APPENDIX G
CONSERVATION ACTIONS FOR WESTSLOPE CUTTHROAT TROUT

BACKGROUND

The BLM entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and Conservation Agreement (Agreement) with a number of agencies and private organizations in May of 1999. The purpose of the MOU and Agreement is to expedite implementation of conservation measures for westlope cutthroat trout (Oncorhynchus clarkii lewisi) in Montana through a collaborative and cooperative effort among resource agencies, conservation and industry organizations, resource users, and private land owners. The goals, objectives and conservation actions described below will be incorporated into activities under the jurisdiction of BLM.

CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION GOAL OVERVIEW

The management goal for westslope cutthroat trout in Montana is to ensure the long-term self-sustaining persistence of the subspecies within each of the five major river drainages they historically inhabited in Montana (Clark Fork, Kootenai, Flathead, upper Missouri, and Saskatchewan), and to maintain the genetic diversity and life history strategies represented by the remaining local populations.

The following objectives are identified in the MOU and Conservation Agreement:

- Protect all genetically pure Westslope Cutthroat Trout populations;
- Protect partially hybridized (>90% pure) populations;
- Ensure the long-term persistence of the WCT within their native range;
- Provide technical information, administrative assistance, and financial resources to assure compliance with the listed objectives and encourage conservation of WCT; and
- Design and implement an effective monitoring program by the year 2002 to document persistence and demonstrate progress towards the management goal.

CONSERVATION ACTIONS

Restoration and recovery actions that address threats toWCT can be grouped into the general categories of fisheries management, habitat management, genetics/population management, and administration, evaluation and information management. In some instances, actions to achieve long-term beneficial effects may cause short-term degradation such as increased sediment during stream channel restoration projects. However, long-term benefits ultimately will offset any short-term impacts.

Since BLM manages habitat rather than species or populations, conservation actions most applicable to BLM management identified in the MOU and Conservation Agreement come under the heading of habitat management recommendations. These include:

- Maintain and protect WCT habitat from degradation by achieving compliance with existing habitat protection laws, policies, and guidelines.
- Restore physical integrity of degraded habitat where logistically and technically feasible.
- Achieve compliance with water quality standards and develop TMDLs for water quality impaired streams (streams listed on the DEQ 303(d) impaired water bodies list) that are priority WCT habitat.
- Restore and maintain hydrologic conditions (flow, timing, duration) to mimic natural processes where necessary to meet Agreement objectives.
- Operate dams to minimize impacts where necessary to meet Agreement objectives.
- Identify, monitor, and maintain existing barriers to keep introduced species at bay; install new barriers where necessary to prevent invasion of introduced species.
- Identify and document fishless streams/reaches above natural barriers as potential introduction/expansion locations.
- Determine effectiveness of existing habitat protection regulations and BMPs.