



DECISION NOTICE

Lolo Creek Tenant Meanders

[FWP-DN-FSH-R8-2025-001]

4/25/2025

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 as final, without modification, 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 for public review and comment. See *Public Participation Process* below.

Further, FWP must consider any substantive comments received in response to an EA and proceed in accordance with one of the following steps: determine the EA did not adequately reflect the issues raised by the proposed action and issue an Environmental Impact Statement or EIS; determine the EA did not adequately reflect the issues raised by the proposed action and issue a supplemental EA; or determine the Draft EA adequately addressed the issues raised by the proposed action and make a final decision, with appropriate modification resulting from the analysis provided in the Draft EA and the analysis of any substantive public comments received. See *Public Comment and FWP Response* below.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCESS

The Draft EA was made available for public review and comment from March 31 through April 15, 2025.

The Draft EA was posted on FWP's Public Notice webpage: <https://fwp.mt.gov/news/public-notice>. The Draft EA was also made available for public review on the Environmental Quality Council or EQC website: <https://leg.mt.gov/mepa/search/>, by individual request, and through notice to identified interested parties. FWP received no comments during the public comment period.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION

Lolo Creek is a tributary to the Bitterroot River, which contains brown trout, brook trout and rainbow trout, as well as known populations of westslope cutthroat trout and mountain whitefish. In the project area, which is adjacent to Highway 12 west of Lolo (Earl Tenant campground), the stream was channelized and rip-rapped due to the highway construction. This project would realign 0.5 miles of the creek in a wide segment of valley bottom and relic channel. Wetland and instream habitat restoration and revegetation would be used to reduce flood energy, increase off-channel water storage, and improve fisheries and aquatic habitat. The stream, floodplain, and wetland areas would be reconnected, and a buffer would be created between the stream and the road to allow for channel adjustments. The restoration would be completed in a publicly accessible area and is intended to be a demonstration project. FWP's action would be funding this project through the Future Fisheries Improvement Program, as well as permitting oversight and fisheries monitoring. The primary project sponsors are Trout Unlimited and the Lolo National Forest; construction is planned for summer or fall 2025.

PURPOSE AND NEED

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." This project is in an area that includes westslope cutthroat trout. Additionally, the fisheries management program at FWP intends to "restore and enhance degraded fisheries habitats," particularly those that support wild trout fisheries. By implementing an improvement project and restoring important habitat, this proposed project would help meet these goals. Lolo Creek is a tributary to the Bitterroot River and provides spawning, rearing, and overwinter habitat for migratory recreational fish species, such as rainbow trout and brown trout. In the project area, floodplain reconnection and channel improvement would be addressed. This will benefit fish species, stream function, anglers, and the public who recreate at the site.

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, 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 Lolo Creek would remain impacted by impaired floodplain reconnection, riparian vegetation and habitat complexity.

Alternative 2: Proposed Action

Under the Proposed Action, stream and floodplain restoration would occur on Lolo Creek.

PUBLIC COMMENT AND FWP RESPONSE

FWP received no public comments on the Draft EA.

DECISION

Based on the environmental review provided in the Draft EA, and 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 EIS is unnecessary. FWP hereby adopts the Draft EA as final and approves the Alternative 2, the proposed action.

With this DN, FWP hereby adopts the Draft EA, without modification, and approves the proposed action.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Peter Brown".

Peter Brown
Acting Habitat Bureau Chief
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks