

August 27, 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  
Granite Conservation District, P.O. Box 926, Philipsburg, MT 59858  
U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Helena  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Helena  
State Historic Preservation Office, Helena  
West Slope Chapter Trout Unlimited, P.O. Box 7165, Missoula, MT 59807  
Rocking K Ranch, 1931 Rock Creek Road, Philipsburg, MT 59858

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 habitat enhancement project on a 4,500-foot reach of Rock Creek, a tributary to Clark Fork River. The intent of the project is to enhance pool and spawning habitat for salmonids and to stabilize an actively eroding stream bank. This proposed project is located on the Rocking K Ranch approximately 11 miles west of the town of Philipsburg in Granite County.

Please submit any comments that you have by 5:00 P.M., September 28, 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  
Rock Creek Habitat Enhancement and 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 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 to a project calling for the enhancement of pool habitat and bank stabilization within a 4,500-foot reach of Rock Creek, a tributary to the Clark Fork River. Pool enhancement would involve the construction of a series of in-stream structures, including placement of large woody debris, installation of rock j-hook vanes, rock weirs and boulder clusters. An eroding stream bank will be stabilized by sloping to a stable angle of repose, installing rootwads and re-vegetating with seed and riparian shrubs. The intent of the project is to enhance pools, spawning habitat and over-wintering habitat for salmonids, including westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout. The project site is located approximately 11 miles west of the town of Philipsburg in Granite County (Attachment 1).

I. Location of Project: This project will be conducted on a reach of Rock Creek located about 11 miles west of the town of Philipsburg within Township 6 North, Range 15 West, Sections 19, 30 and 31 in Granite 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.

The upper reaches of main stem Rock Creek are characterized primarily by a series of long riffles with minimal pool habitat. This lack of habitat diversity may be suppressing salmonid populations, primarily adult fish in areas of upper Rock Creek

III. Scope of the Project:

This proposed project calls for the creation of a series of pools, stabilization of an actively eroding stream bank and balancing stream flow within an existing side channel (Attachment 2). The work would be scattered over a 4,500-foot reach of Rock Creek. Pool habitat will be created with the installation of 18 large woody debris structures, 15 rock j-hook vanes and 8 boulder clusters. Wood stems will be placed at an angle of 20 to 30 degrees projecting upstream from the existing stream bank to create scour. The wood stems will be at least 14 inches in diameter and the boles will be at least 16 feet in length. Pools will be excavated downstream of the wood structures to expedite the scour process. Approximately 575 feet of

actively eroding stream bank will be stabilized by sloping the upper bank to a 2:1 slope and re-vegetating with seed and riparian shrubs. Rootwads will be installed to re-direct the thalweg from the newly restored stream bank. To control the distribution of stream flow between the main channel and a side channel, a rock W-shaped weir will be installed at the head of the side channel. This weir would prevent the avulsion of the main channel into the side channel. Two smaller rock weirs would be installed into the main channel to control grade and to provide for increased flow into the side channel. This project is expected to cost \$192,270.00. Of this total, the Future Fisheries Improvement Program would be contributing up to \$30,000.00.

#### IV. Environmental Impact Checklist:

Please see attached checklist.

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

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

Enhancing pool and over-winter habitat conditions within this reach of Rock Creek is expected to enhance adult salmonid populations within the localized area. The project also may increase holding and staging habitat for migratory bull trout.

##### 2. Water quantity, quality and distribution.

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 will occur during a period of low flow. The Department of Environmental Quality has been 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) has been obtained from the local conservation district and the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers has been 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, but would quickly stabilize following proposed re-vegetation efforts.

##### 4. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality.

Riparian vegetation and cover would be disturbed during the period of construction. However, proposed re-vegetation efforts would mitigate for this disturbance.

##### 5. Aesthetics.

In the short term, aesthetics would be adversely impacted due to ground disturbance and the presence of heavy construction equipment. Construction is expected to occur over an approximately 15-day period.

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

Rock Creek currently supports both bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout. Bull trout are listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act and westslope cutthroat trout have been identified as a species of special concern. The project is expected to enhance holding and staging habitat for these two species of fish.

9. 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.

None

#### VII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

##### 1. No Action Alternative

If no action is taken, this reach of Rock Creek will continue to lack habitat diversity and remain characterized as primarily riffle habitat. The lack of pool habitat may limit the number of adult salmonids in the localized area.

##### 2. The Proposed Alternative

The proposed alternative is designed to enhance pool habitat, stabilize an actively eroding stream bank and control the distribution of stream flow between the main channel and a side channel. The created pool habitat will provide additional holding and staging areas for adult salmonids. Stabilization of an actively eroding stream bank will reduce sediment loading into the stream and controlling stream flow into an active side channel will eliminate the need for continued channel alteration and disturbance in an effort to insure flow for downstream water users that divert from the side channel. The intent of the project is to enhance pools, spawning habitat and over-wintering habitat for salmonids, including westslope cutthroat trout and 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 September 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 Rock Creek Habitat Enhancement and 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 enhancement of pool habitat and the stabilization of an actively eroding stream bank with a 4,500-foot reach of Rock Creek, a tributary to the Clark Fork River. The intent of the project is to enhance pools, spawning habitat and over-wintering habitat for salmonids, including westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout. The project site is located approximately 11 miles west of the town of Philipsburg in Granite 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		
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 Granite 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 Warren Anders, Rocking K Ranch; PBS & J  
 Recommendation concerning preparation of EIS No EIS required.

EA prepared by: Mark Lere

Date: August 15, 2007

