MT Dept of Natural Resources and Conservation State Water Projects 1424 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue P.O. Box 201601 Helena, MT 59620-1601 Attn: James P. Domino

May 14, 2014

## Mr. Domino:

I am writing to comment on the Draft Environmental Assessment prepared for the Deadman's Basin Supply Canal Diversion and Headgate Replacement Project (hereinafter referred to as Project). A family emergency has made me a bit tardy with these comments, and I would greatly appreciate any consideration if at all possible.

The upper Musselshell River is widely recognized by anglers and biologists for its world-class brown trout fishery, despite its small size and prairie-style looking habitat. River recreationists, myself included, travel hundreds of miles every year to enjoy this hidden gem that has held on despite being ravaged by flood and drought periods caused by Mother Nature and senseless man-caused dewatering.

While the Project purports to remedy the dewatering, I have some concerns that didn't seem to be addressed in the EA.

- 1. Grade of fish passage outlet. I am concerned that the grade of the fish passage outlet might be too steep to accommodate the passage of all age-class appropriate fish during the times that passage is most critical.
- 2. Fish passage during flow extremes. As you are well aware, the Musselshell naturally can range from near single digits cfs to a raging nightmare. The details of the proposed fish passage is such that its difficult to tell if fish passage will be adequately provided during those extremes.
- 3. Details of enhanced fish passage. Along the lines of the above, the EA states that fish passage will be enhanced, but I could find no details that elaborate how this is, or can be, accomplished.

Should fish passage indeed be enhanced, and water managed more efficiently, the Project has the potential to extend the brown trout fishery well beyond the diversion. As evidenced this year, brown trout were captured beyond the diversion, which suggests that better water management practices could extend the range of the cold water fishery, which could greatly benefit the recreation in that area.

Lastly, I am embarrassed that cold water recreation enthusiasts have not been more involved in conservation efforts in the area. Our FWP biologists do a super-human job in protecting our precious resources, but I fear they are stretched thin and their voices are not being heard as often as they should. Having said that, I will volunteer to attend the appropriate State Water Project meetings, and further, organize a grasssroots effort to provide a voice for those folks that are either not aware of the procedures in play, or don't have the time to be involved.

Thank you for your consideration, and please don't hesitate to contact me any time.

Doug Haacke Chair, Montana Trout Unlimited Billings, MT

dhaacke@gmail.com (406) 855-6357