

January 11, 2013
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
Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
Deer Lodge Valley Conservation District, 1002 Hollenback Road, Suite C, Deer Lodge, MT 59722
MT Environmental Information Center
Montana Audubon Council
Montana Wildlife Federation
Wayne Hadley, 1016 Eastside Road, Deer Lodge, MT 59722
Montana River Action, 304 N 18th Ave., Bozeman, MT 59715
U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Helena
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Helena
State Historic Preservation Office, Helena
Clark Fork Coalition, P.O. Box 7593, Missoula, MT 59807
Lampert Ranch, 12204 Eastside Road, Anaconda, MT 59711

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Please find enclosed an Environmental Assessment (EA) prepared for the Future Fisheries Improvement Program. The Program tentatively plans to provide funding to secure a 2-year diversion reduction agreement on the Beckstead ditch located on Lost Creek, a tributary to the Clark Fork River. The Beckstead Ditch commonly dewateres Lost Creek for one or two months during the late summer, severing connectivity with the Clark Fork River and degrading the last mile of stream habitat. The agreement would involve the water user foregoing irrigation after July 5 by shutting down the head gate for the next 2 years. In exchange, the water user would receive a payment for foregone production from their 160 acres of irrigated pasture. The intent of the project is to add up to 3.85 cubic feet per second (the entire user's water right) to in-stream flow in lower Lost Creek. The project is a tentative precursor to a long-term water lease with the water user. The project is located on the Lampert Ranch approximately one mile south of the community of Galen in Deer Lodge County.

Please submit any comments that you have by 5:00 P.M., February 15, 2013 to Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks at the address listed above. The 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 Section
Fisheries Bureau
e-mail: mlere@mt.gov

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
Fisheries Division
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Lost Creek In-stream Flow Enhancement Project

General Purpose: The 1995 Montana Legislature enacted sections 87-1-272 through 273, MCA that directs the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) 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 funding to secure a 2-year diversion reduction agreement between the Lampert Ranch and the Clark Fork Coalition to enhance in-stream flow in lower Lost Creek, a tributary to the Clark Fork River. The agreement would involve the water user foregoing late summer irrigation by shutting down the head gate after July 5 for the next 2 years. The expectation is that this agreement would act as a pilot project that would lead to a long-term in-stream flow lease. Lower Lost Creek is commonly dewatered downstream of the Beckstead ditch during the late summer, essentially severing migratory connectivity to the Clark Fork River.

I. Location of Project: This project would involve shutting down the Beckstead ditch located on Lost Creek. The ditch head gate is located on the Lampert Ranch approximately one mile south of the community of Galen in Township 5 North, Range 9 West, Section 6 in Deer Lodge County (Attachment 1).

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.

Lost Creek is a tributary to the Clark Fork River that primarily supports brown trout in its lower reaches. The lower one mile of the stream is commonly dewatered during the irrigation season, with the Beckstead Ditch diverting all of the water before it reaches the river. This dewatering severs migratory connectivity to the Clark Fork River, elevates water temperatures and degrades habitat within the lower one mile reach of the stream. This proposed 2-year water reduction agreement would provide up to 3.85 cubic feet per second (cfs) in in-stream flow to the lower mile of Lost Creek during the late summer irrigation season.

III. Scope of the Project:

This project would secure a 2-year diversion reduction agreement between the Lampert Ranch and the Clark Fork Coalition to enhance in-stream flow in lower Lost Creek. The agreement would involve shutting down the Beckstead Ditch from July 5 to the end of the irrigation season. In exchange, the Lampert Ranch would receive a \$3,000 per year payment for foregone production on its 160 acre irrigated pasture. No other active diversions exist downstream of the Beckstead Ditch on Lost Creek, which tends to be a gaining stream in its lower reach. Shutting down the headgate would provide up 3.85 cfs (the entire Lampert Ranch water right) for in-stream flow in lower Lost Creek. The Lampert Ranch water right is the only active water right on the Beckstead ditch. The other water rights on the ditch are in-active and have not been used for a half century or more. Records from a USGS gage, located about 400 yards upstream of the Beckstead headgate, show water is available throughout the summer in most years. The data indicate that the Lampert water right can be served during most years, despite substantial over appropriation of water in upstream reaches of Lost Creek. The expectation is that this agreement would act

as a pilot project that would lead to a long-term in-stream flow lease. The Lampert Ranch has signed a letter of intent with the Clark Fork Coalition to pursue a long term lease of the Beckstead water right. The Future Fisheries Improvement Program would fund the total \$6,000 cost for the two-year payment associated with the flow reduction agreement. The Clark Fork Coalition would monitor the diversion on the Beckstead Ditch and monitor monthly flows in the canal and in the stream during the period of the agreement. Additionally, the Clark Fork Coalition would work with the Lampert Ranch to pursue a long term water lease through a change process with the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation. The total in-kind contribution being provided by the Clark Fork Coalition is estimated to be \$10,050.

IV. Environmental Impact Checklist:

Please see attached checklist.

V. Explanation of Impacts to the Physical Environment

1. Terrestrial and aquatic life habitats.

Enhancing in-stream flow in the lower one mile of Lost Creek during the irrigation season would restore migratory connectivity with the Clark Fork River, help reduce elevated summer water temperatures and improve overall aquatic habitat. Enhancing stream flow in lower Lost Creek is expected primarily to benefit brown trout.

2. Water quantity, quality and distribution.

No changes in drainage pattern or natural surface run-off would occur in Lost Creek as a result of the proposed project. However, in-stream flow would increase up to 3.85 cfs in the lower 1 mile of the stream during the summer irrigation season.

VI. Explanation of Impacts on the Human Environment.

4. Agricultural or industrial production.

A reduction in irrigation rates as a result of the agreement would be expected to correspondingly reduce production on 160 acres of pasture. This potential reduction is not quantifiable, however, due to variations in water availability, annual precipitation and overall growing conditions.

7. Access to & quality of recreational activities.

It is anticipated that maintaining in-stream flow in lower Lost Creek would support additional recruitment of fish to the upper Clark Fork River, which currently provides for a limited recreational fishery.

13. Locally adopted environmental plans & goals.

The Aquatic Resources Restoration Plan developed through the Natural Resource Damage Program of the Montana Department of Justice rated Lost Creek as a Tier 2 priority stream for fisheries restoration in the upper Clark Fork River drainage, with flow augmentation identified as the highest restoration priority. This project helps meet the goals of the plan.

VII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

1. No Action Alternative

If no funding is provided through the Future Fisheries Improvement Program, the applicant either would need to seek out other sources of funding to complete the project or the lower reach of Lost Creek would remain chronically dewatered during the irrigation season. The potential for undertaking a long term water lease for in-stream flow purposes with the Lampert Ranch likely would be diminished.

2. The Proposed Alternative

The proposed alternative intends to provide funding through the Future Fisheries Improvement Program to secure a 2-year water diversion reduction agreement on the Beckstead Ditch. Flow in the lower one mile of Lost Creek would be enhanced for a 2-year period during the irrigation season. This additional flow is expected to benefit brown trout. The project is expected to be a precursor to a longer term water lease with the Lampert Ranch.

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 February 15, 2013.

4. Person responsible for preparing the EA.

Mark Lere, Program Officer
Habitat Section
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Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
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Helena, MT 59620
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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: Lost Creek In-stream Flow Enhancement Project
 Division/Bureau: Fisheries Bureau -Future Fisheries Improvement
 Description of Project: The Future Fisheries Improvement Program tentatively plans to provide funding to secure a 2-year diversion reduction agreement between the Lampert Ranch and the Clark Fork Coalition. The agreement would involve the water user foregoing late summer irrigation diversion from the Beckstead Ditch by shutting down the headgate from July 5 through the end of the irrigation season, leaving the water for in-stream flow. The intent of the project is to restore migratory connectivity to the Clark Fork River, reduce elevated summer water temperatures and improve the overall aquatic habitat in Lost Creek. The project site is located about one mile south of the community of Galen in Deer Lodge 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		
4. Vegetation cover, quantity & quality				X		
5. Aesthetics				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		

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			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			X
14. Transportation networks & traffic flows				X		

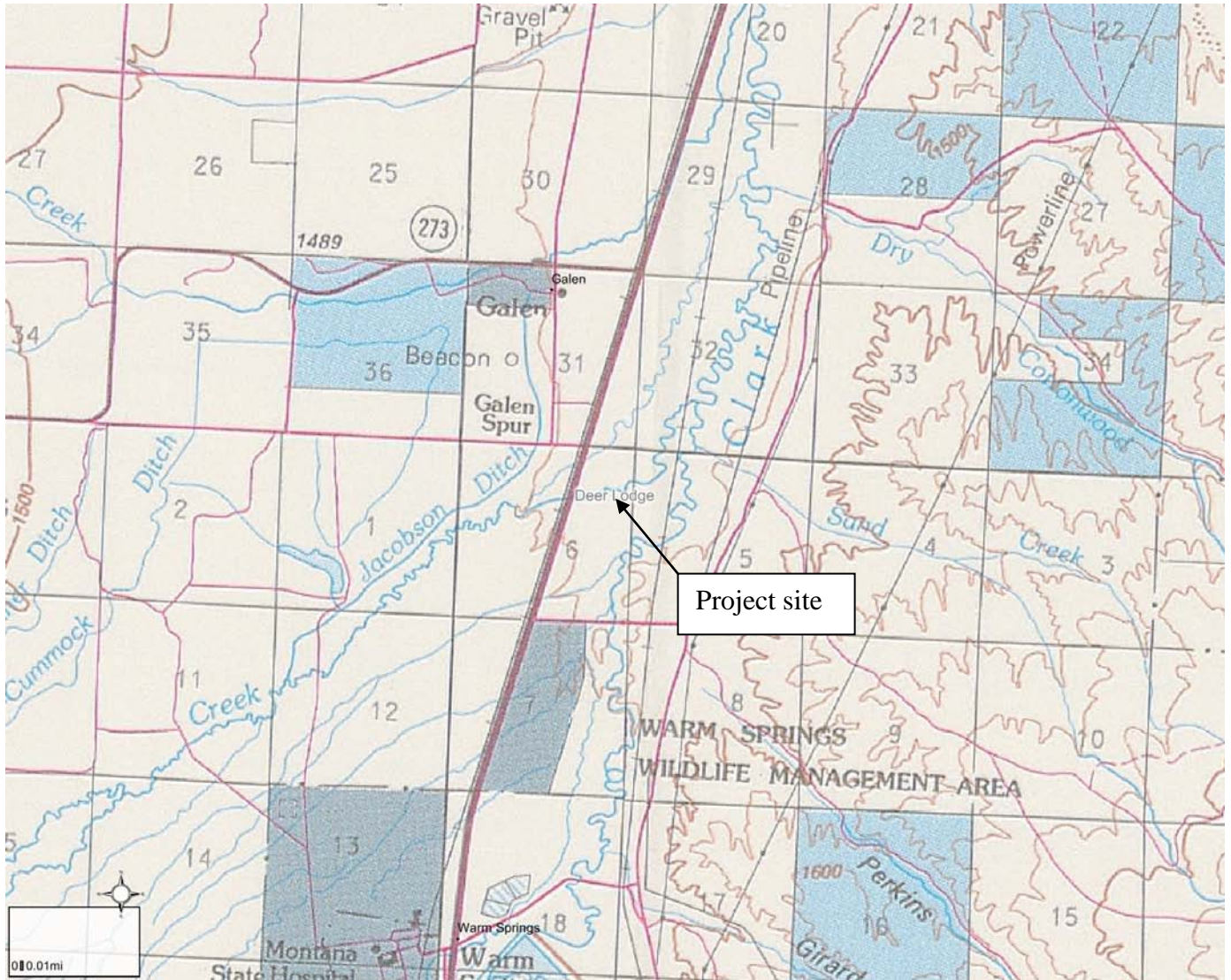
Other groups or agencies contacted or which may have overlapping jurisdiction None

Individuals or groups contributing to this EA Will McDowell, Clark Fork Coalition

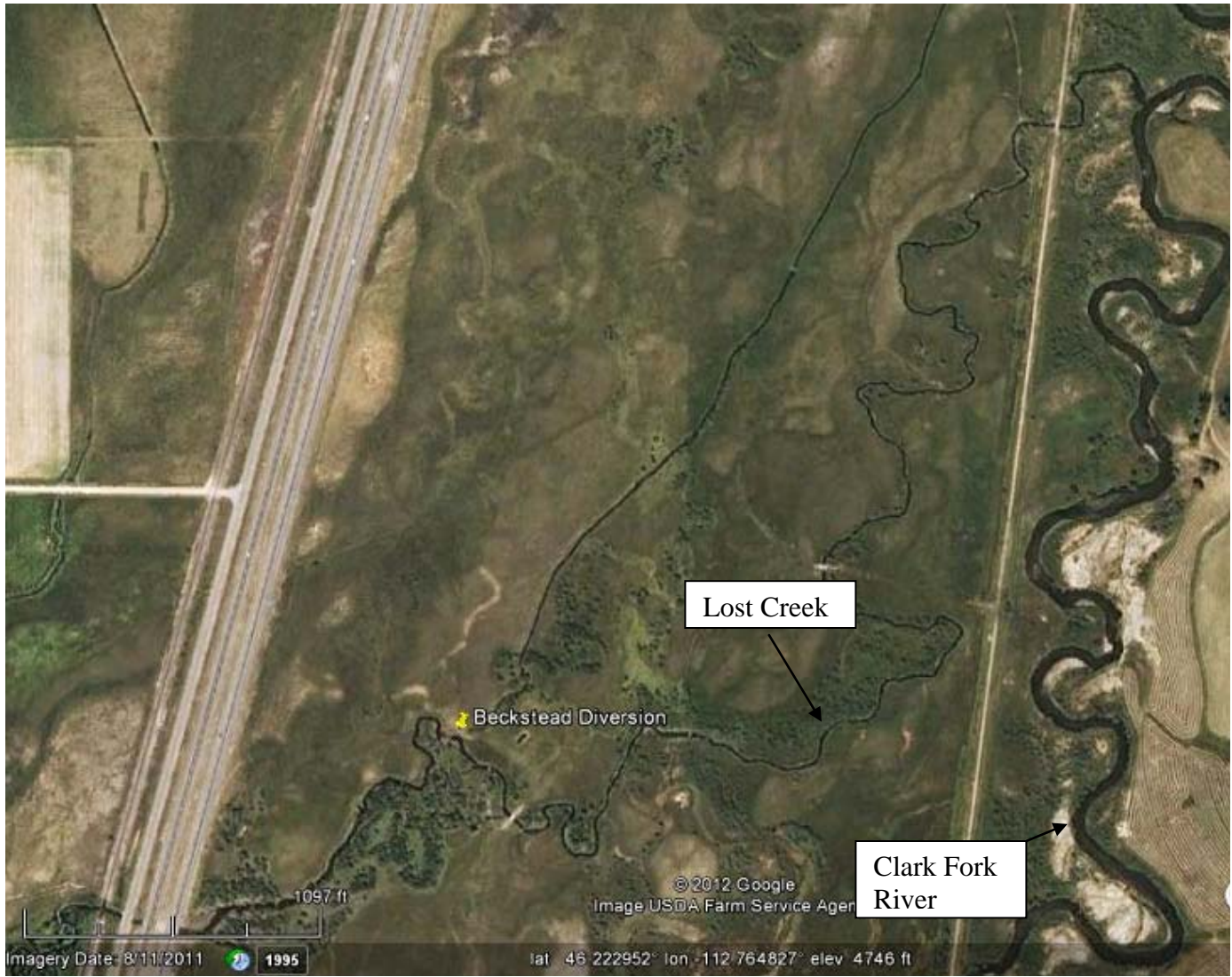
Recommendation concerning preparation of EIS No EIS required.

EA prepared by: Mark Lere

Date: January 9, 2013



ATTACHMENT 1



ATTACHMENT 2.