

Draft Environmental Assessment

Smith River Camp Baker Boat Launch Streambank Stabilization Project



June 11, 2021



**MONTANA FISH,
WILDLIFE & PARKS**

Draft Environmental Assessment CHECKLIST

PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

1. **Type of proposed state action:** Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks proposes to stabilize a portion of the streambank (labeled with red line on map page 3) of the Smith River that has seen substantial erosion downstream of the secondary boat launch (labeled B on map) located at Camp Baker, Smith River State Park. This will include the addition of rock rip-rap, willows, and soil. In addition, the boat ramp, (labeled B) will be replaced and widened. A section of the project is located on private property and an agreement will be signed with the landowner to authorize work on the property. Livestock access will be provided to the river to accommodate the landowners needs.

2. **Agency authority for the proposed action:**
Montana state statute 23-1-102 authorizes the department to make a study to determine the scenic, historic, archaeological, scientific, and recreational resources of the state. The department may by purchase, lease, agreement, or acceptance of donations acquire for the state any areas, sites, or objects that in its opinion should be held, improved, and maintained as state parks, state recreational areas, state monuments, or state historical sites.

Furthermore, state statute 23-1-110 and Administrative Rule 12.2.433 guides public involvement and comment for the improvements at state parks and fishing access sites, which this document provides.

3. **Anticipated Schedule:**
Estimated Construction Commencement Date: Late Summer/Fall 2021
Estimated Completion Date: Fall 2021
Current Status of Project Design (100 % complete):

5. **Location affected by proposed action (county, range and township – included map):**
Meagher County Section 13 Township 12N Range 04 E



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><1</u>
Residential	<u>0</u>		
Industrial	<u>0</u>	(e) Productive:	
(existing shop area)		Irrigated cropland	<u>0</u>
(b) Open Space/	<u><1</u>	Dry cropland	<u>0</u>
Woodlands/Recreation		Forestry	<u>0</u>
(c) Wetlands/Riparian	<u><1</u>	Rangeland	<u>0</u>
Areas		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>
MDEQ (Hardrock Mining)	Small Miners Exemption
Meagher County	Flood Plain/Determination
US Army Corps of Engineers	404
MDEQ (turbidity)	318
Meagher County Conservation District	310
Montana FWP	SP 124
DNRC	Land-Use License

(b) **Funding:**

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Funding Amount</u>
Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks	\$200,000.00

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

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Type of Responsibility</u>
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9. **Narrative summary of the proposed action:** This project is necessary to repair and prevent the continued erosion of the section of the Smith River located downstream of the secondary boat launch at Camp Baker. Without this stabilization the loss of streambank will continue. This area is frequently utilized by floaters as it is adjacent to the downstream boat ramp. The project will result in 178 feet of hardened bank consisting of rip rap and concrete (boat ramp and livestock access) bank. The rip rap will be constructed to the top of the existing bank resulting in an approximately 7 to 8 ft high rip rap bank. It is anticipated that the project will result in decreased erosion along the treated bank but could result in increased velocities along the rip rap bank, and potential increased

erosion downstream of the rip rap. The secondary boat ramp will be replaced and widened to accommodate boats launching at Camp Baker.

10. Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives:

Alternative A: No Action; This alternative would result in the continued erosion of the riverbank causing the loss of additional bank including adjacent landowner property and creating hazards for floaters launching boats from the adjacent upstream boat ramp.

Alternative B: Proposed Action; This alternative would stabilize the portion of the Smith River streambank which would prevent continued erosion and loss of property. It will provide a new boat ramp to replace an aging inadequate existing ramp which will help alleviate and distribute the heavy use at Camp Baker.

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

At a minimum the following agencies will be contacted to obtain the appropriate permits. The agencies may require specific mitigation, stipulations, or other control measures.

- Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks - Stream Protection Act 124 Permit – Pending
- Montana Department of Environmental Quality – 318 Authorization/401 Certification – Pending
- US Army Corps of Engineers – Section 404 Permit - Pending

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			1.
2. Air quality or objectionable odors			X			2.
3. Water quality, quantity and distribution (surface or groundwater)			X			3.
4. Existing water right or reservation				X		
5. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality			X			5.
6. Unique, endangered, or fragile vegetative species				X		6.
7. Terrestrial or aquatic life and/or habitats			X			7.
8. Unique, endangered, or fragile wildlife or fisheries species				X		8.
9. Introduction of new species into an area			X			9.
10. Changes to abundance or movement of species			X			10.

1. The project will result in 178 feet of hardened bank consisting of rip rap and concrete (boat ramp and livestock access) bank. The rip rap will be constructed to the top of the existing bank resulting in an approximately 7 to 8 ft high rip rap bank. It is anticipated that the project will result in decreased erosion along the treated bank but could result in increased velocities along the rip rap bank, and potential increased erosion downstream of the rip rap.

2. During construction the project will utilize heavy equipment, which will emit fumes and objectionable odors. This is would result in a minor short-term impact that will cease with the completion of the project.

3. The project will result in 178 feet of hardened bank consisting of rip rap and concrete (boat ramp and livestock access) bank. The rip rap will be constructed up to the top of the existing bank resulting in an approximately 7 to 8 ft high rip rap bank. Willow will be incorporated into the rip rap. The project will result in decreased erosion along the treated bank but could result in increased velocities along the rip rap bank, and potential increased erosion downstream of the rip rap and adjacent properties. Erosion would be expected to increase over time as the gravel bar deposited by Sheep Creek continues to build resulting in an increasingly narrower channel as the newly constructed rip rap bank will result in the loss of lateral migration. This will result in increasing velocity over time, and increased potential for scour of the streambed and erosion downstream. The rock barbs may result in deflecting the flow away from the river left (looking downstream) bank but may also result in an eddy downstream and further

erosion. Overall, there may be a significant short-term improvement in water quality, and a potentially significant long-term decrease in water quality from increased erosion at downstream sites.

5. The existing bank is largely vertical resulting in minimal riparian vegetation. Incorporating willow into the rip rap bank will result in an increase in riparian vegetation, if completed properly and willows survive. Inclusion of a filter gravel instead of geotextile fabric, as included in the design plans, will help promote vegetation establishment. Any potential increased erosion downstream of the project area would result in the loss of vegetative cover and may offset the benefit on increased vegetation at the project site. Overall, there may be an increase in vegetation at the project site if the willows survive, and a potential decrease in vegetation downstream from increased erosion.

6. It is unlikely there are endangered or fragile species given the existing vertical bank and lack of vegetation present.

7. The construction of the rip rap and concrete bank will result in the loss of lateral migration at this location. This combined with the increasing gravel bar from the deposition of gravel from Sheep Creek may result in increasing velocities in the project area. Incorporating willow into the rip rap bank will provide some minimal riparian habitat function. The project may also result in increased erosion downstream resulting in the loss of additional riparian habitat. Constraining the stream channel at this location may also result in increased scour of the streambed. Overall, the construction of the rip rap bank with the incorporation of willow cuttings may result in a minor impact on aquatic life, due to the loss of habitat at the project site, and the potential for increased erosion and channel incision.

8. It is unlikely there are any unique, endangered, or fragile wildlife species within the project area. Westslope Cutthroat Trout (*Oncorhynchus clarkii lewisi*) are a state species of special concern that are present within the Smith River drainage. While Westslope Cutthroat Trout are largely limited to headwater streams in the drainage, individuals have been sampled in the Smith River mainstem and could potentially be present in the project area at low abundance. Western Pearshell (*Margaritifera falcata*) are a mussel state species of concern that have also been documented within the Smith River drainage.

9. The project has the potential to introduce noxious weeds to the area and/or allow existing weeds to spread in disturbed areas. The potential for noxious weeds to be introduced and/or spread in the project area can be mitigated by requiring construction equipment to be cleaned prior to accessing the site, promptly revegetating any disturbed area with native seed mix, and monitoring and weed control of the construction area following the completion of project.

10. Overall, the construction of the rip rap bank with the incorporation of willow cuttings may result in a potentially minor impact on aquatic life, due to the loss of habitat at the project site, and the potential for increased erosion and channel incision.

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			1.
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			6.
7. Aesthetics and recreation			X			7.
8. Cultural and historic resources	X					8.
9. Evaluation of significance				X		
10. Generate public controversy			X			10.

1. During construction the project will utilize heavy equipment, which will result in noise. This is expected to have a minor short-term impact that will cease with the completion of the project.

6. The rip rap, concrete boat ramp, and concrete water gap may require long-term maintenance. Bank stabilization projects, including rip rap, have the potential to fail and maintenance may be required depending on the consequences of the failure, and the expectations of the FWP and landowner.

7. The existing bank consist of approximately 143 ft of natural eroding vertical bank, 18 ft of concrete boat ramp, and 17 ft of bare livestock access. The proposed project will result in approximately 105 ft of rip rap bank, 56 ft of concrete boat ramp, and 17 ft of concrete livestock access. The rip rap bank will be approximately 7 to 8 ft tall and match the existing top of bank. Willow cuttings will be incorporated into the rip rap to promote riparian vegetation. Three rock barbs are proposed along the rip rap. The increased size of the ramp will help alleviate crowding at the boat launch site.

8. The project site will be monitored by FWP Cultural Resource Manager.

10. The project has the potential to generate public controversy due to the conversion of natural streambank to a rip rap with willow cuttings by FWP on private property however, this project will benefit recreation and access to the river by floaters which should outweigh any controversy.

PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

This project is necessary to prevent the continued loss of streambank in a high use area. This area is utilized by floaters at Camp Baker as it is immediately adjacent to the downstream boat ramp. Recreation is an important component of the river use at this site and this project will improve access to the river and alleviate overcrowding at the boat ramps.

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:

- Two public notices in each of these papers: Helena Independent Record/ Great Falls Tribune
- One statewide press release
- Public notice on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks web page: <http://fwp.mt.gov>.

Copies of this environmental assessment will be distributed to the neighboring landowners and interested parties to ensure their knowledge of the proposed project.

This level of public notice and participation is appropriate for a project of this scope having limited impacts, many of which can be mitigated.

Duration of comment period: 30 Days

The public comment period will extend for (30) thirty days following the publication of the second legal notice in area newspapers. Written comments will be accepted until **5:00 p.m., date**
, 2021 and can be mailed to the address below:

PART V. EA PREPARATION

- 1. Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required? (YES/NO)?** No EIS required
If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action. This project does not meet the criteria necessary to require an EIS.
- 2. Person(s) responsible for preparing the EA:** John Taillie
- 3. List of agencies or offices consulted during preparation of the EA:** Montana FWP, Montana DEQ, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Montana DNRC, Meagher County