

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  
Missoula Office

Montana State Library, Helena  
MT Environmental Information Center  
Montana Audubon Council  
Montana Wildlife Federation  
Bitterroot Conservation District, 1709 North First Street, Hamilton, MT 59840  
U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Helena  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Helena  
State Historic Preservation Office, Helena  
Tri State Water Quality Council, 4660 Spurgin Road, Missoula, MT 59804  
Mr. Frank Mogan, 939 Threemile Creek Road, Stevensville, MT 59870

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Please find enclosed an Environmental Assessment prepared for the Future Fisheries Improvement Program. The Program tentatively plans to provide partial funding for a channel stabilization and riparian restoration project on a degraded reach of Threemile Creek, a tributary to the Bitterroot River. This proposed project is located approximately nine miles northeast of the town of Stevensville in Ravalli 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  
Threemile Creek Channel Stabilization and Riparian Restoration Project – Mogan Reach

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 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 channel stabilization and riparian restoration within a 3,400-foot reach of Threemile Creek, a tributary to the Bitterroot River. The intent of this project is to improve channel stability, enhance aquatic habitat for native fish and wildlife, and reduce sediment loading into downstream waters. The project site is located on Threemile Creek approximately nine miles northeast of the town of Stevensville in Ravalli County (Attachment 1).

I. Location of Project: This project will be conducted on Threemile Creek located approximately nine miles northeast of the town of Stevensville within Township 10 North, Range 19 West, Sections 33 and 34 in Ravalli County. The project site is located on property owned by Mr. Frank Mogan.

II. Need for the Project: One goal within Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks six-year plan of operation for the fisheries program is to “restore and enhance degraded habitat” 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.

The Tri-State Water Quality Council and partners, as a result of a comprehensive watershed assessment completed in 2003, have identified this project as high priority. This project is located just downstream of several recently completed sediment reducing projects on Threemile Creek and its tributary, Wheelbarrow Creek. Bank erosion on this reach of Threemile Creek has been caused by channel aggradation as a result of past sediment loading from upstream sources and the loss of riparian vegetation due to cultivated agriculture and livestock grazing. The project reach currently exhibits approximately 350 feet of active stream bank erosion. This project calls for stabilizing these eroding stream banks, enhancing the function of the existing floodplain and restoring the riparian vegetative community in areas where vegetation was removed for cultivation and/or from livestock overgrazing.

III. Scope of the Project:

The project proposes to stabilize approximately 340 feet of actively eroding stream banks within a 3,400-foot reach of stream. To stabilize these eroding stream banks, a new floodplain bench will be constructed using fabric encased soil lifts and the channel will be narrowed and deepened (Attachments 2 and 3). Containerized native shrubs will be planted and a native seed mix will be spread on the newly created floodplain bench. Willow cuttings and facines also will be installed. Existing fencing will be used to exclude livestock grazing within the riparian corridor for a minimum of five years to allow for the recovery of the vegetative community. This project is expected to cost \$32,022.00. Of this total, the Future

Fisheries Improvement Program would be contributing up to \$8,507.00 to complete the project.

IV. Environmental Impact Checklist:

Please see attached checklist.

V. Explanation of Impacts to the Physical Environment

1. Terrestrial and aquatic life and habitats.

The aquatic and riparian habitat on a 3,400-foot reach of Threemile Creek would be improved by stabilizing a series of eroding stream banks and restoring the riparian vegetative community. This work is expected to create healthier habitat for aquatic life by reducing sediment loading and creating greater environmental complexity. Expected improvements in the aquatic habitat should enhance resident species of fish within this reach of Threemile Creek. Habitat for riparian wildlife also would be improved by enhancing the riparian vegetative community.

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 310 permit will be obtained from the local Conservation District and the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers will be contacted to determine requirements to meet the federal Clean Water Act (404 permit). In the long term, restoring the existing channel would reduce sediment contributions to downstream areas, thereby improving the overall quality of downstream waters.

3. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture.

Soils along the stream margin would be disturbed during construction, but would be stabilized with re-vegetation efforts. Overall, the project is expected to reduce bank erosion and improve channel stability.

4. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality.

Riparian vegetation would be disturbed during the period of construction. However, proposed re-vegetation efforts and improved management of livestock grazing within the stream corridor would result in an overall improvement to the riparian vegetation.

5. Aesthetics.

During the period of construction, aesthetics would be adversely impacted due to on-site construction activities and the presence of heavy equipment. Construction is expected to occur over a five to ten day period. In the long term, aesthetics would be enhanced by restoring a

degraded reach of Threemile Creek to a healthier and more complex stream environment.

9. Historic and archaeological sites

The proposed project likely will 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. The project will not begin 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 Threemile Creek will remain degraded, fish and riparian habitat will be poor and excessive sediment will continue to be introduced into the drainage.

2. Riparian Protection Alternative

Under this alternative, the stream corridor would be protected from livestock grazing for a sufficient period of time to allow for recovery of the riparian vegetation. Unstable stream banks would be allowed to continue to erode until such time they reached a stable angle of repose and re-vegetation occurred naturally. The time period required for recovery for this alternative is unknown, but certainly would be significantly longer than for the preferred alternative.

3. The Proposed Alternative

The proposed alternative is designed to restore a 3,400-foot reach of degraded channel on Threemile Creek. This restoration work would remove a chronic source of sediment, provide for more diverse aquatic habitat and enhance the riparian vegetative community. This alternative would improve fish and wildlife habitat, aesthetics and water quality within the project area and would be expected to enhance resident fisheries within the local area.

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 Park's web page: [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  
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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 Threemile Creek Channel Stabilization and Riparian Restoration Project - Mogan Reach  
 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 channel stabilization and riparian restoration within a 3,400-foot reach of Threemile Creek, a tributary to the Bitterroot River. The intent of this project is to improve channel stability, enhance habitat conditions for fish and wildlife and reduce sediment loading to downstream waters. The project site is located approximately nine miles northeast of the town of Stevensville in Ravalli 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		
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 Bitterroot 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 Tri-state Water Quality Council

Recommendation concerning preparation of EIS No EIS required.

EA prepared by: Mark Lere

Date: August 14, 2007