

July 7, 2017
1420 East 6th Ave.
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Helena, MT 59620-0701

Environmental Quality Council
Montana Department of Environmental Quality
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Fisheries Division
Region 6 Office
Montana State Library, Helena
MT Environmental Information Center
Montana Audubon Council
Montana Wildlife Federation
Phillips County Conservation District
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Helena
State Historic Preservation Office, Helena
Landowner

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 dam repair on Little Warm Reservoir, a reservoir on Little Warm Creek. Little Warm Reservoir is located 26 miles Southwest of Malta in Phillips County.

Please submit any comments by August 6, 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
Little Warm Reservoir dam repair

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 dam repairs at Little Warm Reservoir. The overall goal is to restore the dam, which will facilitate higher water levels and improve the fishery through improved spawning habitat, rearing habitat, and refuge under drought conditions as well as preserving water and stabilizing water levels.

I. Location of Project:

This project will be conducted on Little Warm Reservoir, a reservoir on Little Warm Creek. Little Warm Reservoir is located 26 miles Southwest of Malta in Phillips County within Township 27N, Range 28E, Section 29 in Phillips County (Figure 1). The project site is at the dam.

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. Little Warm Reservoir is an important fishery for walleye, yellow perch, and black crappie. In its current state, the dam cannot retain high water levels and sustain additional habitat resulting from inundated areas and refuge. This project would enhance the habitat for many species at Little Warm Reservoir and improve angler opportunity.

III. Scope of the Project:

The project proposes to repair a dam at Little Warm Reservoir that was breached in 2016 (Figure 2). The overall goal is to facilitate higher water levels, which would improve the fishery through improved spawning habitat, rearing habitat, and refuge under drought conditions as well as retaining water and stabilizing water levels. This project is expected to cost \$507,385.80. Of this total, the FFIP would be contributing up to \$75,000 to complete the project.

Contributor	In-kind services	In-kind cash
Landowner	\$291,385.80	
Ducks Unlimited		\$20,000
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service		\$10,000
\$321,385.80		

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: Little Warm Reservoir dam repair

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

Description of Project: The FFIP tentatively plans to provide partial funding toward dam repairs at Little Warm Reservoir. The overall goal is to facilitate higher water levels, which would improve the fishery through improved spawning habitat, rearing habitat, and refuge under drought conditions as well as retaining water and stabilizing water levels.

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		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		
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			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 would improve the earthen dam and increase stability. In 2016, saturated soils, a 2:1 slope, and insufficient spillway capacity contributed to a breach and this project is intended to rebuild the dam. Once this project is completed, stability will be increased and the dam will be functional.

3. Water quantity, quality, and distribution.

There will be no change in water quality or quantity, but additional water will be retained in the reservoir. The increased storage is intended to benefit water users by increasing supply, and should add additional spawning and rearing habitat for fish, as well as refuge.

4. Existing water right or reservation

The project is expected to improve water supply conditions for other water users on Little Warm Creek. The property ownership around the project area is limited to Little Big Warm Ranch LLC (land and water rights), Diamond Willow Ranch (water rights), and the State of Montana (lands). Existing water rights or reservations will not be impacted.

7. Terrestrial or aquatic life and/or habitats.

Repairing Little Warm Dam will allow existing rock/cobble and littoral habitats to become inundated, providing critical spawning, rearing, and refuge habitats for the fish community that includes game fish such as black crappie, walleye, and yellow perch. The impounded water will also create excellent rearing habitat for many fish species and provide critical refuge under severe drought and winter conditions.

10. Changes to abundance or movement of species.

With increased spawning and rearing habitat, there is potential for fish population sizes to improve. Increased recruitment is expected to translate to increased abundance and potentially, angler opportunity.

VI. Explanation of Impacts to the Human Environment

7. Aesthetics and recreation

This project would improve a pre-existing reservoir that was historically used for angling and create functionality. Reservoir storage capacity will be restored and fish spawning, rearing, and overwinter habitats will be re-established, restoring angler opportunity. Recreation and aesthetics are expected to increase with a more functional reservoir.

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 Little Warm Reservoir would continue to be degraded due to the dam breach.

2. The Proposed Alternative.

The proposed alternative intends to provide partial funding through the FFIP to restore Little Warm Reservoir dam and improve the fishery and angler opportunity.

IX. Environmental Assessment Conclusion Section.

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

US Army Corps of Engineers, Phillips Conservation District, Department of Environmental Quality, State Historical Preservation Office, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of Natural Resources and Conservation

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 PM, August 6th 2017.

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

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FIGURE 1: project location



FIGURE 2: Dam breach

