

September 4, 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  
North Powell Conservation District, 1 Hollenback Road, Deer Lodge, MT 59722  
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  
Powell County, 409 Missouri Avenue, County Courthouse, Deer Lodge, MT 59722

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 project calling to replace an existing ford across Rock Creek with a pipe arch culvert to correct current road drainage problems and restore the natural channel morphology to the site. This proposed project is on Rock Creek, a tributary to the North Fork Blackfoot River, located approximately 9 miles east of the community of Ovando in Powell County.

Please submit any comments that you have by 5:00 P.M., October 5, 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 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 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 for a project calling for the installation of a pipe arch culvert at a stream crossing on Rock Creek, a tributary to the North Fork Blackfoot River. Currently, a ford acts as the county road crossing at this site. The intent of the project is to correct current road drainage problems and restore the natural channel morphology to the site. The project site is located approximately 9 miles east of the community of Ovando in Powell County (Attachment 1).

- I. Location of Project: This project will be conducted on an existing county road crossing on Rock Creek located within Township 15 North, Range 11 West, Section 25 in Powell 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.

Rock Creek is the largest tributary to the North Fork Blackfoot River and has been a focus of continued habitat restoration since 1990. Rock Creek supports populations of westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout, as well as rainbow trout, brown trout and brook trout. Currently, an existing ford acts as a stream crossing on a lightly used county road, creating road drainage problems and an over-widened and shallow channel cross section. This project calls for replacing the existing ford with a pipe arch culvert. This project would represent one of the last habitat issues in need of attention in the Rock Creek drainage.

- III. Scope of the Project:

This proposed project would replace an existing ford with an appropriately sized pipe arch culvert at a road crossing on Rock Creek. The culvert is designed to provide for stream simulation through the crossing (Attachment 2). Installation of the culvert would eliminate existing road drainage problems and restore the channel to a proper morphology. This project is expected to cost \$22,264.00. Of this total, the Future Fisheries Improvement Program would be contributing up to \$6,400.00.

- IV. Environmental Impact Checklist:

Please see attached checklist.

V. Explanation of Impacts to the Physical Environment

1. Terrestrial and aquatic life and habitats.

Replacing an existing ford with a properly sized pipe arch culvert would create a stable stream crossing that would eliminate excessive sediment delivery to the channel and, at the same time, provide for fish passage. The project is expected to enhance native fish recruitment to the North Fork and main-stem Blackfoot rivers. This work would complement previous habitat work that has been systematically completed in the drainage.

2. Water quantity, quality and distribution.

Presently, the existing ford creates road drainage problems and contributes excessive sediment into the system. Installation of a culvert will eliminate these road drainage problems and restore the channel to a more proper morphology. 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. 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 (Montana Stream Protection Act) will be obtained from Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks 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. In the long term, soils would be stabilized with the elimination of road drainage problems at this stream crossing.

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, eliminating road drainage problems and restoring the channel to a proper morphology would enhance aesthetics.

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

The Rock Creek drainage currently supports bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout. Bull trout are listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act and westslope cutthroat trout are considered a species of special concern in Montana. Because Rock Creek supports bull trout, a species listed as threatened, the project will be included in Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Section 6 plan with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The project is expected to benefit both bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout populations.

9. Historic and archaeological sites

This site has been previously disturbed by the construction and maintenance of the existing stream crossing. 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.

None.

VII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

1. No Action Alternative

If no action is taken, this road crossing on Rock Creek will continue to cause road drainage problems and contribute excessive sediment delivery to the stream.

2. The Proposed Alternative

The proposed alternative is designed to replace an existing ford on Rock Creek with a pipe arch culvert. Installation of the culvert will eliminate existing road drainage problems and restore the over-widened channel to a more proper morphology. This work would complement previous habitat work that has been systematically completed in the drainage. The intent of the project is to improve overall habitat for salmonids in the Rock Creek drainage.

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 will review the proposed project 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 October 5, 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 Culvert Replacement 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 installation of a pipe arch culvert at an existing ford on Rock Creek, a tributary to the North Fork Blackfoot River. The intent of the project is to correct current road drainage problems and restore proper channel morphology to the site. The project site is located at a county road crossing approximately 9 miles east of the community of Ovando in Powell 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		
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 North Powell 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; Watermark Consulting

Recommendation concerning preparation of EIS No EIS required.

EA prepared by: Mark Lere

Date: August 16, 2007