

# ***Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks***

4600 Giant Springs Road

Great Falls, Mt. 59405

## ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

of

the stocking of rainbow trout in Crow Coulee Reservoir  
near Fort Benton, Montana

### **PART 1. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION**

Project Title: Stocking rainbow trout in Crow Coulee Reservoir

Date: May 24, 2010

Project Location: Chouteau County, Montana. Approximately 18 miles E/NE of Fort Benton. T24N, R11E, S2 SE1/4 (Figure 1).

**Description of Project:** The Department proposes to stock rainbow trout in Crow Coulee Reservoir to provide a public fishery per the tenants of a Private Lands Fishing Access (PLFA) agreement with landowners Daniel Roddy and Andy Taylor.

The pond is presently a private pond licensed (4-000010) by FWP to harbor black crappie, white crappie, largemouth bass, yellow perch, fathead minnow, brown trout, rainbow trout, westslope cutthroat trout and brook trout. It was relicensed for a 10-year period starting 11/18/2009. The department conducted an environmental assessment in 2000 to evaluate the private stocking of rainbow trout, brook trout, brown trout, and westslope cutthroat trout and no significant impacts were identified. In 2004 the department conducted an environmental assessment of the stocking of two crappie species, largemouth bass, yellow perch and fathead minnow and no individual or cumulative environmental impacts were identified.

In order to fulfill the department's obligation to ARM 12.7.601 (4), this assessment evaluates the states action of stocking rainbow trout in Crow Coulee Reservoir. Although the reservoir is licensed by FWP to harbor rainbow trout, it has never been stocked by FWP with state-raised fish.

#### **Alternatives to Proposed Action:**

No action - No stocking of state raised fish in Crow Coulee Reservoir. This alternative would involve no stocking of state raised fish, no increase in public use, and the present level of public use would continue as allowed by the landowner. The objectives would not likely be met.

No other action alternatives, that have a reasonable chance of being implemented, were identified or analyzed.

**Other groups or agencies contacted or which may have overlapping jurisdiction:** None

## PART 2. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

Table 1. Potential impact on physical environment.

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Provided
1. Unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources				X		
2. Terrestrial or aquatic life and/or habitats				X		2.
3. Introduction of new species into an area				X		
4. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality			X			4.
5. Water quality, quantity and distribution (surface or groundwater)				X		
6. Existing water right or reservation				X		
7. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture			X			7.
8. Air quality or objectionable odors				X		
9. Historical and archaeological sites				X		
10. Demands on environmental resources of land, water, air & energy				X		
11. Aesthetics			X			11.

### Comments

(A description of potentially significant, or unknown, impacts and potential alternatives for mitigation must be provided.)

2. Fish, including rainbow trout, are licensed to be in this reservoir and have been stocked in previous years. No additional impacts to environmental resources are anticipated.

4. Stocking of state-raised rainbow trout in Crow Coulee Reservoir would result in public use of this reservoir. As such, there would be an increase in human activity. Access to the site would be allowed by driving 0.48 mile on an existing road off of a county road, then walk-in 400 feet from the parking site (Figure 2). There would be some increase in trampling of vegetation around the reservoir. Access to the parking area would be on an existing road and walk-in traffic would be on an existing road. Trampling of vegetation by human foot-traffic would be limited to the shoreline of the reservoir and would be similar to existing use by cattle. No significant impacts are anticipated from human foot traffic.

7. There could be some soil compaction at the site as a result of increased human foot traffic. Soil compaction would likely be limited to the shoreline of the reservoir. No significant impacts are expected as a result of soil compaction from foot traffic. All motorized traffic would be confined to existing roads. There would be some additional soil compaction at the designated parking site, but the impacts from this compaction would be minor. The purpose of creating a designated parking site is to reduce impacts to the ground from driving on steep terrain during periods of mud and snow, and to reduce potentially hazardous conditions of steep terrain.

11. Increased human activity would be controlled by signing, limited fencing and developing a parking area. The aesthetics of this site would be changed from predominantly range and agriculture to minor development (signing, fencing) to control public use.

Table 2. Potential impacts on human environment.

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Provided
1. Social structures and cultural diversity				X		
2. Changes in existing public benefits provided by wildlife populations and/or habitat		X				2.
3. Local and state tax base and tax revenue				X		
4. Agricultural production				X		
5. Human health				X		
6. Quantity and distribution of community and personal income				X		
7. Access to and quality of recreational activities		X		X		7.
8. Locally adopted environmental plans & goals (ordinances)				X		
9. Distribution and density of population and housing				X		
10. Demands for government services		X		X		10.
11. Industrial and/or commercial activity				X		

### **Comments**

(A description of potentially significant, or unknown, impacts and potential alternatives for mitigation must be provided as comments.)

2. The desired outcome is to increase quality angling at Crow Coulee Reservoir by stocking rainbow trout produced by the State Of Montana's hatchery system. Surveys in May 2010 detected a high density of crappie.

Angling for both of these species would be beneficial to the public.

7. The desired outcome is to provide an additional opportunity for quality public recreation through angling.

10. Stocking state raised fish would require some patrolling of the site by the local game warden. This increase in service would not be a burden to the existing FWP enforcement program. Controlling driving and parking would help reduce conflicts with public use of private land.

Creating a destination site for anglers in a rural setting would likely result in increased traffic on county roads. The Clear Lake road and the Loma Bridge road are two roads administered by Chouteau County that would receive the most use. Both roads are presently in good condition and increased use resulting from the proposed action is not expected to increase county road maintenance.

**Does the proposed action involve potential risks or adverse effects which are uncertain but extremely harmful if they were to occur?**

There is a potential risk to human health because the road leading to the dam is very steep and is not improved. In order to reduce the risk to human health, access to this point will be controlled by limiting drive-in access to a parking area approximately 400 feet from the reservoir and requiring walk-in from that point. Users will have to walk on a steep grade consistent with river breaks-type terrain in order to use the area. There are inherent water-based risks associated with recreating on or near water, namely drowning. The risks posed at this site are no greater than other reservoir-type fishery.

**Does the proposed action have impacts that are individually minor, but cumulatively significant or potentially significant?**

None of the risks identified are considered significant. Cumulatively, the impacts can be mitigated to reduce their level of significance (soil compaction by vehicles, foot traffic). There is little that can be done to reduce the risk of falling during foot travel from the parking area to the reservoir, or while anglers are walking around the reservoir. There is no plan to improve the site with a formal trail network. Anglers may angle from the dam, which would provide a level grade, with little to no risk of falling. Anglers who use float tubes or other carry-in water craft would do so at their own risk. Implementing the proposed action would not create water based hazards that are greater than most other reservoirs.

**Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives (including the no action alternative) to the proposed action when alternatives are reasonably available and prudent to consider. Include a discussion of how the alternatives would be implemented:**

The only other alternative considered was the No Action alternative. If this were adopted, there would be little to no opportunity for public use of this reservoir. The principle reason the landowner is agreeing to public access is in exchange for stocking the reservoir with state-raised rainbow trout.

No other action alternatives were considered.

**EA prepared by:** Grant Grisak

**Date Completed:** May 24, 2010

**Public comment:**

Due to the narrow scope of affected parties, I have determined that a formal public comment is not warranted. The EA disclosed the likely impacts and offered mitigative measures to help reduce the impacts, while achieving the objectives of the proposed action.

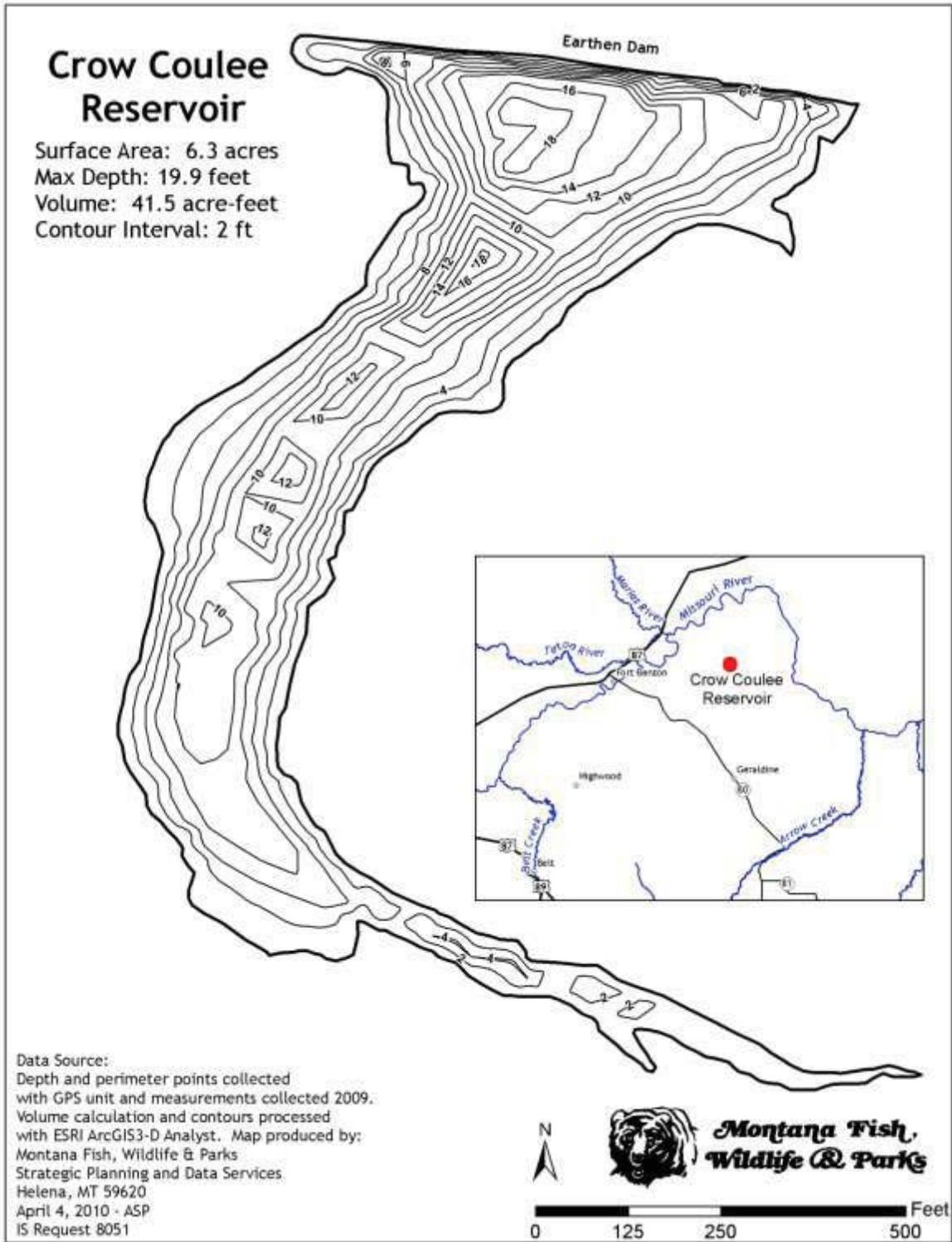


Figure 1. Bathymetric map and area of interest for Crow Coulee Reservoir.



Figure 2. Map of Crow Coulee Reservoir showing access road and parking area.