

NRDP Funding Recommendation for the Helen Johnson Ditch Flow Enhancement Project

November 2019

Background and Project Summary

The Natural Resource Damage Program (NRDP) is partnering with Columbia Basin Water Transaction Program (CBWTP), Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), and the Clark Fork Coalition (CFC) on an irrigation improvement project that would protect 9.28 cubic feet per second (cfs) of Clark Fork River instream flows. The project is in a Group 1 Priority Area for Flow Augmentation, which is defined as a highest priority project that will supply instream flows to the area of the Clark Fork River between Galen and Deer Lodge and would partially implement Section 3.2.1 of the *Upper Clark Fork River Basin Aquatic and Terrestrial Resources Restoration Plans* (Restoration Plans). See attached figure for project location.

In 2014, the CFC, through Dry Cottonwood Creek Ranch (DCCR) spent \$210,542 to purchase and install a new pivot system on the ranch with the goal of reducing water use and permanently dedicating instream flow to the Upper Clark Fork River. The CFC secured partial funding from the CBWTP and NRCS with an agreement from the NRDP outlining the intended actions and funding the remaining project cost of \$63,647 after a the DNRC change application was approved.

The Restoration Plan requires flow projects with water right changes to successfully go through the DNRC's change authorization process prior to NRDP's funding recommendation being considered by the public, the UCFRB Advisory Council and the Trustee Restoration Council, and final funding decision by the Governor. Public comment for expenditure of Restoration Funds for this project will start on October 4, 2019, and run through November 4, 2019, with the public comments received presented to the councils and the Governor for their consideration. As noted below, DNRC held a public comment period specifically for the water rights change application.

The approved change authorization changes a portion of irrigation water right (NOS 76G 30103778 and 76G 30103784) to the purpose of instream flow for fisheries. The change requires discontinuing the use of the Helen Johnson Diversion and ditch that serves 138.2 acres of flood irrigated land and converts 68.7 of this area to center pivot sprinkler irrigation and 11.77 acres to hand-line irrigation and retires 51.21 acres to provide instream flow in the Clark Fork River. Water no longer diverted for irrigation will be used for instream flow in the Clark Fork River. 9.28 cfs flow rate and 990 acre-feet volume will be protected in the Clark Fork River from July 15th to September 6th.

The DNRC held a public notice period for this change application from January 30, 2019, to March 30, 2019. No objections were received.

Wildlife and Fisheries Habitat Assessment:

By funding this project, 9.28 cfs flow and 990 acre-feet volume will be protected in the Clark Fork River from July 15th to September 6th. This flow will be protected in the most dewatered reach of the Clark Fork River and therefore providing the best overall benefits to the restoration of the UCFRB.

Project Evaluation

Cost-Benefit, Cost-Effectiveness Relationship, and Technical Feasibility: The Helen Johnson Ditch Flow Enhancement project is a significant and successful instream flow project that includes 70% matching funds (\$146,895) from numerous funding partners including the NRCS, CBWTP, and, in addition, hours of donated time from the CFC. This project is cost-effective as annually 9.28 cfs will be added to the most dewatered stretch of the Upper Clark Fork River at a cost of \$63,647 from the Aquatic Flow allocation. This project is also technically feasible as the water is already available through implemented irrigation projects using the matching funds and monitoring of flows is scheduled to occur through NRDP's established flow monitoring program.

Public Benefit: This project will result in significant public benefit. The increased flows will be in the Clark Fork River through the Dry Cottonwood Creek Ranch, which has a permanent recreational easement allowing public access. Therefore, these increased flows will result in increased recreational opportunities for angling and recreation in this area.

Public support: The DNRC held a public notice period for this change application from January 30, 2019, to March 30, 2019. No objections were received. The public comments received for the consideration of this funding recommendation will be presented to the councils and the Governor for their consideration.

NRDP Funding Recommendations Summary

The NRDP recommends funding of this project for \$63,647.



TO DEER LODGE

90

DEMPSEY

CLARK FORK RIVER

PROJECT AREA

GALEN

DRY COTTONWOOD CREEK

90

WARM SPRINGS

48

WARM SPRINGS PONDS

HELEN JOHNSON DITCH FLOW ENHANCEMENT PROJECT

