



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

**Region 1
490 N. Meridian Road
Kalispell, MT 59901**

DECISION NOTICE

For

Kootenai Falls Wildlife Management Area Riparian Planting Environmental Assessment

September 12, 2013

Description of the Proposed Action:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposed riparian habitat restoration work along the Kootenai River bank within the Kootenai Falls Wildlife Management Area (WMA). The work would consist of establishing native shrubs and black cottonwood trees along the Kootenai River above the low water mark and extending along the bank below the existing access road. A narrow band of native shrubs and trees would be planted using an approximate 4-foot interval between shrubs with a 6-foot interval for trees. Along with the cottonwood trees, two species of willow and red osier dogwood would be used. Approximately 600 black cottonwood, 4000 willow, and 2500 dogwood plants or cuttings were proposed for planting on approximately 5 to 10 acres.

Public Review and Comment:

Montana FWP is required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) to consider all potential impacts of the proposed project on the human and physical environment, and to consider public input before making any decision on projects that may affect the human environment. FWP prepared an environmental assessment checklist (EA) and asked for public review over a 14-day period, from March 25 through April 8, 2013. The EA was advertised through media releases and legal notices in local newspapers including the Western News and Montananian. The draft was available in local libraries and notices of the availability were sent to local elected officials, sporting groups, government agencies, and the State Historic Preservation Office. Copies of the EA were distributed to interested individuals via email. The EA was also available from the Kalispell FWP office, as well as the FWP web site. FWP also met with the Libby Rod and Gun Club to explain the project and answer questions. We also participated in a consultation meeting with a member of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) to discuss their cultural resource concerns.

FWP received three responses to this proposal:

- One written response was generally in favor of the planting proposal but was concerned with plant seed source. They requested that the plants to be used (both shrubs and trees) should be grown locally from seeds collected locally.
- Verbal comments from the Libby Rod and Gun Club were positive and in favor of the project. Most comments were suggestions on planting methodology and offers of volunteer help.

- The consultation meeting with CSKT raised significant cultural issues. Subsequent discussions and reviews indicated potential conflicts between proposed riparian planting and cultural resources.

Response to Issues and Concerns:

1. Plant seed source. We looked for available rooted stock and inquired as to the source of the seed. We found plants available at the CSKT nursery, which were established from seeds generally collected within or surrounding the Flathead Basin. The most distant seed source was from the Deer Lodge Valley.

2. Potential impact to cultural resources. CSKT raised significant concerns over potential impacts of our proposal to cultural resources in the general area. We discussed several proposals to minimize those potential impacts, but could come up with no methods that could satisfy their concerns. Conducting this project would require intensive cultural surveys and monitoring of project activities, with no guarantee that even that could avoid potential adverse impacts.

MFWP Recommended Alternative and Final Decision

Our decision for this proposal is to select the No Action Alternative and **not to continue as proposed**. While the riparian planting would result in improved habitats and restore historic conditions, the effect on cultural issues was uncertain. Identification and protection of the cultural resources are extremely important and would have been costly to implement in order to improve riparian plant communities. The No Action Alternative would avoid all potential impacts to cultural resources and would only delay, not preclude, development of more natural and diverse riparian communities.

The draft EA together with this decision notice will constitute the final EA. It can be viewed at or obtained from Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Region One, 490 N. Meridian Road, Kalispell, MT 59901. The final document will be available on the Montana FWP website at fwp.mt.gov. Contact person: FWP Wildlife Biologist Dwight Bergeron, (406) 751-4587 or e-mail to dbergeron@mt.gov.



James R. Satterfield Jr., Ph.D.
Regional Supervisor

September 13, 2013

Date