155,000.00. Of this total, the Future Fisheries Improvement Program would be contributing up to \$20,000.00. This project compliments other restoration efforts that have been completed or are ongoing. These past projects include a series of culvert replacements, instream flow enhancement, and channel restoration.

#### IV. Environmental Impact Checklist:

Please see attached checklist.

#### V. Explanation of Impacts to the Physical Environment

##### 1. Terrestrial and aquatic life and habitats.

Enhancing upstream fish passage in Poorman Creek by replacing undersized double culverts with a bridge or a bottomless arch is expected to enhance resident and migratory fish as well as other aquatic organisms, including spotted frogs and western toads. Enhanced upstream fish passage is expected to increase recruitment of westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout to the creek and to the upper Blackfoot River. The upper Blackfoot River is considered a recruitment limited system. As a result, the project is expected to enhance westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout populations in both Poorman Creek and the Blackfoot 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). Fill slopes and disturbed stream banks will be reclaimed using mulch and seed. Slash filter windrows will be placed to control sediment transport from roadbed and fill surfaces.

##### 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 short time frame of construction due to ground disturbance and the presence of heavy equipment. Long-term impacts to aesthetics would be negligible.

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

Poorman Creek supports fluvial and resident westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout. Westslope cutthroat trout is a species of special concern in Montana and bull trout are listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. Replacing this undersized double culvert will enhance upstream fish passage and will enhance the recruitment of these two fish species to the creek and upper Blackfoot River. Because Poorman Creek supports bull trout, a listed species, the project will be included in Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Section 6 conservation plan with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

9. Historic and archaeological sites

This site has been previously disturbed by the construction and maintenance of Stemple Pass 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.

7. Access to & quality of recreational activities.

Poorman Creek is a perennial tributary to the upper Blackfoot River that has the potential to provide important spawning and rearing habitat for westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout. Enhancing fish passage at this culvert crossing, located about 2.5 miles upstream from the mouth, would increase recruitment of trout to the upper Blackfoot River. Since the upper Blackfoot River is considered to be a recruitment limited system, enhancing trout reproduction in Poorman Creek is expected to improve recreational fishing in the river.

13. Locally adopted environmental plans & goals.

In 2005, the Blackfoot Challenge, in cooperation with the Big Blackfoot Chapter Trout Unlimited, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks and other partners prepared a prioritization restoration strategy for the Blackfoot Watershed. Out of a total of 108 streams evaluated, Poorman Creek was rated as a high priority stream with an overall ranking of 4. Poorman Creek also is included on the 303 (d) list in the Blackfoot Headwaters TMDL.

14. Transportation networks and traffic flows.

Traffic on this portion of Stemple Pass Road likely would be delayed, interrupted, or re-routed onto the Herrin Lakes Road during the period of construction. The period of construction is expected to take no longer than two weeks.

VII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

1. No Action Alternative

If no action is taken, this undersized double culvert on Poorman Creek will continue to act as a partial barrier to fish migration and to other aquatic organisms. As such, the passage of fluvial westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout from the upper Blackfoot River will continue to be hindered and the potential for recruitment will remain reduced.

2. The Proposed Alternative

The proposed alternative is designed to enhance fish passage at a Poorman Creek culvert crossing located on Stemple Pass Road. Poorman Creek has the potential of providing important spawning and rearing habitat for fluvial westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout. Enhancing fish passage at this culvert crossing would increase recruitment of trout to the stream and upper Blackfoot River. Enhancing trout reproduction in Poorman Creek is expected to improve recreational fishing in the Blackfoot 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 Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission also reviewed the proposed project. 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](http://fwp.mt.gov).

3. Duration of comment period?

Public comment will be accepted through 5:00 PM on July 28, 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

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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 Lower Poorman Creek Culvert Replacement Project

Division/Bureau Fisheries Division -Future Fisheries Improvement

Description of Project The Future Fisheries Improvement Program is proposing to provide funding to a project calling for the replacement of an undersized double culvert on Poorman Creek, located on Stemple Pass Road, with a bridge or with a bottomless arch. The intent of the project is to improve upstream fish passage for bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout. The stream crossing is located approximately 3 miles south of 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			X
14. Transportation networks & traffic flows			X			X

Other groups or agencies contacted or which may have overlapping jurisdiction Helena National Forest, Lewis and Clark County, Lewis and Clark 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 Ryen Aasheim, Big Blackfoot Chapter Trout Unlimited

Recommendation concerning preparation of EIS No EIS required.  
EA prepared by: Mark Lere  
Date: June 6, 2007