

February 20, 2009
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
 Missoula Office
Montana State Library, Helena
MT Environmental Information Center
Montana Audubon Council
Montana Wildlife Federation, P.O. Box 1175, Helena, MT 59624
Wayne Hadley, 1016 Eastside Road, Deer Lodge, MT 59722
Montana River Action, 304 N 18th Ave., Bozeman, MT 59715
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
Fay Management, 395 Gallatin Park Drive, Bozeman, MT 59715
Alpine Creek Restoration, P.O. Box 5186, Missoula, MT 59806
Skip Herman, 105 Pauly Drive, 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 stream restoration project on two unnamed spring creeks, both small tributaries to Flint Creek located near the town of Drummond. The intent of the project is to enhance spawning, rearing and adult habitat for salmonids in these two spring creeks and potentially increase recruitment of fish to lower Flint Creek. This proposed project is located on the KT Ranch approximately 4.5 miles south of the town of Drummond in Granite County.

Please submit any comments that you have by 5:00 P.M., March 23, 2009 to the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks in Helena at the address listed above. Completion of this project 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
Sams Spring Creek Channel Restoration 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.

The Future Fisheries Improvement Program is proposing to provide partial funding to a project calling for the restoration of approximately 5,700 feet on two unnamed spring creeks, both tributaries to lower Flint Creek. The eastern most of these two springs is locally known as Sams Spring Creek, while the western spring has been identified as Spring Creek C. Restoration would involve increasing channel sinuosity, narrowing and deepening over-widened portions of the channel, creating pool habitat and planting woody vegetation along the stream banks. Large woody debris would be added along both spring creeks to create habitat and provide for bank stabilization. All restoration activities would be protected by riparian fencing that would be used to exclude livestock from the riparian corridor. The intent of the project is to enhance resident fisheries in these two spring creeks and potentially provide recruitment of fish to lower Flint Creek. The project site is located approximately 4.5 miles south of the town of Drummond in Granite County (Attachment 1).

I. Location of Project: This project will be conducted on two unnamed spring creeks, both tributaries to Flint Creek, located approximately 4.5 miles south of the town of Drummond within Township 10 North, Range 12 West, Section 7 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.

Past overgrazing by livestock and other land use activities have degraded these two spring creeks. Both streams have been channelized, portions of the channels are excessively wide and shallow, the streambeds are filled with fine sediment and the riparian corridor lacks woody shrubs and trees. For Sams Spring Creek, the easternmost stream, approximately 65% of the stream banks currently are unstable and 99% of the channel has been altered (Attachment 2). For Spring Creek C, the westernmost stream, the entire channel has been altered and over 85% of the stream banks are actively eroding (Attachment 3). The flow of Sams Spring Creek at the lower end of the reach was measured at about 13 cfs. Bank full discharge for Spring Creek C was estimated to be about 7 cfs. These degraded stream channels lack habitat diversity and display elevated water temperatures. Water temperatures in these streams have exceeded 70 F during the summer. The proposed project intends to create hydraulic conditions that would provide for the transport of fine sediment, improve habitat conditions to enhance the fisheries and improve wetland habitat adjacent to the spring creeks.

III. Scope of the Project:

This proposed project calls for restoring the plan form of both streams, totaling about 5,700 feet, by increasing sinuosity, narrowing over-widened channel reaches, creating pool habitat and planting woody vegetation along the stream banks. Additionally, large woody debris would be strategically placed in the banks of both channels to provide stability and create greater habitat diversity in the form of overhead cover and pool scour. Channel modifications would include reworking and narrowing the channel pattern to improve point bars and width to depth ratios. The placement of sod mats and bio-logs, use of a cut and fill approach and/or creation of alternating point bars would be used to narrow the channels and adjust the plan form. The channel bed would be graded so scour pools can form on the outside of meander bends and tail-out of pools would be contoured to create spawning habitat. Added habitat features would include large woody debris cross vanes and simple vanes (Attachment 4). Woody structures would be installed by pushing wood stems into the stream bank with an excavator. Existing high cut banks would be sloped back to create greater access to the floodplain and create conditions for restoration of wetland sods. Stream banks would be re-vegetated with native grass seed, sprigging cut willow stems, planting of bare-root stock of native shrubs and transplanting live willow clumps. This project is expected to cost \$156,632.00. Of this total, the Future Fisheries Improvement Program would be contributing up to \$30,875.00.

IV. Environmental Impact Checklist:

Please see attached checklist.

V. Explanation of Impacts to the Physical Environment

1. Terrestrial and aquatic life and habitats.

Restoring overall aquatic habitat conditions within these two spring creeks is expected to enhance the resident fisheries, including brown trout, brook trout and rainbow cutthroat trout hybrids. Additionally, restoration of Spring Creek C may enhance recruitment of fish to Flint Creek. Sams Spring Creek, in contrast, appears to be isolated from Flint Creek due to degraded channel conditions located downstream of the reach proposed for restoration. Habitat for riparian dependent wildlife also would be improved by providing better management of livestock grazing within the riparian corridor and by enhancing the riparian vegetative community along the stream margin.

2. Water quantity, quality and distribution.

Presently, these degraded spring creeks display elevated water temperatures and excessive fine sediment accumulations due to the over-widened and shallow nature of the channel. The proposed restoration project is expected to reduce water temperatures and increase the sediment transport capability of the channel. 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 310 permit (Natural Streambed and Land Preservation Act) will be obtained

from the local conservation district 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 restoration activities, but would be stabilized following proposed re-vegetation efforts. Re-vegetation efforts would involve placement of salvaged sod and seeding with native sedges and grasses, as well as planting and sprigging native riparian shrubs. Soils would be further stabilized with the installation of fencing along the riparian corridor and the implementation of a plan to protect streamside vegetation from livestock grazing.

4. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality.

Riparian vegetation and cover would be disturbed during the period of construction. However, proposed re-vegetation efforts, in conjunction with fencing the riparian corridor and excluding livestock grazing within the riparian corridor, would result in an overall improvement to the riparian vegetative community.

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, aesthetics would be enhanced by returning two degraded spring creeks back to more natural configurations. In addition, the riparian vegetative community would be enhanced by riparian plantings and by improved grazing management.

6. 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. The project will not begin until a cultural clearance is granted.

VI. Explanation of Impacts on the Human Environment.

1. Access to & quality of recreational activities.

Presently, this spring creek complex contributes no appreciable recruitment of salmonids to Flint Creek. The proposed project may increase recruitment to downstream waters and enhance the recreational fisheries found there, including Flint Creek and the Clark Fork River.

VII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

1. No Action Alternative

If no action is taken, these two spring creeks will remain degraded and their fisheries potentials will remain unrealized. The riparian habitat also will remain degraded. Recreational opportunities

associated with fish and wildlife resources will remain reduced and aesthetics will continue to be impaired.

2. The Proposed Alternative

The proposed alternative is designed to restore approximately 5,700 feet of degraded channel in two spring creek tributaries to lower Flint Creek. The intent of the project is to improve overall aquatic habitat for salmonids and to improve the vegetative community within the riparian corridor. This alternative is expected improve fish and wildlife habitat and aesthetics within the project area and has the potential to enhance recruitment of fish to downstream waters, including Flint Creek and the Clark Fork 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 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.

3. Duration of comment period?

Public comment will be accepted through 5:00 PM on March 23, 2009.

4. Person responsible for preparing the EA.

Mark Lere, Program Officer
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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 Sams Spring Creek Channel Restoration 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 restoration of approximately 5,700 feet of two unnamed spring creeks, both tributaries to lower Flint Creek. The intent of the project is to enhance resident fisheries in these two spring creeks and potentially enhance the recruitment of juvenile fish to downstream waters. The project site is located approximately 4.5 miles south of the town of Drummond 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		
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		

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 Eric Reiland, Alpine Creek Restoration.

Recommendation concerning preparation of EIS No EIS required.

EA prepared by: Mark Lere

Date: February 5, 2009