FUTURE FISHERIES IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM
SUMMER 2015 FUNDING CYCLE

Decision Notice and Response to Public Comment

Prepared by
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
August 28, 2015

Proposal and Final Action

Members of the Future Fisheries Review Panel submitted funding recommendations for 17 of 19 proposed projects from the 2015 summer funding cycle of the Future Fisheries Improvement Program (FFIP) to the Montana Fish & Wildlife Commission (Commission) for final approval. The Future Fisheries Review Panel is an independent board appointed by the governor (87-1-273, MCA). As a final action, the Commission adopted all of the funding recommendations, as submitted by the Future Fisheries Review Panel, at their public meeting held in Helena on August 25, 2015.

The Future Fisheries Improvement Program was established in 1995 to establish and implement a statewide voluntary program that promotes fishery habitats and spawning areas for the rivers, streams, and lakes of Montana's fisheries in order to enhance future fisheries through natural reproduction (87-1-272, MCA).

Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA)

MEPA requires Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) to assess the potential consequences of the proposed action for the human and natural environment. Environmental Assessments (EAs) were prepared and released by FWP on July 13, 2015 for six individual proposed projects associated with the summer 2015 Future Fisheries funding cycle. The 30-day public comment period ended August 12, 2015. These proposed projects included:

Cherry Creek fish passage
Devil's Dip Spring Creek channel restoration
Rattlesnake Creek fish screen
Smith Slough spawning enhancement
Stonewall Creek fish screen
Trail Creek fish screening and passage

The remaining 11 projects funded by Commission approval fell either under a categorical exclusion (defined under ARM), the federal National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), or ongoing/pending Environmental Assessment processes by the project applicants.

Categorical exclusion:
Big Otter Creek fencing and stock tank
Moose Creek riparian fencing

NEPA:
Deep Creek streamflow improvement
French Gulch channel restoration
Martina Creek channel restoration
Reese Creek instream flow enhancement
Upper Lolo Creek sediment reduction

Other processes / Applicant EAs:
Braziel Creek instream flow
La Marche Creek fish passage improvement
Poindexter Slough channel restoration
Van Houten fish barrier and spawning channel

Summary of Public Comment

The following is a summary of comments received from six drafted EA's, as well as associated responses from FWP.

Cherry Creek fish passage:

- A comment was made regarding the ability of rainbow trout and brown trout to enter into the project area. "Would this project allow rainbow trout and brown trout from the Madison River to enter into the upper Cherry Creek system? If the answer is 'yes' then I am opposed to this project. If the answer is 'no' then I am not opposed to this project."
- This project would not allow non-native trout (rainbow, brown trout) to access the project area. There is an additional barrier downstream. This project would only allow westslope cutthroat trout to have more access *within* the project area.

Smith Slough spawning enhancement:

- The State Historical Preservation Office commented that any structures that may be altered and are over fifty years old should be recorded and a determination of their eligibility should be made. This would include the proposed headgate replacement.
- However, because FWP is only funding the spawning gravel portion of the project and the headgate replacement is going to be completed and funded by the private landowner (on private land), it was determined that a cultural survey is not warranted.

Trail Creek fish screening and passage:

- A comment was made regarding the funding source and project cost. The individual expressed general support for the project as long as the total estimated cost doesn't exceed $59,975 and no funds will be expended from the FWP budget.
- FFIP funding for this project is through the Resource Indemnity Trust fund (RIT) and will not affect the FWP budget. The FFIP cost would not exceed $21,175.

Decision Notice

The public comment period closed on the above projects, and the comments received required clarification. Once the questions were resolved, the comments indicated general support for the projects. Based on the EAs' disclosures and analyses of potential impacts, FWP concludes that the proposed actions will not result in any significant impacts. For the six projects listed above, FWP will adopt the draft EA as the final EA and proceed with the projects as planned. Copies of the final EA's are available upon request.

Thank you for your interest,

Jim Darling
Habitat Bureau Chief
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