

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
Fisheries Division
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Stonewall Creek 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 streams 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 to a project to restore this section of Stonewall Creek by removing tailing piles, adding woody debris complexes to the stream, and restoring the adjacent floodplain and riparian area. The goals of this project include contributing to the recovery of westslope cutthroat trout by expanding suitable habitat and improving water quality on-site and downstream of the project.

I. Location of Project:

The project site is located on Stonewall Creek, a tributary to Keep Cool Creek, within Township 15 North, Range 9 West, Sections 22 and 27 in Lewis & Clark County (Attachment 1). It is located about 5 miles northwest of the town of Lincoln.

II. Need for the Project:

One goal within FWP's Statewide Fisheries Management Plan for the fisheries management program is to "protect, maintain, and restore native fish populations, their habitats, life cycles, and genetic diversity to ensure stewardship of native species and to ensure angling opportunities whenever possible." By implementing habitat restoration projects through the FFIP, this critical goal can be achieved. This project would restore a degraded stretch of Stonewall Creek, which should improve westslope cutthroat trout populations and provide significant habitat for their persistence.

III. Scope of the Project:

This project would restore a 4,300-foot section of Stonewall Creek by removing tailings piles, adding large woody debris complexes to mimic reference conditions, and restoring the adjacent floodplain to foster a fully functional, maintenance-free stream channel. The addition of large woody debris structures would enhance instream habitat complexity, provide cover and habitat diversity, and create mechanisms for energy dissipation and pool maintenance. The structures would be composed of native materials designed to mimic naturally occurring components of a

healthy, functioning stream channel and floodplain ecosystem. Floodplain treatments would include the use of swales, microtopography, coarse wood, planting, and seeding. They would include a variety of vegetation cover types and support plant community development over time.

The total estimated cost for this project is \$324,050. Of this total, the FFIP would be contributing up to \$41,000. The remaining funds will come from other sources and from in-kind services:

Contributor	In-kind services	In-kind cash
U.S. Forest Service	\$23,550	\$213,720
Big Blackfoot Chapter of Trout Unlimited	\$5,780	
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service North American Wetlands Conservation Act		\$40,000
TOTAL = \$283,050		

This project will obtain the proper permits for construction. A 310 permit (Montana Natural Streambed and Land Preservation Act) will be obtained from the local conservation district, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will be contacted for requirements to meet the federal Clean Water Act (404 permit).

IV. Environmental Impact Review Checklist:

Evaluation of the impacts of the Proposed Action including secondary and cumulative impacts on the Physical and Human Environment

Project Title: Stonewall Creek Restoration

Division/Bureau: Fisheries Division / Habitat Bureau (FFIP)

Description of Project: The FFIP tentatively plans to provide partial funding to a project intending to restore a section of Stonewall Creek by removing tailings piles, adding woody debris complexes to the stream, and restoring the adjacent floodplain and riparian area.

A. POTENTIAL IMPACTS TO THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Provided
1. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture			X			X
2. Air quality or objectionable odors				X		
3. Water quality, quantity and distribution (surface or groundwater)			X			X
4. Existing water right or reservation				X		
5. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality			X			X
6. Unique, endangered, or fragile vegetative species				X		
7. Terrestrial or aquatic life and/or habitats			X			X
8. Unique, endangered, or fragile wildlife or fisheries species			X			X
9. Introduction of new species into an area				X		
10. Changes to abundance or movement of species				X		

B. POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Provided
1. Noise and/or electrical effects				X		
2. Land use				X		
3. Risk and/or health hazards				X		
4. Community impact				X		
5. Public services/taxes/utilities				X		
6. Potential revenue and/or project maintenance costs				X		
7. Aesthetics and recreation				X		
8. Cultural and historic resources				X		X
9. Evaluation of significance				X		
10. Generate public controversy				X		

V. Explanation of Potential Impacts on the Physical Environment

1. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture.

This project would remove tailings piles adjacent to the stream and relocate them to repository sites. Long-term impacts will be positive, as tailings relocation would allow for natural stream/floodplain function (Attachment 2). The original tailings location would be reclaimed and vegetated.

3. Water quantity, quality, and distribution.

No changes in streamflow would occur in Stonewall Creek as a result of the proposed project. Short-term increases in turbidity may occur during project construction. To minimize turbidity, operation of equipment in the stream channel will 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).

5. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality.

This project would relocate tailings piles and restore the floodplain, including the installation of vegetation. Although there will be temporary disturbance during construction, much of the existing mature vegetation will be preserved. Long-term impacts are considered positive, with an overall addition of vegetative cover. The old tailings piles and repositories will be restored and vegetated. Vegetative cover will also be added to the riparian area. This project is expected to increase the form and function of the stream and floodplain while returning the landscape to a more natural state.

7. Terrestrial and aquatic life habitats.

Construction activities that will affect terrestrial and aquatic life habitats will be short-term. Aquatic impacts would involve installation of in-channel and riparian habitat structures. Terrestrial impacts would include the relocation of tailings piles and the subsequent revegetation. Long-term, this project should improve aquatic and terrestrial habitats, thereby increasing stream and floodplain function.

8. Unique, endangered, or fragile wildlife or fisheries species.

This project will affect westslope cutthroat trout, federally identified as a sensitive species, and designated a “Species of Concern” in Montana. The impacts on the species as a result of this project are predicted to be positive, increasing recruitment and survival.

VI. Explanation of Impacts on the Human Environment.

8. Cultural and historic resources.

No cultural or historical resource impacts are anticipated. However, the State Historical Preservation Office will be notified of this project and any potential concerns will be addressed.

VII. Narrative Evaluation and Comment.

There are no anticipated cumulative effects

VIII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

1. No Action Alternative

If no funding is provided through the FFIP, either the applicant would have to seek additional sources of funding to complete the project, or the tailings piles would remain in place and the stream and floodplain would continue to be impaired.

2. The Proposed Alternative

The proposed alternative intends to provide partial funding through the FFIP to restore a section of Stonewall Creek by removing tailing piles, adding woody debris complexes to the stream, and restoring the adjacent floodplain and riparian area. The successful completion of this project would contribute to the recovery of westslope cutthroat trout by expanding suitable habitat and improving water quality on-site and downstream of the project.

IX. Environmental Assessment Conclusion Section

1. Other groups or agencies contacted or which may have overlapping jurisdiction:

Lewis & Clark 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

2. Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency:

None.

3. Is an EIS required?

No. We conclude, from this review, that the proposed activities will have an overall positive impact on the physical and human environment, and will therefore not require the extensive analysis associated with an EIS.

4. 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 will be distributed to all individuals and groups listed on the cover letter and will be published on the FWP webpage: www.fwp.mt.gov.

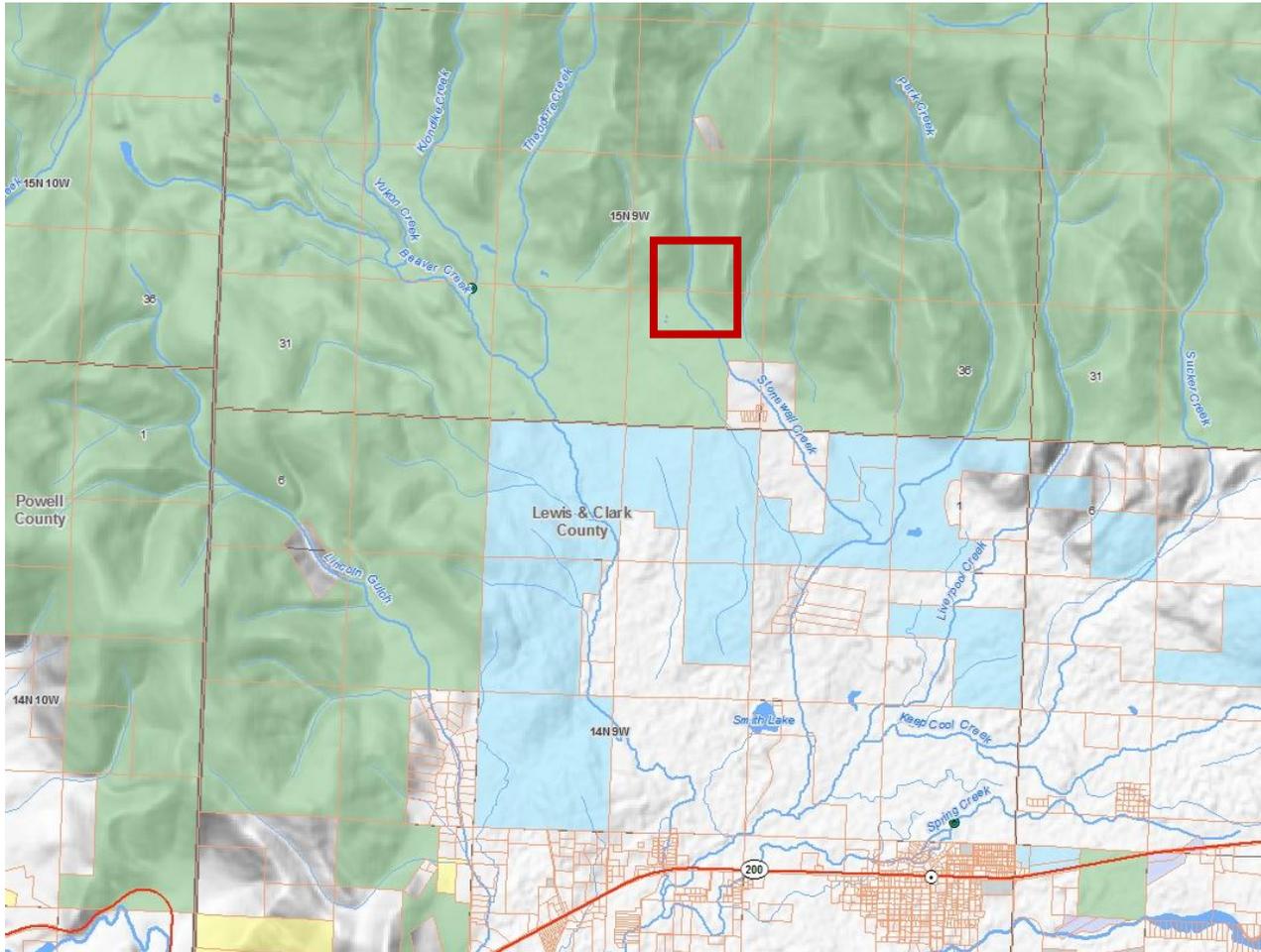
5. Duration of comment period?

Public comment will be accepted through 5:00 PM on February 16, 2015.

6. Person(s) responsible for preparing the EA.

Michelle McGree, Program Officer
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
1420 East 6th Avenue
PO Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620
Telephone: (406) 444-2432
E-mail: mmcgree@mt.gov

ATTACHMENT 1



ATTACHMENT 2

