

July 24, 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
Great Falls Office
Montana State Library, Helena
MT Environmental Information Center
Montana Audubon Council
Montana Wildlife Federation, P.O. Box 1175, Helena, MT 59624
Lewis & Clark Conservation District, 790 Colleen Street, Helena, MT 59601
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Helena
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Helena
State Historic Preservation Office, Helena
Robert and Susan Hundley, 154 Brushwood Drive, Loveland OH 45140

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 fencing and irrigation improvement on Tenmile Creek near Helena.

Please submit any comments that you have by 5:00 P.M., August 25, 2014 to Montana 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
Tenmile Creek Bank Stabilization and Fencing

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 to fence approximately 4,200 feet of Tenmile Creek and install livestock water gaps at appropriate locations. Additional funding from other sources has been secured to convert the adjacent land parcel from flood irrigation to an electric pump and wheel lines, which will allow efficient delivery of water and preserve Tenmile Creek streamflows. Expected outcomes from the overall project include efficient water delivery to pasture lands, promotion of riparian vegetation growth by excluding livestock, and providing a water source for livestock through water gaps.

I. Location of Project:

This project will be on Tenmile Creek, a tributary to the Missouri River, located approximately 2 miles west of Helena, T 10N, R 4W, Sections 31 and 32 (Attachment 1). The property is owned by the Grunenfelder Family Partnership LLP.

II. Need for the Project:

This reach of Tenmile Creek supports rainbow, brown, and Eastern brook trout. Riparian vegetation has been heavily impacted by livestock grazing, which has denuded many of the stream banks leading to habitat degradation and erosion. Water diverted for flood irrigation dewatered the stream during low streamflow periods, and an irrigation diversion dam impeded fish passage (the dam was destroyed during high flows in 2011). Excluding livestock via fencing is expected to promote stream bank vegetation, which in turn will provide cover and fish habitat and also reduce stream bank erosion. Converting from flood to wheel-line irrigation is expected to improve efficiency of water use and result in reduced water withdrawal from Tenmile Creek and improved fish passage.

III. Scope of the Project:

This proposal is to use FFIP funding to construct fencing and water gaps on approximately 4,200 feet of

Tenmile Creek to exclude livestock and promote riparian vegetation growth (Attachment 2). Approximately 5,350 feet of three-strand high-tensile electric fencing will be constructed to exclude livestock from both banks of Tenmile Creek (Attachment 3). Additionally, PPL Montana will provide funding to convert gravity-fed flood irrigation to wheel lines with water delivered via electric pump. A 15 hp electric pump will be used to pump water to approximately 1,320 feet of wheel line to irrigate the pasture north of the stream. The total project (fencing and irrigation) is expected to cost \$63,000, with FFIP contributing \$15,100.

Contributor	In-kind services	In-kind cash
PPL Montana		\$47,900
TOTAL = \$47,900		

IV. Environmental Impact Checklist:

Please see attached checklist.

V. Explanation of Impacts to the Physical Environment

1. Terrestrial and aquatic life and habitats.

Excluding livestock from the riparian corridor via fencing is expected to promote vegetation growth, which should improve fish and wildlife habitat by providing additional food and cover. Converting from flood irrigation to wheel lines should increase efficiency of water use and improve streamflows, which will improve abundance of aquatic life.

2. Water quantity, quality and distribution.

Short-term increases in turbidity will occur during construction of water gaps and when placing the electrical pump. Turbidity is not expected to exceed narrative conditions listed in the Short Term Water Quality Standard for Turbidity Related to Construction Activity (318 Authorization). All conditions from other relevant permits (i.e., SPA 310, COE 404) will be adhered to during construction to minimize impacts to water quality. Riparian fencing to exclude livestock is expected to improve water quality by reducing stream bank erosion and moderating water temperature by providing shade to the stream. Streamflow is expected to improve due to increased efficiency of the water distribution system.

3. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture.

Soils near the water gaps and pump site will be disturbed during construction, but will be stabilized with rock and vegetation following construction. Cumulatively, the project is expected to reduce erosion and improve stream bank stability when completed.

4. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality.

Little vegetation cover will be disturbed during construction activities. Fencing to exclude livestock is expected to promote growth of riparian vegetation throughout the stream reach.

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. Following construction, aesthetics would be improved through improved riparian vegetation growth.

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

This reach of stream supports primarily non-native brown trout, rainbow trout, and Eastern brook trout. Native fish species present include white sucker, longnose sucker, and mottled sculpin. Proposed work is expected to improve abundance of both native and non-native fish present in Tenmile Creek.

9. Historical and archaeological sites

No ground disturbing activities will occur until cultural clearance is granted through the State Historic Preservation Office.

VI. Explanation of Impacts on the Human Environment.

4. Agricultural or industrial production

Conversion from flood irrigation to wheel lines is expected to improve grassland hay production on the pasture on the north side of Tenmile Creek.

VII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

1. No Action Alternative

If no action is taken, livestock will not be excluded from this reach of Tenmile Creek, and growth of riparian vegetation would remain limited. Erosion of stream banks would continue at a relatively high rate. A large irrigation diversion, which would impede fish passage, would need to be reconstructed to continue flood irrigation. Tenmile Creek streamflows would diminish due to inefficient water use.

2. The Proposed Alternative

The proposed alternative is to construct a three-wire electric fence with water gaps to exclude livestock and promote growth of riparian vegetation, and install an electric pump and wheel lines

to replace a flood irrigation system. Improved growth of riparian vegetation is expected to improve fish habitat by providing cover and reducing the rate of stream bank erosion. Use of an electric pump and wheel lines should improve efficiency of water use, which in turn should improve streamflows in Tenmile Creek. An electric pump also eliminates the need to replace a large diversion dam that impedes fish passage.

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 25, 2014.

4. Person responsible for preparing the EA.

Michelle McGree, Program Officer
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Fisheries Division
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks
1420 East 6th Avenue
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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) 444-2432

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Title Tenmile Creek Bank Stabilization and Fencing

Division/Bureau Fisheries Division / Habitat Bureau (FFIP)

Description of Project The FFIP is proposing to provide partial funding for a project to fence approximately 4,200 feet of Tenmile Creek and install livestock water gaps at appropriate locations. Expected outcomes from the overall project include efficient water delivery to pasture lands, promotion of riparian vegetation growth by excluding livestock, and providing a water source for livestock through water gaps. The project site is located on Tenmile Creek, a tributary to the Missouri River, located approximately 2 miles west of Helena in Lewis and Clark County.

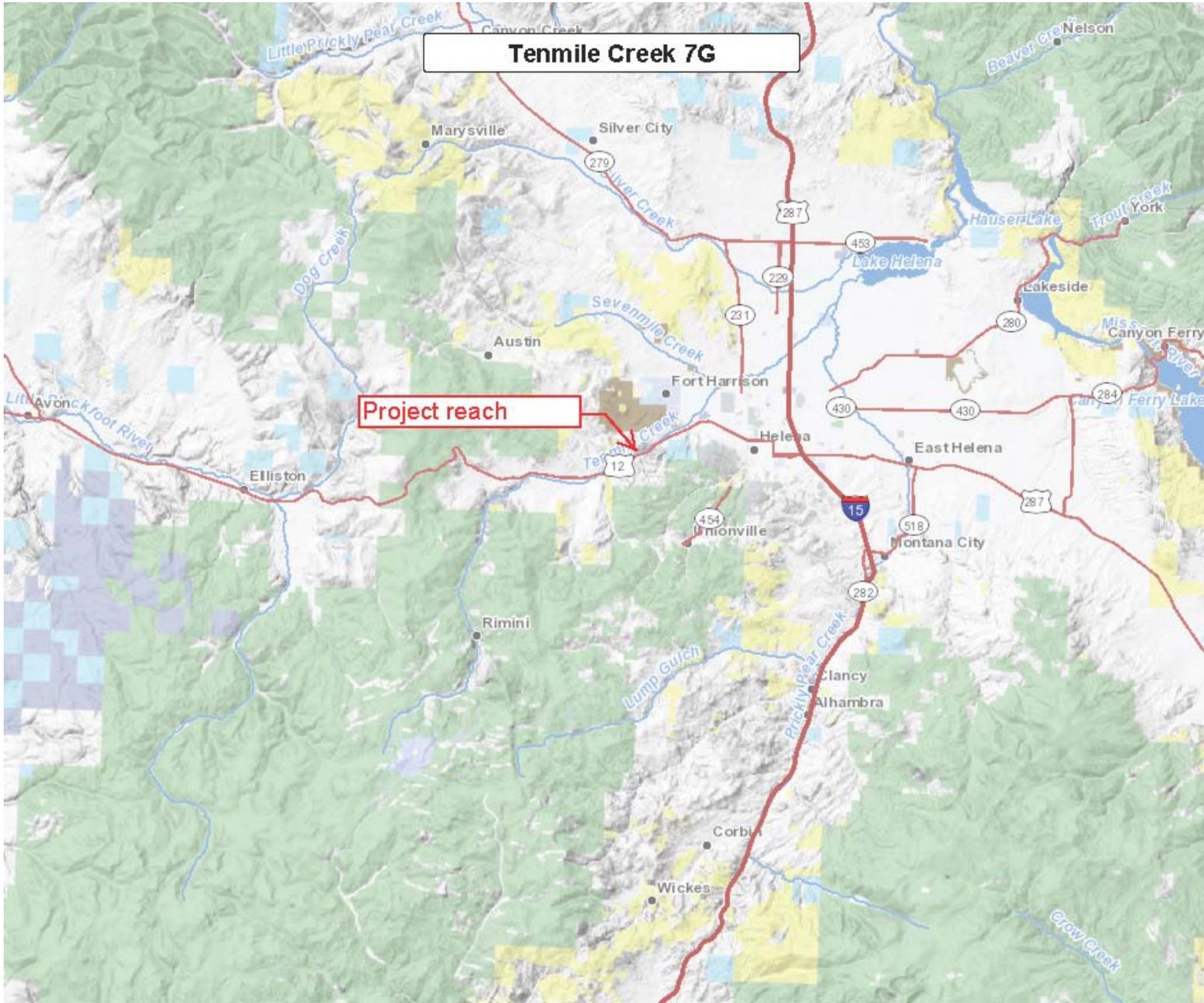
POTENTIAL IMPACTS TO THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

	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			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		

Other groups or agencies contacted or which may have overlapping jurisdiction: Lewis & Clark Conservation District, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, US Army Corps of Engineers, Montana Department of Environmental Quality, State Historic Preservation Office
 Individuals or groups contributing to this EA: Eric Roberts, FWP; Alan McNeal, McNeal Resources.
 Recommendation concerning preparation of EIS No EIS required.
 EA prepared by: Michelle McGree
 Date: July 24, 2014



ATTACHMENT 1



ATTACHMENT 2

Tenmile Creek 7G



ATTACHMENT 3