



## SPA 124 PERMIT DECISION NOTICE

### Unnamed Tributary to Standard Creek Culvert Replacements

FWP-FSH-DN-R3-24-075

November 19, 2024

#### **ACTION**

Decision Notice (DN). Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) shall prepare a DN for the proposed action. The DN must identify the agency decision, the reasons for the decision, and any special conditions surrounding the decision or its implementation.

With this action, FWP hereby adopts the Draft Environmental Assessment or Draft EA prepared for the proposed action as final, and approves Alternative 2, the proposed action.

#### **AUTHORITY: MONTANA ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT**

According to the applicable requirements of the Montana Environmental Policy Act or MEPA and its implementing rules and regulations, before a proposed action may be approved, environmental review must be conducted to identify, consider, and disclose any potential impacts of the proposed action on the affected human environment. The level of environmental review will vary with the complexity and seriousness of environmental issues associated with a proposed action. The level of public interest will also vary. The agency is responsible for adjusting public review to match these factors. *Title 75, Chapter 1, Parts 1 through 3, Montana Code Annotated (MCA)*. Based on these factors, FWP determined a Checklist EA (Draft EA) constitutes the appropriate level of review for the proposed action. Therefore, to assess and disclose potential impacts of the proposed action, FWP prepared a Draft EA.

#### **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCESS**

Under usual circumstances, FWP makes the Draft EA available for public review and comment. However, in this circumstance, MEPA's required public process for projects of this nature is impacted by a competing statutory deadline. MEPA requires FWP to comply with its terms "*to the fullest extent possible*." To fulfill the stated policy of MEPA, the agency shall conform to the applicable rules prior to reaching a final decision on proposed actions covered by MEPA. *ARM 12.2.428, Policy Statement Concerning MEPA Rules*. More specifically, *§ 87-5-504, MCA*, states:

*"Within 30 days after the receipt of such plans [for a project subject to SPA 124 permitting], the department shall notify the applicant whether or not such construction project or hydraulic project will adversely affect any fish or game habitat. If the department notifies the applicant that such construction will adversely affect any fish or game habitat, it shall accompany such notice with recommendations or alternative plans which will eliminate or diminish such adverse effect."*

Effectively, within 30 days after receipt of an application [for an SPA 124 Permit], FWP must make a final

decision on the proposed action/project. Within the applicable 30-day timeframe, the MEPA practitioner or author of the Draft EA must conduct a rigorous process, making it difficult or impossible for FWP to accommodate a public comment period for the Draft EA within the required 30-day time-period. § 87-5-504, MCA.

Therefore, for the purposes of achieving compliance with MEPA, *"to the fullest extent possible,"* FWP prepares a Draft EA for file, sans public comment, and issues a DN identifying the agency decision, reasons for the decision, and any special conditions surrounding the decision or its implementation. Conditions applicable to the approved action, including recommendations or alternative plans to eliminate or diminish any adverse effects, are contained in the approved SPA 124 Permit (see attached).

#### **DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION**

Two culvert replacements are proposed on the Standard Creek Road #237. Both locations had water present when inventoried in September. The existing banks at the sites are vegetated with grass/sedge, forbs, and willows. These culverts are beginning to rust to the point of deterioration. Banks are generally in good condition. There are no nearby structures present or wetlands at these locations. MP 15.72 - replace existing 18" culvert with 24" x 24' CMP (unnamed tributary to Standard Creek. MP 16.66 - replace existing 18" culvert with 24" CMP x 34' CMP (unnamed tributary to Standard Creek)

The applicant is Dale Olson of the United States Forest Service. The project is expected to occur over 3 days in late October – Early November.

#### **PURPOSE AND NEED**

These culverts were encountered during road reconstruction pre-work and were deemed warranted for replacement due to failure and being undersized.

#### **ALTERNATIVES ANALYZED**

##### **Alternative 1: No Action**

In addition to the proposed action, and as required by MEPA, FWP analyzes the "No-Action" alternative in the EA. Under the No-Action alternative, the proposed action would not occur. Therefore, no additional impacts to the human environment would occur. The No Action alternative forms the baseline from which the potential impacts of the proposed action may be measured.

Under the No Action alternative, FWP would not issue a SPA124 permit, which would threaten the long-term viability of the road and public access to the area.

##### **Alternative 2: Proposed Action**

Under the Proposed Action, FWP would issue a SPA124 for the project with the following special conditions:

1. Existing vegetation must be preserved wherever possible. Any disturbed vegetation, including willows or other riparian vegetation, should be reestablished if removed. All disturbed areas (including any spoils or excess material) must be shaped and seeded to native grass to control erosion and prevent the infestation of noxious weeds.
2. Excess materials generated from a project must be disposed of in upland habitats outside of the floodplain.
3. Culverts will be inspected annually (post run-off) and after significant rainfall events, and maintained to avoid blockage and upstream aggradation, and to ensure proper hydraulic function and stream channel integrity.

**DECISION**

Based on the environmental review provided in the Draft EA, and, to the greatest extent possible, in accordance with all applicable laws, rules, regulations, and policies, FWP determined the proposed action (Alternative 2), will not have significant adverse impacts on the human environment associated with the proposed action and constitutes a reasonable and appropriate strategy to achieve identified objectives. Therefore, preparation of an environmental impact statement or EIS is unnecessary.

FWP hereby adopts the Draft EA as final and approves Alternative 2, the Proposed Action.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'L. Schroeer', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Linnaea Schroeer  
Acting Regional 3 Supervisor

