



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

1400 South 19th Avenue
Bozeman, MT 59718

July 25, 2016

To: Governor's Office, Sheena Wilson, State Capitol, Room 204, P.O. Box 200801, Helena, MT 59620-0801
Environmental Quality Council, State Capitol, Room 106, P.O. Box 201704, Helena, MT 59620-1704
Dept. of Environmental Quality, Metcalf Building, P.O. Box 200901, Helena, MT 59620-0901
Dept. of Natural Resources & Conservation, P.O. Box 201601, Helena, MT 59620-1601
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks:

Director's Office

Parks Division

Lands Section

FWP Commissioners

Fisheries Division

Legal Unit

Wildlife Division

Design & Construction

MT Historical Society, State Historic Preservation Office, P.O. Box 201202, Helena, MT 59620-1202

MT State Parks Association, P.O. Box 699, Billings, MT 59103

MT State Library, 1515 E. Sixth Ave., P.O. Box 201800, Helena, MT 59620

Bureau of Reclamation, 7700 Canyon Ferry Rd., Helena, MT 59602

James Jensen, Montana Environmental Information Center, P.O. Box 1184, Helena, MT 59624

Janet Ellis, Montana Audubon Council, P.O. Box 595, Helena, MT 59624

George Ochenski, P.O. Box 689, Helena, MT 59624

Jerry DiMarco, P.O. Box 1571, Bozeman, MT 59771

Montana Wildlife Federation, P.O. Box 1175, Helena, MT 59624

Wayne Hurst, P.O. Box 728, Libby, MT 59923

Jack Jones, 3014 Irene St., Butte, MT 59701

Jim Hoschouer, 1627 West Main St. #304, Bozeman, MT 59715

Pheasants Forever Chapter #563, P.O. Box 4808, Helena, MT 59604-4808

Randy Pierson, 5525 Treasure Canyon Drive, Helena, MT 59602

Robert L. Sanders, Ducks Unlimited, Inc., P.O. Box 183, Elliston, MT 59728

Mark Natale, 46 Broadwater Rd., Townsend, MT 59644

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The enclosed decision notice is for the proposed construction of two small water impoundments on the Canyon Ferry WMA (CFWMA) for the creation of shallow wetland habitat for waterfowl and a variety of other wildlife species. The proposed water impoundments would be approximately 8 acres and 11.5 acres in size. A brood strip for pheasants would also be created (approx. 0.5 acres) as part of the project. The source of water for this project would be the Montana Ditch. Water would be released from the Montana Ditch into the old Ray Creek channel that used to flow through the area for flooding each of the water projects. The project is dependent upon MFWP being granted a Change-In-Water Use Permit from the DNRC, the application for which is currently pending. If the Change-In-Water Use Permit is not granted, then the project will not happen at this point in time.

Both of the impoundments would include a water control structure to control water levels in the ponds to manage for emergent and submergent vegetation for the benefit of waterfowl. The brood strip would be periodically flooded during the summer period to keep the soil moist. The projects are proposed to be completed on a portion of the former Meyer agricultural lease. The agricultural lease on the property became vacant in 2007, and MFWP made the decision to not renew the lease, but instead chose to pursue a variety of wildlife habitat improvement projects on the property including the proposed action.

MFWP manages the CFWMA as part of a long-term agreement with the Bureau of Reclamation who actually administers most of the property that comprises the CFWMA including the property where the proposed project

would occur. MFWP's primary waterfowl related objectives on the CFWMA are to improve waterfowl production and recruitment through habitat manipulation and to improve waterfowl hunting opportunities. Construction of the two small ponds will work toward those objectives. Shallow seasonal ponds provide good habitat for breeding pairs, especially for dabbling duck species such as mallards, gadwalls, and pintails among others. MFWP's primary upland game bird objectives on the CFWMA are to improve seasonal habitat for upland birds (primarily pheasants) to increase production, recruitment and annual survival and to improve upland game bird hunting opportunities. Construction of the pheasant brood strip will work towards achieving that objective by promoting insect production. Insects provide a valuable protein source for young growing chicks.

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks is required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) to assess significant potential impacts of a proposed action to the human and physical environment. In compliance with MEPA, an Environmental Assessment (EA) was completed for the proposed project by FWP and released for public comment on May 13, 2016.

Public comments on the proposed project were taken for 31 days (through June 13, 2016). An EA notice was mailed to more than 40 individuals and groups. Legal notices were printed in the Broadwater Reporter (Townsend), Bozeman Chronicle and Helena Independent Record. The Environmental Assessment was also posted on the FWP webpage: <http://fwp.mt.gov/publicnotices/>.

Two comments were received on the Environmental Assessment. Based on the Environmental Assessment, the public comments received, and benefits and risks associated with this project, it is my decision, pending MFWP being granted the necessary Change-In-Water Use Permit by the DNRC, to go forward with the proposed action of constructing two small water impoundments for shallow wetland habitat and creating a pheasant brood strip on the CFWMA. I find there to be no significant impacts on the human and physical environments associated with this project. Therefore, I conclude that the Environmental Assessment is the appropriate level of analysis, and that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

Questions regarding this Decision Notice should be mailed to:

Adam Grove
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
P.O. Box 998
Townsend, MT 59644

Or e-mailed to: adgrove@mt.gov

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sam B. Sheppard", is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Sam B. Sheppard
Region Three Supervisor

Attachment



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT DECISION NOTICE for the Canyon Ferry WMA Pond Construction Project

**Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Region 3, Bozeman
July 2016**

Preface

The enclosed Decision Notice has been prepared for the proposed construction of two small water impoundments on the Canyon Ferry WMA (CFWMA) for the creation of shallow wetland habitat for waterfowl and a variety of other wildlife species. Canyon Ferry WMA is administered by the Bureau of Reclamation but is managed by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP) through a management agreement with the Bureau of Reclamation. The proposed water impoundments would be approximately 8 acres and 11.5 acres in size. A brood strip for pheasants would also be created (approx. 0.5 acres) as part of the project. The source of water for this project would be the Montana Ditch. Water would be released from the Montana Ditch into the old Ray Creek channel that used to flow through the area for flooding each of the water projects. The project is dependent upon MFWP being granted a Change-In-Water Use Permit from the DNRC, the application for which is currently pending. If the Change-In-Water Use Permit is not granted, then the project will not happen, at least at this point in time.

Both of the impoundments would include a water control structure to control water levels in the ponds to manage for emergent and submergent vegetation for the benefit of waterfowl. The brood strip would be periodically flooded during the summer period to keep the soil moist. The projects are proposed to be completed on a portion of the former Meyer agricultural lease. The agricultural lease on the property became vacant in 2007, and MFWP made the decision to not renew the lease, but instead chose to pursue a variety of wildlife habitat improvement projects on the property including the proposed action.

MFWP's primary waterfowl related objectives on the CFWMA are to improve waterfowl production and recruitment through habitat manipulation and to improve waterfowl hunting opportunities. Construction of the two small ponds will work toward those objectives. Shallow seasonal ponds provide good habitat for breeding pairs, especially for dabbling duck species such as mallards, gadwalls, and pintails among others. MFWP's primary upland game bird objectives on the CFWMA are to improve seasonal habitat for upland birds (primarily pheasants) to increase production, recruitment and annual survival, and to improve upland game bird hunting opportunities. Construction of the pheasant brood strip will work towards achieving that

objective by promoting insect production. Insects provide a valuable protein source for young growing chicks.

Public Process and Comments

FWP is required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) to assess potential impacts of a proposed action to the human and physical environment. An Environmental Assessment (EA) in compliance with MEPA was completed for the proposed project by FWP and released for public comment on May 13, 2016.

The following two alternatives were considered in this Environmental Assessment:

Alternative A: No Action. Under this action the proposed construction of the two small water impoundments and creation of the pheasant brood strip would not occur.

Alternative B: Proposed Action: MFWP would construct two small water impoundments for the creation of shallow wetland habitat for waterfowl and other wildlife species on the CFWMA and create a pheasant brood strip for the benefit of pheasant habitat on the CFWMA

Public comments were taken for 31 days (through June 13, 2016). Legal notices were printed in the Broadwater County Reporter (Townsend), Bozeman Chronicle, and Helena Independent Record. The Environmental Assessment was also posted on the FWP webpage: <http://fwp.mt.gov/publicnotices/>.

Two individuals submitted comments on the proposed project. One individual, speaking on behalf of the Broadwater Rod & Gun Club, was in support of the project. The second individual felt that it was a worthwhile project except for the creation of the pheasant brood strip. He felt that MFWP should not be enhancing habitat for the benefit of a non-native species (pheasant).

The following is the summary of the comment related to the creation of the pheasant brood strip, and FWP's response to the comment.

1. The pheasant brood strip supports a non-native bird. FWP should not be in the habit of supporting non-native species.

***MFWP's response:** While MFWP recognizes that pheasants are indeed a non-native bird, MFWP's primary upland game bird objectives on the CFWMA are to improve seasonal habitat for upland birds (primarily pheasants) to increase production, recruitment and annual survival and to improve upland game bird hunting opportunities. Construction of the pheasant brood strip would work towards achieving that objective by promoting insect production. Insects provide a valuable protein source for young growing chicks.*

Decision

It is my decision, based on the Environmental Assessment and public comment, to approve the proposed action of constructing two small water impoundments and creating a pheasant brood strip on the CFWMA. The proposed actions will work toward MFWP meeting its objectives of

improving habitat conditions on the CFWMA for waterfowl, upland game birds and other wildlife species. The analysis did not reveal any significant impacts to the human or physical environment as a result of the project. I therefore conclude that the Environmental Assessment is the appropriate level of analysis, and that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.



Sam B. Sheppard
Region 3 Supervisor
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

7/25/2016

Date