

July 7, 2017
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
Region 3 Office
Montana State Library, Helena
MT Environmental Information Center
Montana Audubon Council
Montana Wildlife Federation
Gallatin Conservation District
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Helena
State Historic Preservation Office, Helena
Landowner
Trout Unlimited, Montana Water Project

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Enclosed is an Environmental Assessment (EA) prepared for the Future Fisheries Improvement Program (FFIP). The Program tentatively plans to provide partial funding toward a project that would improve stream habitat on Dry Creek, downstream of a recently completed fish passage project. Instream pools and riparian habitat would be enhanced to increase spawning, rearing, and resting habitat. Dry Creek is a tributary to the East Gallatin River outside of Belgrade in Gallatin County.

Please submit any comments by August 6th 2017 to Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks at the address listed above. The funding for this project through the FFIP is contingent upon approval being granted by the Fish & 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
Dry 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 tentatively plans to provide partial funding toward the establishment of more pools and improved riparian habitat in Dry Creek. Willow, aspen, and chokecherry would be planted to establish cover along the stream corridor. Large woody debris would be placed in the channel to form scour pools and provide overhead cover. The goal is to increase spawning, rearing, and resting habitat for Brown Trout, Mountain Whitefish, Rainbow Trout, and Brook Trout.

I. Location of Project:

This project will be conducted on Dry Creek, a tributary to the East Gallatin River, located near Belgrade within Township 1N, Range 4E, Section 3 in Gallatin County (Figure 1). The project site is downstream of the Dry Creek Ditch Company Canal.

II. Need for the Project:

One goal within FWP's Statewide Fisheries Management Plan for the fisheries management program is to "restore and enhance degraded fisheries habitats." By implementing an improvement project and restoring important habitat, this proposed project would help meet this goal. This project will enhance the habitat in a section of stream that has been recently reconnected, improving migration corridors for trout that will use Dry Creek and recruit to the East Gallatin River. This project, combined with the other projects, will re-establish a tributary and add additional habitat for aquatic species.

III. Scope of the Project:

The project proposes to establish more pools and improved riparian habitat in Dry Creek. Willow, aspen, and chokecherry would be planted to establish cover along the stream corridor. Large woody debris would be placed in the channel to form scour pools and provide overhead cover. The goal is to increase spawning, rearing, and resting habitat for Brown Trout, Mountain Whitefish, Rainbow Trout, and Brook Trout.

This project is expected to cost \$14,878. Of this total, the FFIP would be contributing up to \$9,258 to complete the project.

Contributor	In-kind services	In-kind cash
Steve Carlson		\$2,000
Trout Unlimited	\$1,100	
Lonny Walker	\$350	
Gillian Associates	\$450	
Volunteer Labor	\$1,750	
\$5,620		

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: Dry Creek Channel Restoration

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

Description of Project: The project proposes to establish more pools and improved riparian habitat in Dry Creek. Willow, aspen, and chokecherry would be planted to establish cover along the stream corridor. Large woody debris would be placed in the channel to form scour pools and provide overhead cover. The goal is to increase spawning, rearing, and resting habitat for Brown Trout, Mountain Whitefish, Rainbow Trout, and Brook Trout.

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		
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 Impacts to the Physical Environment

1. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture

This project is expected to improve soil stability through reduced erosion. The riparian plantings, combined with the riparian fencing and protective cages that will reduce browse, is intended to encourage root growth and hold banks together. Soil would be contained within the streambanks and would not erode into the stream.

3. Water quantity, quality, and distribution.

No changes in streamflow would occur in Dry Creek as a result of the proposed project. A 318 authorization will be obtained, if necessary, to meet short-term water quality standards. Long term, the project is expected to improve water quality through reduced sediment inputs.

5. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality

This project would improve near bank cover and restore woody riparian vegetation in a 700 foot reach of stream. Vegetative communities would be actively created through planting and

seeding, and would be protected from browse when necessary. Trees and shrubs would be planted into weed matting to increase mortality of and decrease competition with grass species. Increased vegetative cover is intended to provide shade and reduce erosion in Dry Creek, and the expected results would be positive.

7. Terrestrial or aquatic life and/or habitats.

This project would revegetate the stream banks and riparian area. Long term, the project intends to provide additional shade and reduce erosion, which could provide cooler water for aquatic life as well as reduce fine sediment. Combined with projects outside the scope of this EA, additional, quality habitat would be created for migratory trout.

VI. Explanation of Impacts to 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 the 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 affected area of Dry Creek would not gain quality habitat and would continue to be limited by channelization, sedimentation, and lack of riparian cover.

2. The Proposed Alternative.

The proposed alternative intends to provide partial funding through the FFIP to restore Dry Creek and improve in-channel and riparian habitats.

IX. Environmental Assessment Conclusion Section.

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

Gallatin Conservation District, US Army Corps of Engineers, 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 & 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 11:59 August 6th 2017.

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

Michelle McGree, Program Officer
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
1420 East 6th Avenue, P.O. Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620
Telephone: (406) 444-2432, E-mail: mmcgree@mt.gov
Contributor: Pat Byorth (Trout Unlimited Montana Water Project)

FIGURE 1: project location



Figure 1. Location of proposed Walker Property project and relationship to its confluence with the East Gallatin River, the Dry Creek Canal, and the proposed upstream 319 grant funded project.