



File Code: 1950

Date: February 14, 2002

**SCOPING STATEMENT
USDA FOREST SERVICE
Shoshone National Forest
North Zone/Greybull Ranger District
Park County, Wyoming**

Dear Interested Party:

The Shoshone National Forest (SNF) is considering three aquatic and fisheries enhancement projects. All three proposals are described in this one scoping statement because of the project's similarities. If providing input, please be specific about which project you are commenting on.

The purpose of this letter is to solicit written comments from all concerned parties regarding the proposals. Your comments and suggestions are needed and encouraged. Project alternatives will be determined and environmental consequences analyzed during the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process initiated by this scoping letter.

If approved, the proposed work on these projects would be conducted in the late summer/fall 2002.

Forest Plan Direction and Need for the Projects

Common to All Three Proposals-The **purpose of and need** for the action are tied to guidance set forth in the 1986 Shoshone National Forest Plan and Record of Decision. The need for the proposal stems from Forest Plan (FP) direction to manage waters capable of supporting trout populations to provide for those populations (FP-III-21).

The project **is needed** in order to fulfill plan direction:

- Management Area 9A-The goals of management are to provide healthy, self-perpetuating plant communities, meet water quality standards, provide habitats for viable populations of wildlife and fish, and provide stable stream channels and still water body shorelines. The aquatic ecosystem may contain fisheries habitat improvement and channel stabilization facilities that harmonize with the visual setting and maintain or improve wildlife or fish habitat requirements (FP-III-207). Additional plan direction is:
 - Improve habitat capability through direct treatments of vegetation, soils and waters (FP-III-52)
 - Provide habitat for viable populations of all native vertebrate species of fish and wildlife (FP-III-210).



- Plan lake and stream habitat improvement projects with the assistance of state wildlife agencies, where aquatic habitats are below productive potential. Plan those improvements that harmonize with the visual setting (FP-III-211).
- Design project construction plans, permits and activities to minimize siltation or pollution of streams and lakes (FP-III-211).
- Require sediment control for any construction activity within the aquatic zone to prevent downstream sedimentation (FP-III-211).
- Maintain proper stocking and livestock distribution to protect riparian ecosystems (FP-III-211).
- Develop a transportation system that meets land and resource management needs at lowest costs and least disturbance to the environment (FP-III-10).

Introduction and Description of the Three Proposals

Project One - This project is called the Lower Dick Creek Lake Enhancement Project. The Shoshone National Forest is considering this aquatic and fisheries project to enhance an existing pond. The proposed project is located in Park County in T46N, R103W, SW ¼ of NE ¼ of Section 2, off Forest Service Road #202. The project site is approximately 4 miles south of the Timber Creek Ranger Station and 22 miles west of Meeteetse, Wyoming via Forest Roads #203 and #202 (Figure 1).

Lower Dick Creek Lake was periodically stocked with Golden Trout, starting in 1939 and ending in 1993, to diversify the recreational fishery in the Greybull River Drainage. The water level has fluctuated over the years resulting in periodic winterkills of the stocked trout due to low water and dissolved oxygen levels. When the current drought cycle started, the pond was approximately 1 acre in size and three foot below full pool elevation but still had a maximum depth of around fourteen feet. The water level in the pond has continued to drop and had a maximum depth of about eight feet in June 2001.

- The **purpose of** the proposal is to deepen the pond in order to create an over wintering fishery. To decrease the chances of genetic dilution of the native gene pool downstream, the lake would be restocked with Yellowstone cutthroat trout. The intent is to build a spring box and divert water from a spring through plastic pipe buried just underground. This would maintain the pond at full pool elevation. This project would improve habitat for fisheries, waterfowl, and other aquatic organisms, and improve recreational opportunities. In summary, the project benefits include:
 - a. Provide an over wintering recreational fishery.
 - b. Fill and maintain the pond at full pool.
 - c. Increase the range and habitat for Yellowstone cutthroat trout (a Region 2 sensitive fish species).
 - d. Ensure a long-term fishery and sustained production of other aquatic organisms.
- The **project design and implementation for Lower Dick Creek Lake** involves:
 - a. The site can be accessed by 4WD vehicle to an existing trailhead so no new road or trail construction would be required.
 - b. The proposal involves installing a spring box in the hillside above and to the north of the lake. Approximately 700 feet of plastic pipe would be run from the spring box to the lake in order to maintain the lake at full pool (Figure 2). All equipment would be hauled to the lake and spring site via horse or mule.

- c. The pipe will be buried, just under the surface, so not to be visible or trampled by livestock and/or wildlife. All excavation work would be done by hand by forest personnel and possibly volunteers.
- d. The excavated fill would be minimal and redistributed around the front and backside of the spring box to ensure maximum collection capabilities.
- e. The lake would be managed by the Wyoming Game and Fish Department on a Basic Yield concept, meaning periodic stocking of Yellowstone cutthroat trout fingerlings and allowing them to grow to catchable size in the lake.
- f. The area would be managed as a backcountry fishery with no recreational improvements.
- g. Spring box and piping would be checked spring and fall for any potential maintenance needs.
- h. All relevant permits would be obtained before project implementation (i.e. ground water permit, 404, etc.)

Project 2 - This project site is known as Sawmill Pond. The Shoshone National Forest is considering this aquatic and fisheries project to enhance an existing pond. The proposal is located in Park County in T47N, R102W, Section 17 along Forest Service Road (FSR #203). The project site is just inside the Forest boundary, approximately 2 miles southeast of the Timber Creek Ranger Station and 20 miles west of Meeteetse, Wyoming via FDR #203 (Figure 1).

In the past, Sawmill Pond was developed for a sawmill by diverting a very small, unnamed stream/spring into the pond area (Figure 3). In 1985, the pond was excavated and the surface area expanded to just over two acres at full pool. It included the creation of an island for waterfowl nesting and habitat diversity. The earthen diversion washed out. A hand crew reworked it in 1989 using earthen fill material. It has since washed out again. As a result, the water level in the pond had dropped about five feet from full pool in the fall of 2001. The water depth in the pond was no more than about two feet deep.

- The **purpose of** the proposal is to deepen the pond in order to create an over wintering Yellowstone cutthroat trout (YSC) fishery. The intent is to repair and upgrade the creek diversion in order to maintain the pond at full pool. This project would benefit fisheries, waterfowl, other aquatic organisms and recreationalists. In summary, the project benefits include:
 - a. Provide an over wintering recreational fishery.
 - b. Fill and maintain the pond at full pool.
 - c. Increase the range and habitat for Yellowstone cutthroat trout (a Region 2 sensitive fish species).
 - d. Ensure a long-term fishery and sustained production of other aquatic organisms.
- The **project design and implementation for the Sawmill Pond proposal** involves:
 - 1) The site can be accessed by vehicle and no new road construction would be required.
 - 2) A large excavator with a long arm and wide bucket, such as those used to excavate large canals would be used to deepen the pond in the dam area to about 16 feet below full pool.
 - 3) The excavated fill would be distributed around the backside of the existing dam. Silt fencing would be used to prevent sediment from entering the pond outlet and downstream creek.
 - 4) In order to beef up the diversion and prevent washout, a backhoe would be used to repair and upgrade the earthen diversion using rock, wood and fill material.
 - 5) Native vegetation would be planted in the disturbed sites.
 - 6) The existing island area would remain in place for waterfowl nesting and habitat diversity.
 - 7) The existing top rail fence would be expanded to prevent livestock use around the pond area.

- 8) A collection pipe would be installed in the creek downstream of the pond below the FSR 203 stream crossing. The pipe would run below the hill to a livestock tank, which would provide water away from the site.
- 9) A small pullout would be created along the road. An accessible gravel trail would be constructed and extend from the pullout along the dam to the outlet.
- 10) The area would be surveyed by a Forest Archaeologist and cleared with SHPO prior to making a decision to implement the decision. All other relevant permits would be obtained before project implementation (i.e. ground water, 404, etc).
- 11) Currently, management of the area is proposed to be a dispersed recreation site with no developments.
- 12) A locked gate, previously installed in the existing fence system, would be kept for administrative purposes in case livestock got inside the enclosure.

Project 3 - This project is known as the Timber Creek low-water crossing. The Shoshone National Forest is considering this aquatic and fisheries project to remove an existing undersized, deteriorated culvert in a poor location on Timber Creek. In its place, an armored ford (low water crossing) would be built. The primary location being considered is on BLM land approximately 50-150 feet downstream. Other possible locations are being considered and evaluated. The proposal is located in Park County in T47N, R102W, Section 14 where Forest Service Road (FSR #203) crosses Timber Creek. The project site is adjacent to the Forest boundary about one quarter mile downstream of the Timber Creek Ranger Station and about 20 miles west of Meeteetse, Wyoming via FDR #203 (Figure 1).

The Wood and Greybull River drainages are one of the last strongholds of Yellowstone cutthroat trout (YSC) on the Shoshone National Forest, a Region 2 sensitive fish species. Timber Creek drains into the Greybull River. The existing Forest Service Road (FSR) #203 culvert on Timber Creek is located in an unstable and wide floodprone area (Figure 4). The existing culvert is undersized and deteriorated. This situation has caused the stream to significantly down cut below the culvert and has created a hydraulic drop. This has resulted in a barrier to upstream fish passage for YSC and steep, high, eroded stream banks. The stream has also eroded the up and downstream road fill around the culvert. The culvert is now collapsing on the downstream side and is in danger of washing out during a major precipitation event. It is also a safety hazard for motorists. Due to the unstable nature of this area, periodic high precipitation events, and low vehicular use, an interdisciplinary team including the District Ranger, Forest Fisheries Biologist, Hydrologist, Engineer and Wyoming Game & Fish Department Fisheries Biologist felt the best solution was to remove the culvert and create a low water, armored ford crossing in a more stable area. During a major runoff or precipitation event motorists may not be able to ford the stream. This situation would be rare and of short duration. Most of the use occurs during firewood gathering and hunting season, which occurs during the summer and fall.

- The **purpose of** the proposal is to provide a transportation system, FSR #203, which meets the lowest costs and least disturbance to the environment (III-10) while allowing unimpeded access for fish, reducing stream bank erosion and providing a more cost effective armored ford low water crossing in a more desirable location. In summary the benefits of the project are:
 - a. Provide unimpeded fish passage.
 - b. Reduce erosion and improve water quality.
 - c. Increase the range and habitat for Yellowstone cutthroat trout (a Region 2 sensitive fish species) and other aquatic organisms to historical conditions.
 - d. Provide a safe crossing for vehicles, current situation is a hazard.
- The **project implementation for the Timber Creek low-water crossing** involves:

- 1) Relocate about 300-500 feet of road and construct an armored ford (low water crossing) across Timber Creek in a location determined by a final review (Figure 4).
- 2) The old road surface would be removed and used on the new road. The old road would be scarified.
- 3) Where the culvert and road fill has been removed, the stream bank would be contoured and shaped blending the upstream and downstream channel profile.
- 4) Unusable fill material would be returned to the nearby borrow pit for future use.
- 5) Native vegetation would be planted in disturbed areas.
- 6) The site has been reviewed and cleared by the Forest archaeologist in conjunction with the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO).
- 7) All relevant permits would be obtained before project implementation; as well as, coordination with other jurisdictions as needed (i.e. BLM-Cody Field Office).

Preliminary Issues and Potential Mitigation Measures

- 1) **Project 1 and 2 (Lower Dick Creek Lake Enhancement and Sawmill Pond)** -What recreational fishing opportunities would the pond provide? How should the area be managed? Due to the easy access fishing pressure would be high during certain times of the year. As a result, Wyoming Game & Fish Department currently plans to periodically stock the pond with YSC fingerlings (basic yield).
- 2) **Project 3 (Timber Creek Low Water Crossing)** - Are there any other suitable crossings in the area? What impacts would this road relocation have on dispersed camping?
- 3) **All Projects**-An archaeologist has or would survey the project sites. All historical resources would be protected.
- 4) **All Projects**-What other permits, clearances, and coordination needs exist for the projects?

Possible Alternatives

- No Action Alternative – Current management would continue and no aquatic/fisheries enhancement project would occur.
- Proposed Action - The projects would be authorized as proposed.
- Alternatives to the proposed action or different methods would be analyzed if issues and concerns related to the proposal are identified during scoping and that could not be mitigated.

Nature of Decision

The decision to be made is whether or not to implement the proposals, or an alternative to the proposals. Also, the decision could include what mitigation measures need to be applied to the proposed action. Based on public comment from this scoping notice and environmental analysis, the Forest Service must determine whether significant issues or concerns exist. If there are any, they will be addressed in the analysis and the eventual decision. The target date for a decision is August 15, 2002 with implementation during the late summer/fall of 2002.

Contacts

The public is provided this opportunity to identify and submit issues and concerns they feel the Forest Service should address. To be most helpful, written comments need to be submitted no later than March 18, 2002. Comments should be as specific as possible to assist us in the analysis. For further information, contact project leader Joe Neal at 307-527-6241 or jrneal@fs.fed.us for Lower Dick Creek Lake

Enhancement Project (Project 1) and Ray Zubik for Sawmill Pond (Project 2) and Timber Creek Low Water Crossing (Project 3) at 307-527-6241 or rzubik@fs.fed.us .

Written comments should be sent to Marty Sharp, North Zone NEPA Coordinator, Wapiti Ranger District, 203A Yellowstone Ave., Cody, Wyoming 82414. Comments can also be e-mailed to msharp@fs.fed.us or sent to fax number (307) 527-1202.

Again, your comments are important to us.

Sincerely,

/s/ Brent L. Larson
BRENT L. LARSON
District Ranger



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Clarks Fork Ranger District
Greybull Ranger District
Wapiti Ranger District

North Zone – Shoshone N.F.
203A Yellowstone Ave.
Cody, WY 82414-9313
Voice: 307-527-6921
Fax: 307-578-1202

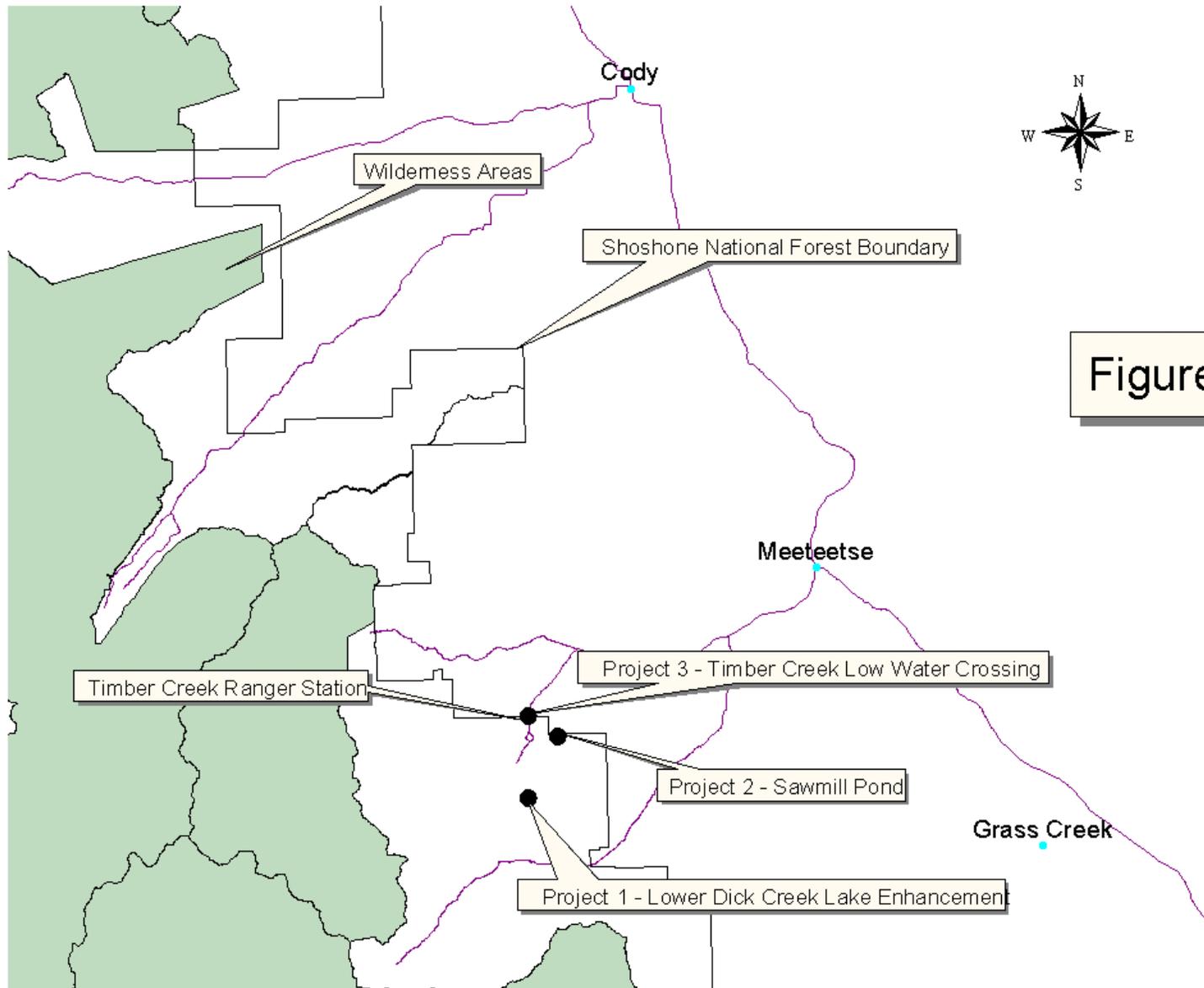


Figure 1



Figure 2

