July 15, 2014
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
    Native Species Coordinator, Fisheries
    Bozeman Office
Montana State Library, Helena
MT Environmental Information Center
Montana Audubon Council
Montana Wildlife Federation, P.O. Box 1175, Helena, MT 59624
Beaverhead Conservation District, 420 Barrett Street, Dillon, MT 59725
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Helena
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Helena
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 420 Barrett St., Dillon, MT 59725
State Historic Preservation Office, Helena
Daniel Dennis, 12110 SW King Arthur Street, King City, OR 97224

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Please find enclosed an Environmental Assessment (EA) prepared for the Future Fisheries Improvement Program (FFIP). The Program tentatively plans to provide partial funding toward a stream channel restoration project located on an altered reach of Bean Creek, a tributary to the Red Rock River. This proposed project is located approximately 10 miles west of the community of Lakeview in Beaverhead County.

Please submit any comments that you have by 5:00 P.M., August 18, 2014 to Montana of Fish, Wildlife & Parks at the address listed above. Funding for this project through the FFIP is contingent upon approval being granted by the Fish and Wildlife 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,

Michelle McGree, Program Officer
Habitat Bureau
Fisheries Division
e-mail: mmcgree@mt.gov

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
Fisheries Division
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Bean Creek Channel Restoration

General Purpose: The 1995 Montana Legislature enacted sections 87-1-272 through 273, MCA that direct Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) to administer a Future Fisheries Improvement Program (FFIP). 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. Additionally, the 1999 Montana Legislature amended statute sections 87-1-273, 15-38-202 and Section 5, Chapter 463, Laws of 1995 to create a bull trout and cutthroat trout enhancement program. This legislation was amended again in 2013 to open the program to all native fish species (statute section 87-1-283). The program now calls for the enhancement of native fish through habitat restoration, natural reproduction and reductions in species competition by way of the FFIP.

The FFIP is proposing to provide partial funding for a project calling for the restoration of an 800-foot channelized and overgrazed reach of Bean Creek, a tributary to the Red Rock River. The straightened, shallow and over-widened channel would be restored to a proper dimension, pattern and profile by re-activating numerous historical meanders, creating scour pools and planting riparian vegetation. The intent of this project is to improve overall aquatic habitat in a short reach of Bean Creek and enhance a resident population of genetically pure westslope cutthroat trout.

I. Location of Project:

This project will be conducted on Bean Creek, a tributary to the Red Rock River, located approximately ten miles west of the community of Lakeview within Township 14 South, Range 4 West, Section 25 in Beaverhead County (Attachment 1). The project site is located approximately ten miles west of the community of Lakeview in Beaverhead County on property owned by Daniel Dennis.

II. Need for the Project:

One goal within FWP's six-year operations plan for the fisheries program is to "protect, maintain, and restore native fish populations, their habitats, life cycles, and genetic diversity to ensure stewardship of native species." Bean Creek supports a population of genetically pure westslope cutthroat trout, a Species of Concern in Montana. Historically, an 800-foot section of Bean Creek was straightened and overgrazed, resulting in a shallow and over-widened channel that provides poor fish habitat. Restoring healthy aquatic habitat in this short reach of Bean Creek would enhance overall habitat for a resident westslope cutthroat trout population.

III. Scope of the Project:

The project proposes to restore an 800-foot channelized reach of Bean Creek by re-activating numerous historical meanders, creating approximately 30 pools, and planting vegetation within the riparian

corridor (Attachments 2 and 3). Additionally, approximately 0.5 miles of riparian fencing with two water gaps would be installed to protect the riparian area from grazing by livestock. An undersized culvert would be relocated and replaced to increase capacity and reduce ice flows in winter months. A headgate would be installed at the upstream end of the relocated culvert crossing to allow for management of diverted flow. All restoration materials would be gathered onsite, including cobble and sedge mats within the project area and willow sprigs collected from the Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge. All work is proposed to take place in late summer or early fall 2014 to avoid the cutthroat spawning period. This project is expected to cost $109,980. Of this total, the FFIP would be contributing up to $14,945 to complete the project.

Contributor	In-kind services	In-kind cash
Bureau of Land Management	66,304	
The Nature Conservancy	15,000	
USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program	12,656	
Confluence Consulting	1,075	

IV. Environmental Impact Checklist:

Please see attached checklist.

V. Explanation of Impacts to the Physical Environment

1. Terrestrial and aquatic life and habitats.

Replacing the undersized culvert and returning the existing straightened channel to a proper dimension, pattern and profile is expected to create healthier habitat for aquatic life by lengthening the channel and by creating greater environmental complexity. Expected improvements in the aquatic habitat should enhance the resident fisheries in Bean Creek. Habitat for riparian dependent wildlife also would be improved by restoring the riparian vegetative community by planting riparian shrubs and by protecting the corridor with fencing to exclude livestock.

2. Water quantity, quality and distribution.

Short-term increases in turbidity will occur during project construction. To minimize turbidity, construction of the new channel will occur when the stream is flowing at a base level. Operation of equipment in the active stream channel would be minimized to the extent practicable. The Department of Environmental Quality will be contacted to determine narrative conditions required to meet short-term water quality standards and protect aquatic biota (318 authorization). A 310 permit will be obtained from the local Conservation District, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will be contacted for requirements needed to meet the federal Clean Water Act (404 permit). In the long term, restoring the existing channel would reduce sediment and nutrient contributions to downstream areas, thereby improving the overall quality of downstream waters.

3. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture.

Soils along the stream margin would be disturbed during construction of the new channel, but stabilized with re-vegetation efforts. Overall, the project is expected to improve channel stability by replacing the culvert and returning the stream to a natural dimension, pattern, and profile.

4. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality.

Riparian vegetation would be disturbed during the period of construction. Proposed re-vegetation efforts, however, in conjunction with implementing a livestock grazing exclosure, would result in a significant overall improvement to the riparian vegetative community.

5. Aesthetics.

During the period of construction, aesthetics would be adversely impacted due to on-site construction activities, including ground disturbance and the presence of heavy equipment. In the long term, aesthetics would be enhanced by restoring a straightened reach of Bean Creek to a healthier and more natural stream environment. Additionally, the riparian vegetative community would be enhanced by riparian plantings and by fencing the riparian corridor to exclude livestock.

7. Unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources.

The upper reaches of Bean Creek support a genetically pure population of westslope cutthroat trout, classified as a Species of Concern in Montana. Restoration of an 800-foot straightened reach of the stream would augment the usable habitat for this resident population of cutthroat trout.

9. Historical and archaeological sites

The proposed project likely will require an individual Army Corps of Engineers 404 permit. Therefore, the State Historic Preservation Office will be contacted to determine the need for compliance with the federal historic preservation regulations. The project will not begin until a cultural clearance is granted.

VI. Explanation of Impacts on the Human Environment.

14. Transportation networks and traffic flows.

Restoration of the stream channel and the replacement of the culvert and diversion structures are expected to reduce the frequency of ice build-up at the established county road crossing during the cold winter months.

VII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

1. No Action Alternative

If no action is taken, this short reach of Bean Creek will remain straightened and will continue to provide poor aquatic habitat for a genetically pure population of westslope cutthroat trout. An undersized and improperly placed culvert will continue to degrade the channel and promote ice jams. Additionally, habitat for riparian-dependent wildlife will remain in a degraded condition.

2. The Proposed Alternative

The proposed alternative is designed to restore a straightened reach of Bean Creek, providing for more diverse aquatic habitat. This alternative would lengthen the existing channel and is expected to augment habitat for a resident population of genetically pure westslope cutthroat trout. The proposed alternative also would improve the vegetation within the riparian corridor. An undersized culvert would be replaced, discontinuing channel degradation and reducing the likelihood of ice jams. This alternative would improve fish and wildlife habitat, aesthetics and water quality within the project area.

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, and will therefore not require the extensive analysis associated with an EIS.

2. Level of public involvement.

The project application to the FFIP has been posted on the FWP webpage for public comment. No comments have been received to date. The proposed project was reviewed and supported by the public review panel of the FFIP. The proposed project also will be reviewed by the Fish and Wildlife Commission, and funding will be contingent upon their approval. The EA is being distributed to all individuals and groups listed on the cover letter and will be published on the FWP webpage: **www.fwp.mt.gov**

3. Duration of comment period?

Public comment will be accepted through 5:00 PM on August 18, 2014.

4. Person responsible for preparing the EA.

Michelle McGree, Program Officer
Habitat Bureau
Fisheries Division

Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks
1420 East 6th Avenue
PO Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620
Telephone: (406) 444-2432
e-mail: mmcgree@.mt.gov

MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF FISH, WILDLIFE AND PARKS
1420 E 6th Ave, PO BOX 200701, Helena, MT 59620-0701
(406) 444-2432

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Title Bean Creek Channel Restoration

Division/Bureau Fisheries Division / Habitat Bureau (FFIP)
Description of Project The FFIP is proposing to provide partial funding for a project calling for the restoration of a straightened reach of Bean Creek, a tributary to the Red Rock River, by re-activating numerous historical meanders. The intent is to restore proper channel function and improve aquatic habitat for a resident population of genetically pure westslope cutthroat trout. The project site is located on two ranch properties approximately 10 miles west of the community of Lakeview in Beaverhead County.

POTENTIAL IMPACTS TO THE 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			X
4. Vegetation cover, quantity & quality			X			X
5. Aesthetics			X			X
6. Air quality				X		
7. Unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources			X			X
8. Demands on environmental resources of land, water, air & energy				X		
9. Historical & archaeological sites				X		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		
5. Human health				X		
6. Quantity & distribution of community & personal income				X		
7. Access to & quality of recreational and wilderness activities				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		
14. Transportation networks & traffic flows			X			X

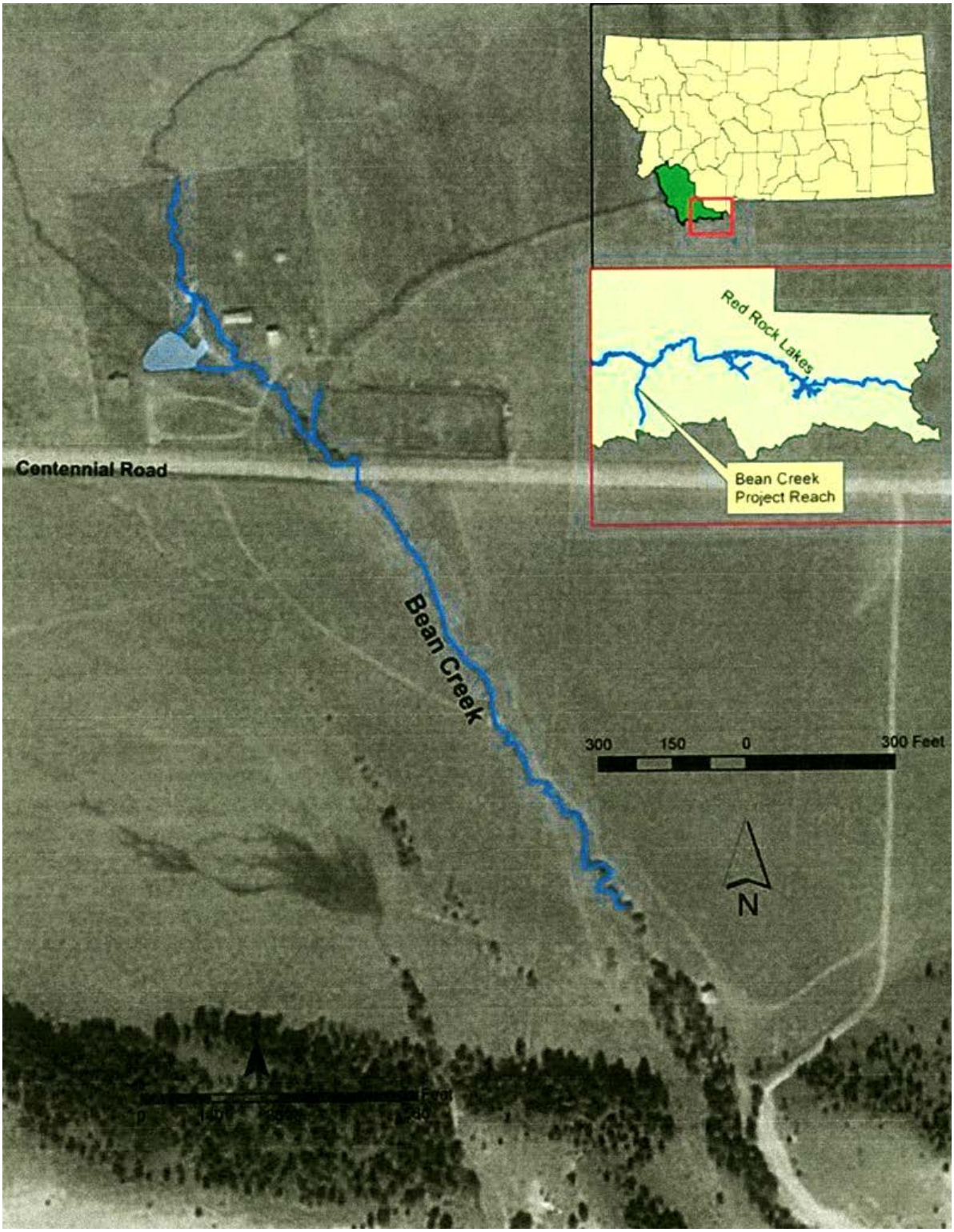
Other groups or agencies contacted or which may have overlapping jurisdiction: Beaverhead Conservation District, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Army Corps of Engineers, Montana Department of Environmental Quality, State Historic Preservation Office

Individuals or groups contributing to this EA: Jim Magee, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Confluence Consulting, Inc.

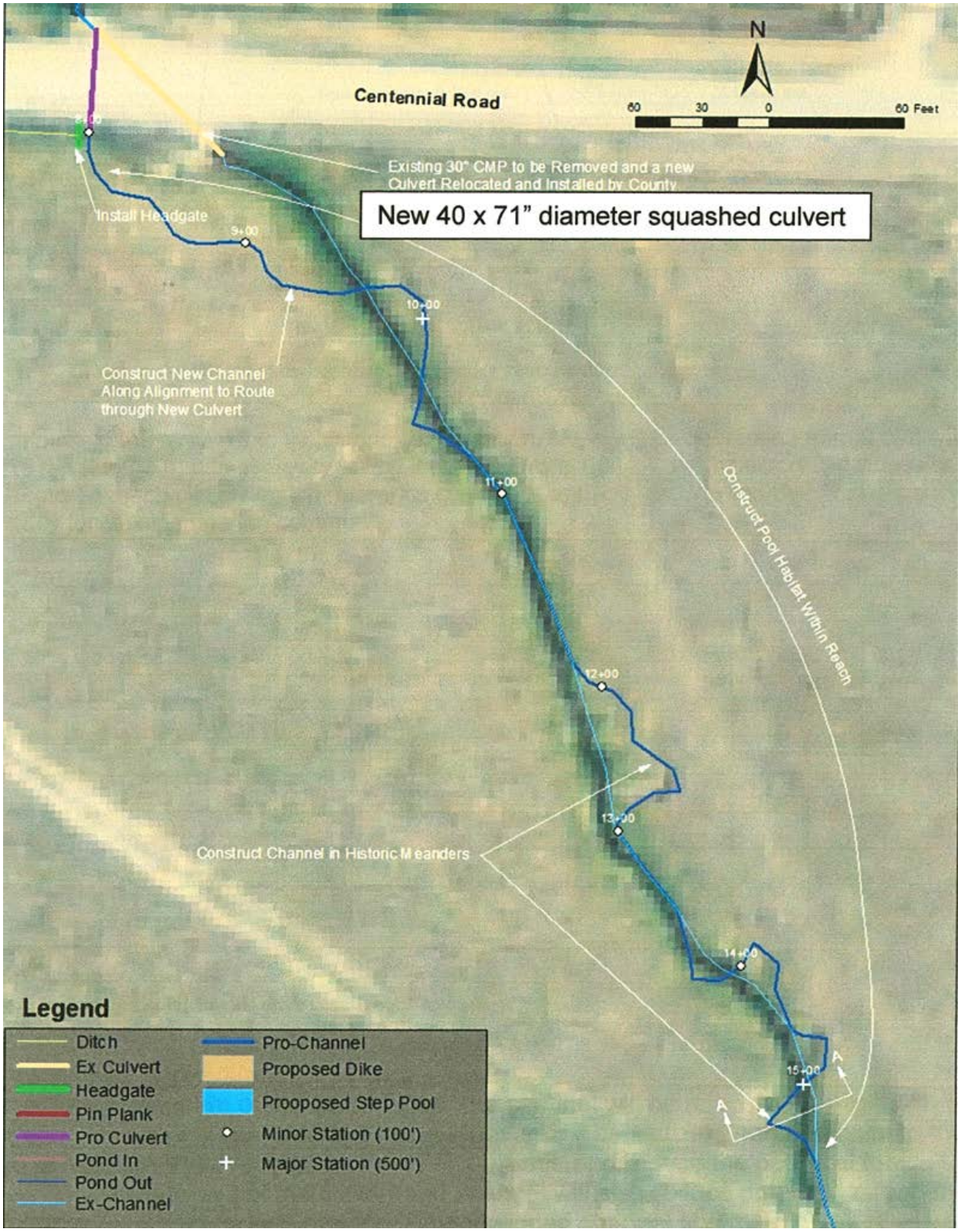
Recommendation concerning preparation of EIS No EIS required.

EA prepared by: Michelle McGree

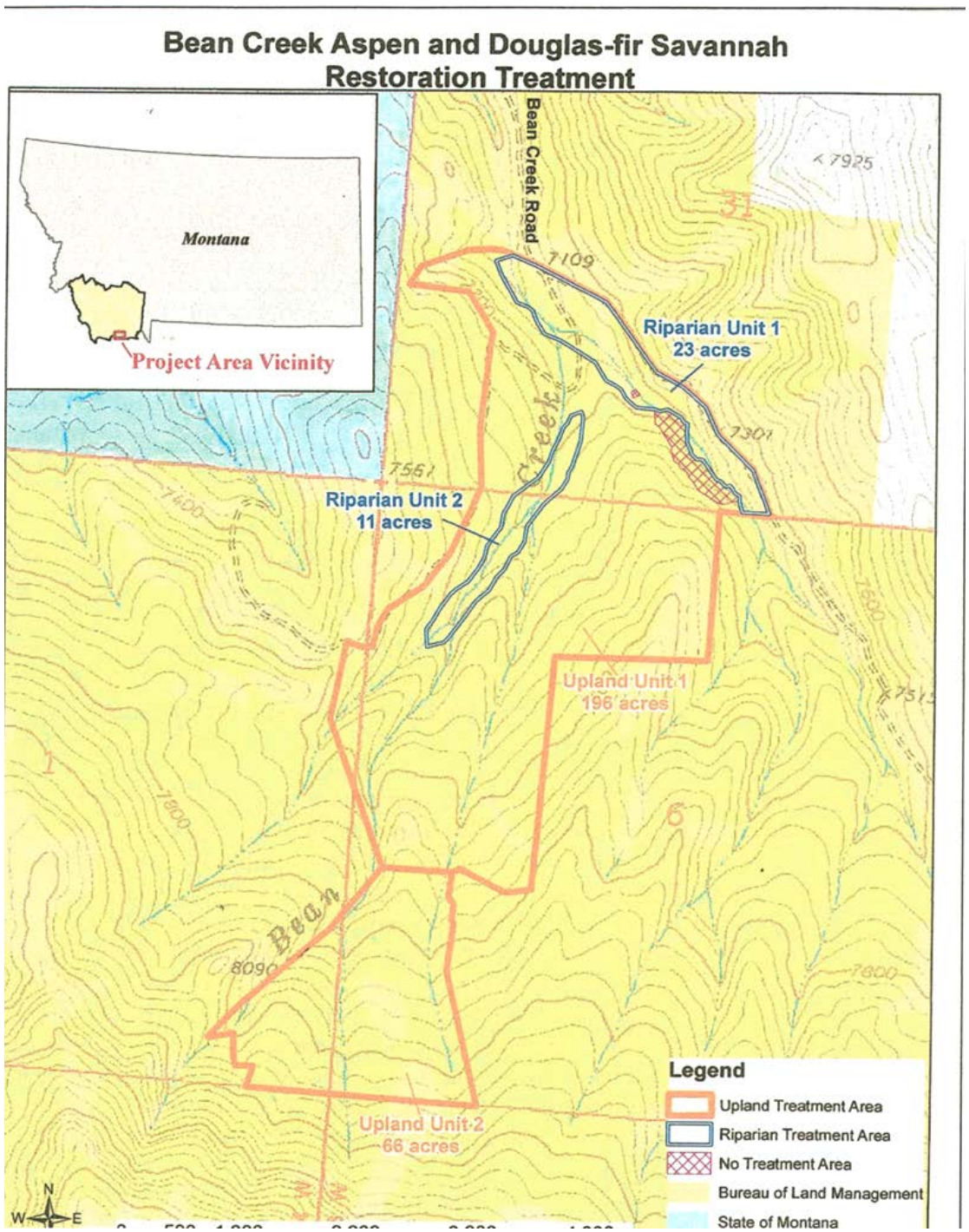
Date: July 15, 2014



ATTACHMENT 1



ATTACHMENT 2



ATTACHMENT 3