

July 7, 2017  
1420 East 6<sup>th</sup> 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  
Region 2 Office  
Montana State Library, Helena  
MT Environmental Information Center  
Montana Audubon Council  
Montana Wildlife Federation  
Missoula Conservation District  
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Helena  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Helena  
State Historic Preservation Office, Helena  
Missoula County Public Works Department

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 fish passage on LaValle Creek, a tributary to the Clark Fork River. The project site is located just north of Missoula in Missoula County.

Please submit any comments by August 6<sup>th</sup>, 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](mailto:mmcgree@mt.gov)

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT  
Fisheries Division  
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks  
LaValle Creek Fish Passage

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 replacement of two undersized culvert crossings with bridges. The overall goal is to enhance upstream passage for resident, genetically pure Westslope Cutthroat Trout.

I. Location of Project:

This project will be conducted on LaValle Creek, a tributary to the Clark Fork River, located north of Missoula within Township 14N, Range 20W, Sections 12 and 13 in Missoula County (Figure 1).

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." Upper LaValle Creek supports a genetically pure population of Westslope Cutthroat Trout, which is recognized as a Species of Concern in Montana and is a federally Sensitive species. Currently, these fish are unable to navigate two culvert road crossings at high flow, restricting them from upstream movement. This project would replace these two inadequate culverts with bridges designed to sustain a 100-year flood and would allow fish to easily move throughout the stream.

III. Scope of the Project:

The project proposes to remove two undersized culverts crossings with bridges. The overall goal is to facilitate unobstructed movement and consistent reproduction of Westslope Cutthroat Trout. The project is located on a public road easement. This project is expected to cost \$43,151. Of this total, the FFIP would be contributing up to \$18,520 to complete the project.

Contributor	In-kind services	In-kind cash
WestSlope Chapter Trout Unlimited		\$12,960.00
Trout Unlimited- National	\$11,671.00	
TOTAL: \$24,631.00		

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: Upper LaValle Creek Fish Passage

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

Description of Project: The project proposes to remove two undersized culverts crossings with bridges. The overall goal is to facilitate unobstructed movement and consistent reproduction of Westslope Cutthroat 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		
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		
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			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**

3. Water quantity, quality, and distribution.

No changes in streamflow would occur in LaValle 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. A 318 authorization will be obtained, if necessary, to meet short-term water quality standards.

7. Terrestrial or aquatic life and/or habitats.

This project would replace two undersized culverts with bridges designed to sustain a 100-year flood. The current culverts are only 4.5 feet in diameter, while the average stream width is approximately 11 feet. Their replacement would allow for natural stream conditions and remove the velocity barrier, allowing for upstream migration of Westslope Cutthroat Trout. All changes are expected to be positive.

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

This project will allow for upstream passage of genetically pure Westslope Cutthroat Trout, helping to ensure long-term persistence. Any changes are expected to be positive.

10. Changes to abundance or movement of species.

The replacement of culverts with appropriately sized bridges will restore connectivity of LaValle Creek. The structures will be large enough to withstand a 100-year flood event and allow complete fish passage. The impact is considered positive and is expected to positively impact Westslope Cutthroat Trout populations in the Clark Fork River.

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 LaValle Creek would continue to limit fish passage.

2. The Proposed Alternative.

The proposed alternative intends to provide partial funding through the FFIP to restore two undersized culverts and replace them with bridges.

IX. Environmental Assessment Conclusion Section.

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

Montana Department of Environmental Quality  
Missoula County Conservation District  
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers  
Montana Department of Natural Resources  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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](http://www.fwp.mt.gov).

5. Duration of comment period?

Public comment will be accepted through 11:59 PM August 6, 2017.

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

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FIGURE 1: project location

