

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS

Future Fisheries Improvement Program

Application Guidelines

Application Dates:	Submission information:
Deadlines: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• November 15 (winter cycle)• May 15 (summer cycle) <i>Must be received by midnight</i> Citizen Review Panel Meetings for funding recommendations: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mid-June (summer cycle)• Mid-December (winter cycle) Fish & Wildlife Commission Meetings for approval: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• August (summer cycle)• February (winter cycle)	Email to: FWPFFIP@mt.gov For files over 10MB, use https://transfer.mt.gov and send to bailey.duxbury@mt.gov Mail to: Future Fisheries Improvement Program FWP Fisheries Division P.O. Box 200701 Helena, MT 59620 <i>Digital and printed submissions must be signed</i>

Comprehensive Program information and guidance can be found at <https://fwp.mt.gov/ffip>

Program Purpose

To provide funding to enhance, restore, or protect wild fish populations and their habitats. These improvements are intended to benefit fish populations, native species conservation, and angling opportunities.

The Citizen Review Panel recommends that any project involving grazing includes participation and/or investment from the landowner, including development of a grazing management plan early in the process. Fencing costs should be reasonable and competitive. Photopoints are a required and important part of pre-project and post-project assessment.

Project Eligibility

Any individual or group can apply. Projects must evaluate the cause of the problem, incorporate a large-scale view of the project and surrounding area, and benefit the angling public. Project design should incorporate natural stream form and function with the goal of obtaining a condition as close to natural as possible.

Funding Eligibility

Program funds can be used for on-the-ground work, including permitting, construction (and construction oversight), materials, water leasing, and maintenance (up to 10% of the total project cost). Funding cannot be used for administration, travel, coordination, overhead, monitoring, assessment or studies, design alone (must be design/build), contingency, or land acquisition. Projects must have written landowner permission. **If proposing a fish screen project, please consider a maintenance request.**

Review Criteria

Project prioritization includes the magnitude of enhancement to aquatic habitats and fish populations, public access and opportunity, waterbody importance, long term effectiveness, cost/benefit, and cost share. Additional emphasis is placed on projects that are in Eastern Montana, involve mineral reclamation, and/or improve native fish.

Available Funding

The Montana Legislature gives authority for the Program to expend funds. Approximately \$2 million is available for each biennium (two years; four grant cycles). Approved funding varies by grant cycle; over the last five years, the average grant award was approximately \$40,000.

Proposed projects should include cost share. A 50% match is typical. In-kind services or wages of government agency personnel cannot be used as match. Permanent irrigation diversions must have at least a 50% match.



FUTURE FISHERIES IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM GRANT APPLICATION

All sections must be addressed, or the application will be considered invalid



I. APPLICANT INFORMATION

A. Applicant Name: High Plains Conservation District

Mailing Address: 3615 29th St. SW

City: Great Falls State: MT Zip: 59405

Telephone: 4068660020 E-mail: hpcdtech@cascadecd.com

B. Contact Person (if different than applicant): Jake Atkinson

Address: 3615 29th St. SW

City: Great Falls State: MT Zip: 59405

Telephone: 4064032644 E-mail: hpcdtech@cascadecd.com

C. Landowner and/or Lessee Name (if different than applicant): McKamey Ranch Company

Mailing Address: 1909 Millegan Road

City: Great Falls State: MT Zip: 59405

Telephone: 4067882862 E-mail: kpmck.mt@gmail.com

II. PROJECT INFORMATION

A. Project Name: Hound Creek Realignment and Floodplain Reconnection

River, stream, or lake: Hound Creek

Location: Township: 17N Range: 03 E Section: 19

Latitude: 47.21503 Longitude: -111.39394 *Within project (decimal degrees)*

County: Cascade County

B. Purpose of Project: *(high level, focus on why the project is important)*

The purpose of the Hound Creek Realignment and Floodplain Reconnection Project is to restore a degraded section of lower Hound Cree, a Smith River Tributary, that is lacking in diverse stream habitat, floodplain connectivity, and geomorphic resiliency. The area that the project site is located in has been used for cattle grazing and hay fields, which has led to poor habitat conditions for Smith River spawning trout, an increase in fine sediment input into Hound Creek and the Smith River, and a lack of riparian vegetation or a connected floodplain. High Plains Conservation District, Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks, Geum Environmental Consulting, Montana Trout Unlimited, Missouri River Fly Fishers & Pat Barnes Trout Unlimited Chapters, Upper Missouri Watershed Alliance, legislatures, and the landowner have come together to address degradation issues on Hound Creek. The Hound Creek Realignment and Floodplain Reconnection project is the first phase in a 3-phase effort to restore lower Hound Creek to a healthy, functioning system. The overall goals of the Hound Creek realignment and Floodplain Reconnection Project are to restore aquatic habitat diversity, increase spawning habitat for fish, increase floodplain connectivity, restore woody riparian vegetation, and reduce accelerated lateral erosion into incised banks.

C. Brief Project Description (attach additional information to end of application). Please include the anticipated construction schedule:

Hound Creek is an important flow contributor to the Smith River, which is an important fishery in the region that historically has been under served by stream restoration practitioners. Additionally, Hound Creek is an important spawning tributary for spawning rainbow and brown trout from the Smith River, and important habitat for resident trout, beaver, and wildlife such as deer, elk, moose, bear, birds, etc. Aside from the natural resource benefits of the project, this project is also an important momentum and partnership builder. Regional partners are showing investment in the Smith Watershed, and this is the first project to take place after the development of the Smith River Watershed Restoration Plan. Developing partnerships in the watershed and leveraging landowner and public investment is critical if we are to continue to implement projects in the watershed that will benefit the fishery and the resource.

The Hound Creek Realignment and Floodplain Reconnection project includes improving aquatic habitat diversity, realigning Hound Creek away from an actively eroding vertical bank, increasing floodplain connectivity, significantly expanding the woody riparian buffer along the channel, and creating off-channel wetland area. The stream bank is approximately 6 to 8 feet tall and is dominated by introduced pasture grasses such as smooth brome. The stream bank has eroded approximately 70 feet since 2005, delivering approximately 9,000 cubic yards of fine sediment to Hound Creek and the Smith River. As erosion and lateral migration have occurred, a new floodplain has formed on the inside bench where willows and cottonwoods have colonized. The creation of a new inside meander floodplain surface from channel migration makes realigning the channel away from the bank a feasible option rather than treating the bank in place. Relocating the channel away from the bank allows us to build a much larger floodplain to dissipate high flow energy, restore a woody riparian vegetation corridor, and create clean riffles and pools with overhanging cover.

Restoration treatments to achieve Phase 1 restoration goals include:

Install 8 large wood habitat structures, including root wads in pool locations and 775 linear feet of streambank treatments consisting of woody debris and 5,000 willow cuttings to increase geomorphic resiliency, increase aquatic habitat diversity, and restore woody riparian vegetation

Realign Hound Creek away from a 650-foot long vertical, actively eroding stream bank to reduce sediment input into Hound Creek/Smith River and increase overall connected floodplain area

Construct 910 linear feet of new channel that supports pools and riffles and promotes spawning gravel sorting

Construct side channels with willow streambank treatment for increased juvenile fish rearing habitat.

Construct approximately 2 new acres of connected floodplain surfaces that will support natural colonization of cottonwood while preserving existing areas of woody vegetation and diverse floodplain

Create a connected floodplain surface between the new channel and existing eroding bank that gently slopes up to the existing bank and will be revegetated with rhizomatous grasses for long-term erosion control. The connected floodplain bench will be revegetated with willow cuttings and willow transplants to increase the riparian buffer width and provide energy relief for high flows. Floodplain areas will include introduced wood both on the surface and partially buried to create floodplain roughness, as well as willow trenches to help stabilize soils, prevent erosion, and provide habitat.

Install permanent wildlife friendly riparian fencing to exclude cattle from project area, reducing nutrient input into the system and, allowing woody riparian vegetation to establish. Fencing will include water gaps to allow for cattle and sheep grazing in low-impact zones, and 2 access gates to allow the landowner to access the project site for maintenance tasks.

Annually monitor and reseed/revegetate riparian areas as needed using native seed mix and willow plantings.

The anticipated construction schedule is for implementation to take place fall of 2026. Geum consulting is finishing designs during May 2026, and project partners plan to have construction bid packages out to contractors in the early summer (June/July). Project implementation is scheduled to take place in mid October 2026 and it is anticipated that implementation will take 2 weeks. Volunteer riparian willow harvesting and planting will take place near the end of October, 2026, after willows have gone dormant for the year.

Phase 2 of the project is anticipated to be implemented in the fall of 2027, and Phase 3 is anticipated to be implemented in the fall of 2028. Please see the attached Restoration Feasibility Analysis for information on phases 2 and 3. The target fall implementation season is in place to complete project phases during low water periods and to install riparian vegetation treatments after transplants/cuttings have gone dormant.

D. What was the cause of habitat degradation and how will the project correct the cause?

Impairment of the site was caused by a combination of vegetation clearing to create hayfields, reduced vegetation cover from livestock grazing, and historical beaver removal. The channel has adjusted over time in response to these historical alterations through vertical incision and lateral migration, especially where woody riparian vegetation has been removed.

E. Length of stream or size of lake that will be treated (project extent): 1,775 feet
Length/size of impact, if larger than project extent (e.g., stream miles opened): 2 acres of floodplain

F. Project Budget Summary:

Grant Request (Dollars):	\$ 53,524.00
Matching Dollars:	\$ 136,200.00
Matching In-Kind Services:*	\$ 18,668.00
<i>*salaries of government employees are not considered matching contributions</i>	
Other Contributions (not used as match)	\$ 30,000.00
Total Project Cost:	\$ 238,392.00

G. Attach itemized (line item) budget – see *budget template*

H. Attach project location map(s) that include:

- Extent of the project, including context (relation to major landmark or town)
- Indication of public and private property
- Riparian buffer locations and widths (if applicable) and grazing locations

I. Attach project plans:

- Detailed sketches or plan views with the location and proposed restoration
- Pre-project photographs (GPS location strongly recommended)
- If water leasing or water salvage is involved, attach a supplemental questionnaire (<https://myfwp.mt.gov/getRepositoryFile?objectID=36110>)

J. Attach support letters or statements of (e.g., landowner consent, community or public support). For FWP statement, attach provided template. List any other project partners:

See attached letters of support and FWP Biologist Statement. Project partners include High Plains Conservation District, Geum Environmental Consulting, Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks, Montana Trout Unlimited, Missouri River Flyfishers TU Chapter, Pat Barnes TU Chapter, Upper Missouri Watershed Alliance, American Rivers, local legislatures, and the McKamey Ranch Company

III. MAINTENANCE AND MONITORING (attach additional information to end of application):

A. A 20-year maintenance commitment is required*. Please confirm that you will ensure this protection and describe your approach. Attach any relevant maintenance plans. Yes No

**If it is a water leasing project, describe the length of the agreement.*

This project takes place on private property adjacent to cattle grazing and hay areas. The landowner has committed to permanent riparian fencing around the project to exclude cows from the area. High Plains Conservation District is working with the landowner to develop a landowner agreement to ensure livestock is excluded from the area for the required 20 year maintenance period. Additionally, project partners will conduct annual monitoring at the project area for 5 years after implementation. Monitoring practices will include trout spawning red monitoring, photo point monitoring, and greenline riparian vegetation surveys. The landowner will repair or replace any damaged or failing woody habitat structures as needed for the life of the project, address any unforeseen erosion issues, and maintain the fence.

B. Will grazing be part of or adjacent to the project? If so, describe or attach land management plans, including short term and long term grazing regimes. If the landowner is not the applicant, please describe their involvement in the project. *If you want assistance with grazing plan development, note your need.*

Cattle and sheep grazing will be taking place adjacent to the project area. The landowner has agreed to install a robust permanent riparian fence around the project area, as well as the area of future project phases. The landowner is fortunate to have a high amount of grazing pastures outside of the project area and away from the stream. Cattle and sheep will be allowed to graze long term in upland areas away from the Hound Creek channel, and permanent riparian fencing will ensure the protection of the project long term. Project partners will develop a landowner agreement that will include a grazing management plan with the following criteria:
-Grazing will be limited to areas outside of the riparian fencing.
-The landowner shall maintain the permanent riparian fencing and water gap.
-The landowner shall perform maintenance tasks for any small erosion issues or structure failures/adjustments in the restoration area, with technical assistance provided by project partners.

- C. Will the project be monitored to determine if goals were met? If so, what are the short-term and long-term plans to assess benefits and lessons learned? Were pre-project data collected? Will monitoring information be shared with FWP?

Annual monitoring will take place pre-project implementation (summer 2026) and for 5 years after project implementation to gauge effectiveness of the project, or longer if deemed necessary. Annual rainbow and brown trout spawning red surveys will take place throughout the project area. Greenline vegetation surveys will take place throughout the length of the project to measure riparian vegetation establishment and assess the need for further riparian plantings/transplants. Lastly, photo points will be established throughout the project area to monitor revegetation efforts, riffle/pool habitat formation, and the status of habitat structures and woody streambank treatments over time.

Monitoring results will be shared with FWP in annual reports. Additionally, monitoring results will be shared with project partners and the public, and photos from photo point monitoring will be utilized in project education and outreach efforts.

IV. PROJECT BENEFITS (attach additional information to end of application):

- A. What species of fish will benefit from this project?

This project will primarily benefit rainbow trout and brown trout but will also have beneficial impacts for mountain whitefish, white sucker, longnose sucker, plains sucker, longnose dace, and Rocky Mountain sculpin.

- B. How will the project protect or enhance wild fish habitat?

The primary enhancement to wild fish habitat will come from improvements to fish spawning habitat in the project reach. Trout from the Smith and Missouri rivers are known to utilize Hound Creek for spawning. Thus, improved spawning habitat could increase fish recruitment and result in more adult fish for trout anglers in multiple fisheries. Narrowing and deepening the stream channel in the project reach will result in faster flows that will expose spawning gravels which are currently silt covered. Restored riparian vegetation will provide better cover for fish than the poorly vegetated banks which currently exist and will also provide shade to moderate summer high temperatures. A reconnected floodplain will provide benefits of cooler, cleaner water and will also help mitigate impacts of high flows.

- C. What is the expected improvement to fish populations, both short term and long term? How might the project translate to angler success?

This project is expected to result in increased fish recruitment through improved spawning and rearing habitat. These impacts are expected to be both short term and long term. The direct benefit to anglers would come from increased numbers of adult trout in the Smith and Missouri rivers, as well as improving Hound Creek as a fishery itself. The mouth of Hound Creek is a popular stop for Smith River floaters and the project will provide cooler, cleaner water to the Smith River at the mouth, enhancing fishing opportunities at the mouth of Hound Creek for Smith River anglers.

- D. Will the project increase public fishing opportunity for wild fish and, if so, how? Is public fishing allowed onsite? Is it allowed by permission? If not, describe how the public would benefit.

Public fishing opportunity is expected to increase as a result of this project through increased trout numbers in the Smith and Missouri rivers. The project site is on private property, and anglers can acquire permission to fish at the project site from the landowner, or access by following stream access laws. The main benefit of the project to anglers occurs on the Smith River and Missouri River downstream of the site. There is good public access on the Smith River upstream and downstream of the mouth of Hound Creek. There is also good public access on the Missouri River near the mouth of the Smith River.

- E. Aside from angling, what local or large-scale public benefits will be realized from this project?

Local benefits include increased flood resiliency throughout the stream reach, enhanced wildlife habitat in re-vegetated areas, and increased local awareness of best management practices in the Smith River Watershed. Additionally, irrigators immediately downstream will benefit from more water availability as water can easily access the floodplain in Hound Creek and move through the system at a more natural pace, avoiding the flashy spring flows that happen with current site conditions. Large-scale public benefits include increased water quality for City of Great Falls drinking water. Also, shade relief provided created by riparian treatments will help combat downstream algal blooms.

- F. Will the project interfere with water or property rights of adjacent landowners? (explain):

The project takes place on a single private property and will not extend over property boundaries. The landowner has a water right, and draws water from the stream close to the confluence with the Smith River, which will not interfere with adjacent landowners water rights or flows within the project area.

- G. Will the project result in the development of commercial recreational use on the site (including paid access)? Explain:

No, the project will not result in the development of commercial recreational use.

- H. Is this project associated with the reclamation of past mining activity?

No, this project is not associated with the reclamation of past mining activity.

Each approved project applicant must enter into a written agreement with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks specifying terms and duration of the project. The applicant must obtain all applicable permits prior to project construction. A competitive bid process must be followed when using State funds.

V. AUTHORIZING STATEMENT

I (we) hereby declare that the information and all statements to this application are true, complete, and accurate to the best of my (our) knowledge and that the project or activity complies with rules of the Future Fisheries Improvement Program.

Applicant Signature: Elliot Merja, HPCD Chairman  Date: 5-15-2026

Submittal: Applications must be signed and received on or before November 15 and May 15 to be considered for the subsequent funding period. Late or incomplete applications will be rejected.

Mail to: FWP Future Fisheries Fish Habitat Bureau PO Box 200701 Helena, MT 59620-0701	Email: Future Fisheries Coordinator FWPFFIP@mt.gov (electronic submissions must be signed) For files over 10MB, use https://transfer.mt.gov and send to bailey.duxbury@mt.gov
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BUDGET TEMPLATE SHEET FOR FUTURE FISHERIES PROGRAM APPLICATIONS

OTHER REQUIREMENTS:

**For projects that include a maintenance request, it cannot exceed 10% of the total project cost.

***Match can include in-kind materials or labor. Justification for in-kind labor (e.g. hourly rates used) can be noted below. Do not use government salaries as match.

Additional budget detail:

APPLICATION MATCHING CONTRIBUTIONS

Total should equal match listed above; do not include requested funds

CONTRIBUTOR	IN-KIND	CASH	TOTAL	Secured? (Y/N)
Northwestern Energy	\$ -	\$ 65,000.00	\$ 65,000.00	Y
Missouri River Flyfishers Trout Unlimited Chapter	\$ -	\$ 20,000.00	\$ 20,000.00	Y
Pat Barnes Trout Unlimited Chapter	\$ -	\$ 5,000.00	\$ 5,000.00	Y
Montana Trout Unlimited	\$ -	\$ 25,000.00	\$ 25,000.00	Y
Landowner in kind (maintenance time & willows)	\$ 18,668.00	\$ -	\$ 18,668.00	Y
Ranching for Rivers Fencing Grant	\$ -	\$ 21,200.00	\$ 21,200.00	N
	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	
	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	
TOTALS	\$ 18,668.00	\$ 136,200.00	\$ 154,868.00	

OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS

Total should equal other contributions listed above; these are funds not specially matched to the Future Fisheries application

CONTRIBUTOR	IN-KIND	CASH	TOTAL	Secured? (Y/N)
American Rivers - Design Funds	\$ -	\$ 20,000.00	\$ 20,000.00	Y
Montana Trout Unlimited - Design Funds	\$ -	\$ 10,000.00	\$ 10,000.00	Y
	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	
	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	
	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	
	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	
	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	
	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	
TOTALS	\$ -	\$ 30,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	