

Draft
Environmental Assessment

Hells Canyon Creek Instream Flow

3/16/2016



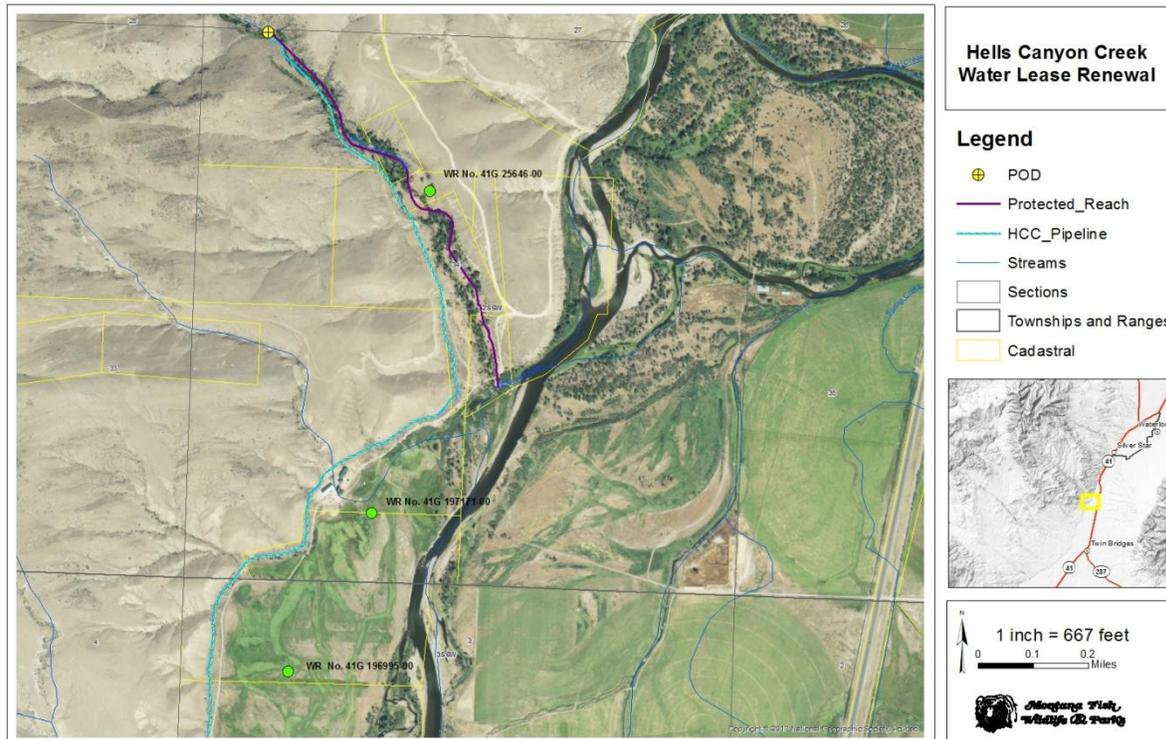
***Montana Fish,
Wildlife & Parks***

Draft Environmental Assessment CHECKLIST

PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

1. **Type of proposed state action: Administrative**
2. **Agency authority for the proposed action: Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks**
3. **Name, address and phone number of project sponsor (if other than the agency)**
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
1420 East 6th Avenue
Helena, MT 59620
(406) 444-1229
4. **Anticipated Schedule:**
Estimated Instream Flow Lease Commencement Date: 2016
Estimated Instream Flow Lease Completion Date: 2019
Current Status of Project: Agreement with landowner nearly completed. Lease needs to be approved by DNRC.
5. **Location affected by proposed action (county, range and township – included map):**

The project is located in Madison County in Section 34, Township 2 South, and Range 6 West.



6. Project size -- estimate the number of acres that would be directly affected that are currently:

	<u>Acres</u>		<u>Acres</u>
(a) Developed:		(d) Floodplain	<u>0</u>
Residential	<u>0</u>		
Industrial	<u>0</u>	(e) Productive:	
(existing shop area)		Irrigated cropland	<u>130</u>
(b) Open Space/ Woodlands/Recreation	<u>0</u>	Dry cropland	<u>0</u>
(c) Wetlands/Riparian Areas	<u>0</u>	Forestry	<u>0</u>
		Rangeland	<u>0</u>
		Other	<u>0</u>

8. Permits, Funding & Overlapping Jurisdiction.

(a) **Permits:** permits will be filed at least 2 weeks prior to project start.

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Permits</u>
DNRC	Water Right Change Application

(b) **Funding:**

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Funding Amount</u>
Future Fisheries Improvement Program	\$7,395.20
George Grant Trout Unlimited	\$3,000.00
Jefferson Valley Sportsman	\$3,000.00
Landowners	\$999.00

(c) **Other Overlapping or Additional Jurisdictional Responsibilities:**

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Type of Responsibility</u>
DNRC	facilitates water resources issues

9. Narrative summary of the proposed action:

Hells Canyon Creek (Madison County) is a tributary to the Jefferson River and supports spawning populations of brown and rainbow trout. Flow monitoring in the area indicated dewatering due to irrigation demand, and this project aims to lease water and secure minimum flows for trout. In this project, three water users are combined to a single gravity pipeline providing 1.12 cfs of water savings. Guaranteed minimum flows during rainbow trout spawning (April 1 to July 15) is 1.60 cfs, and the minimum flow 0.25 cfs will be maintained during trout fry migration (July 16 to November 4). The goal of this project is to protect and enhance trout habitat by securing additional water for instream flow. This lease was implemented from 1996-2015, and this proposal for a 3 year renewal is to prepare for a long term lease prior to 2019.

10. Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives:

Alternative A: Fund the water lease and secure additional streamflow.

Alternative B: Do not fund the water lease and fail to legally protect instream flow.

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

The lease renewal will need to be approved by the DNRC after it conducts a 90 day review for adverse effect.

PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW CHECKLIST

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

A. 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		
2. Air quality or objectionable odors				X		
3. Water quality, quantity and distribution (surface or groundwater)				X		
4. Existing water right or reservation			X			X
5. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality				X		
6. Unique, endangered, or fragile vegetative species				X		
7. Terrestrial or aquatic life and/or habitats				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		

4. Existing water right or reservation.

This project does not change water rights of other landowners. It does, however, secure an instream flow lease from three water users. The project is purely administrative, keeping water formerly used for irrigation within the stream.

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

This project will affect important spawning populations of brown and rainbow trout in the Jefferson River. The impacts on these species as a result of this project are predicted to be positive. The project may provide significant improvements in habitat within the Hells Canyon Creek drainage. The enhanced streamflow would secure critical minimum flows for resident fish as well as fish migrating from the Jefferson River.

B. 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		
9. Evaluation of significance				X		
10. Generate public controversy				X		

PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

There are no anticipated cumulative effects.

PART IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

1. Public involvement:

The public will be notified in the following manners to comment on this current EA, the proposed action and alternatives:

- Public notice on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks web page: <http://fwp.mt.gov>.

This level of public notice and participation is appropriate for a project of this scope having limited impacts and is administrative in nature.

PART V. EA PREPARATION

**1. Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required? NO
If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action.**

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.

**2. Person(s) responsible for preparing the EA:
Michelle McGree, Program Officer**

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3. **List of agencies or offices consulted during preparation of the EA:**
Stephen Begley, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Ron Spoon, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks