March 17, 2025

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

TO ALL INTERESTED GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES AND PUBLIC GROUPS

As required by state and federal rules for determining whether an Environmental Impact Statement is necessary, an environmental review has been performed on the proposed action below:

Project	City of White Sulphur Springs Sewer Collection System Improvements
Location	White Sulphur Springs, Montana
Project Number	C302286
Total Cost	$283,624

The City of White Sulphur Springs (City) has three residential properties located within the north-central portion of the City limits that are not currently connected to its public wastewater system. These homes are on the west side of 1st Avenue NW between Badger Street West and Baker Street West and utilize individual drainfield systems for wastewater treatment and disposal. In the spring of 2023, local high groundwater caused one of the drainfields to fail. In response, and as a measure to protect public health and the environment, the City temporarily connected the home to a nearby public sewer main. In order to eliminate the chances of this problem reoccurring at any of these homes, the City would like to connect the three homes to its community public wastewater system.

The proposed project entails abandonment of the three on-site wastewater systems and replacement with individual grinder pump stations connected to the City's wastewater collection system. A 1.5-inch low pressure main will be installed and connected to the existing 2-inch low pressure main on Baker Street West. Also included in the scope of work are asphalt, gravel, and lawn restoration; two future sewer service stub outs; and connection of one existing sewer service into the new 1.5-inch low pressure pipe that currently discharges into the existing 2-inch low pressure sewer main.

State grant/loan program will fund the project. Environmentally sensitive characteristics such as wetlands, floodplains, threatened or endangered species, and historical sites are not expected to be adversely impacted because of the proposed project. Additional environmental impacts related to land use, water quality, air quality, public health, energy, noise, growth, and sludge disposal were also assessed. No significant long-term environmental impacts were identified.

An environmental assessment (EA), which describes the project and analyzes the impacts in more detail, is available on the DEQ web site (https://deq.mt.gov/public/water-public) and at the following locations:

Department of Environmental Quality
1520 East Sixth Avenue
Helena, MT 59620-0901
travis.dunkle@mt.gov

City of White Sulphur Springs
P.O. Box 442
White Sulphur Springs, MT 59645

Comments on the EA may be submitted to the Department of Environmental Quality at the above address. After evaluating comments received, the department will revise the environmental assessment or determine if an environmental impact statement is necessary. If no substantive comments are received during the comment period, or if substantive comments are received and evaluated and the environmental impacts are still determined to be non-significant, the agency will make a final decision. No administrative action will be taken on the project for at least 30 calendar days after release of the Finding of No Significant Impact.

Sincerely,

Mike Abrahamson

Mike Abrahamson, Section Supervisor
Water Pollution Control State Revolving Fund Program
Engineering Bureau, Water Quality Division
Montana Department of Environmental Quality

CITY OF WHITE SULPHUR SPRINGS
SEWER COLLECTION SYSTEM IMPROVEMENTS

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

I. COVER SHEET

A. PROJECT IDENTIFICATION

Applicant: City of White Sulphur Springs

Address: P.O. Box 442
White Sulphur Springs, MT 59645

Project Number: C302286

B. CONTACT PERSON

Name: Richard Nelson, Mayor

Address: P.O. Box 442
White Sulphur Springs, MT 59645

Telephone: (406) 547-3911

C. ABSTRACT

The City of White Sulphur Springs (City) has three residential properties located within the north-central portion of the City limits that are not currently connected to its public wastewater system. These homes are on the west side of 1st Avenue NW between Badger Street West and Baker Street West and utilize individual drainfield systems for wastewater treatment and disposal. In the spring of 2023, local high groundwater caused one of the drainfields to fail. In response, and as a measure to protect public health and the environment, the City temporarily connected the home to a nearby public sewer main. In order to eliminate the chances of this problem reoccurring at any of these homes, the City would like to connect the three homes to its community public wastewater system.

The proposed project entails abandonment of the three on-site wastewater systems and replacement with individual grinder pump stations connected to the City's wastewater collection system. A 1.5-inch low pressure main will be installed and connected to the existing 2-inch low pressure main on Baker Street West. Also included in the scope of work are asphalt, gravel, and lawn restoration; two future sewer service stub outs; and connection of one existing sewer service into the new 1.5-inch low pressure pipe that currently discharges into the existing 2-inch low pressure sewer main.

The proposed improvements, including administration, engineering, and

construction, are estimated to cost $283,624, and will be entirely financed with Water Pollution Control State Revolving Fund (WPCSRF) dollars. A low-interest loan (2.5%, 20-year term) of $145,624 and principal forgiveness in the amount of $138,000 will be awarded. It is not anticipated that an increase in sewer rates will be needed as a result of this project.

Environmentally sensitive characteristics such as wetlands, floodplains, threatened/endangered species, and historical sites are not expected to be adversely impacted because of the proposed project. Additional environmental impacts related to land use, water quality, air quality, public health, energy, noise, and growth, were also assessed. No significant long-term environmental impacts were identified.

Under Montana law, (75-6-112, MCA), no person may construct, extend, or use a public sewage system until the DEQ has reviewed and approved the plans and specifications for the project. Under the Montana Water Pollution Control State of public sewage systems.

The DEQ, Engineering Bureau, has prepared this Environmental Assessment to satisfy the requirements of the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

D. COMMENT PERIOD

Thirty (30) calendar days

II. PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION

The City has identified three properties within its limits that have on-site wastewater systems in danger of failing during seasonally high groundwater conditions. High local groundwater inundates drainfield laterals, which can cause wastewater to surface on the ground and backup into homes, posing serious risks to human health and the environment. The proximity of these homes to the North Fork of the Smith River raises concerns about the transport of contaminants and nutrients from the drainfields to the river, especially during high groundwater conditions. With the City's sewer collection system within easy reach of these three lots and the lots already being annexed, connection to public sewer would provide consistency for the sewering of this section of the community.

III. ALTERNATIVES INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION AND COSTS

A. Three alternatives to address the collection system deficiencies were considered:

- No Action Alternative
- Alternative 1 - Gravity Sewer to Lift Station
- Alternative 2 - Low Pressure Sewer System

NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE – The "no-action" alternative would not eliminate or reduce the risks to public health and the environment due to high groundwater conditions at the three onsite wastewater systems and will only delay costs to

connect the three homes to the City's public wastewater system. Therefore, the "no-action" alternative was not determined to be a viable option and will not be given further consideration.

ALTERNATIVE 1 - GRAVITY SEWER TO LIFT STATION – This alternative involves the installation of approximately 600 lineal feet of 8-inch polyvinyl chloride (PVC) gravity sewer main, three concrete manholes, and a new lift station with a small-diameter force main to the existing sewer collection system. The new gravity sewer main would run along Baker Street West to the lift station where wastewater would be conveyed to the nearest manhole within the existing wastewater system.

ALTERNATIVE 2 - LOW PRESSURE SEWER SYSTEM – This alternative consists of installing three individual grinder pump units and 910 feet of 1.5-inch high-density polyethylene (HDPE) low pressure sewer pipe. The small-diameter main would convey the wastewater to the nearest existing manhole. An existing sewer service would be connected and two stub outs for future connections would be installed.

B. COST

The estimated administration, engineering, and construction cost for Alternative 1 is $681,584. Alternative 2 is estimated to cost $266,348. Alternative 2 was selected as the preferred option primarily because of its much lower capital cost, but also because of lower operation and maintenance costs for the City, when compared to Alternative 1

The proposed improvements, including administration, engineering, and construction, are estimated to cost $283,624, and will be entirely financed with Water Pollution Control State Revolving Fund (WPCSRF) dollars. A low- interest loan (2.5%, 20-year term) of $145,624 and principal forgiveness in the amount of $138,000 will be awarded. It is not anticipated that an increase in sewer rates will be needed because of this project.

Based on 2018-2022 American Communities Survey data (Montana Department of Commerce) the median household income for the City is $3,941 per month. The current average monthly wastewater rate is $41.26 which is 1.05% of the month median household income and therefore should not pose an economic hardship on most households. The City's residential monthly sewer rate is not expected to change due to this project and therefore there is no direct additional financial impact from this project on wastewater system users.

Table 1 - PROJECT AFFORDABILITY

Monthly sewer user cost	$41.26
Monthly median household income (mMHI)[1]	$3,941
User rate as a percentage of mMHI	1.05%

[1]Based on 2018-2022 American Communities Survey data

IV. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

A. PLANNING AREA AND MAPS

White Sulphur Springs is the county seat of Meagher County. The City is located along the North Fork of the Smith River until it converges with the South Fork of the Smith River to the southwest of the City. US Highway 12 and US Highway 89 both pass through the community (see Figure 1). The proposed wastewater improvements will take place in a neighborhood along Baker Street West, near the North Fork of the Smith River, as shown in Figure 2. As shown in Figure 3, the individual sewer services will be connected to the City's public system by 910 feet of 1.5-inch low pressure main installed along Baker Street West and connecting to an existing manhole.

B. WASTEWATER FLOW PROJECTIONS

The 1.5-inch low pressure main will be constructed to have adequate hydraulic capacity for six homes. With a design population of 15 people (based on 2.5 people per home) and 100 gallons per capita per day, the total average daily flow is 1.0 gallons per minute. The existing wastewater treatment plant has capacity to accept additional customers, according to the City.

C. NATURAL FEATURES

The City of White Sulphur Springs is located in central Montana, approximately 60 miles directly east of the City of Helena. It is situated near the headwaters of the recreationally renowned Smith River. Surface soils are clay loam or cobbly loam, underlain by Quaternary alluvium with depths to 200 feet and then significant depths of Tertiary alluvium. Topography within the planning area is relatively flat with slopes trending to the west and northwest at 1 to 4 percent. The elevation of the town varies from 4,960 feet to 5,151 feet. Mountains surround three sides of town, with the Big Belt Mountains to the west, the Little Belt Mountains to the north, and the Castle Mountains to the southeast.

Average annual precipitation in the area is 15.13 inches, with the wettest months typically being May and June. Historical records show that the average maximum temperature for July is 80.9 degrees Fahrenheit and the average minimum temperature in January is 10.5 degrees Fahrenheit.

V. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF PROPOSED PROJECT

A. DIRECT AND INDIRECT INVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

1. Land Use/Prime Farmland – All work will occur within city limits and within previously disturbed areas. The new sewer mains will be constructed within public rights of way along existing roads and alleys. Within City limits, land use is predominantly residential with a variety of commercial and industrial businesses located throughout. Land use outside the city limits is primarily open rangeland that supports ranching and farming.

2. Floodplains and Wetlands – The proposed project will be located within the 100-year floodplain of the North Fork of the Smith River. A floodplain permit will be required and obtained prior to construction.

   Mapped palustrine emergent wetlands are located adjacent to the project area and are associated with the North Fork of the Smith River and could be impacted by the proposed improvements. Precautions will be taken during construction to prohibit any sedimentation or other potential adverse impacts on the wetlands. A US Army Corps of Engineers 404 Permit may be required. If jurisdictional areas are impacted.

3. Cultural Resources and Historical Sites – No impacts to cultural resources are anticipated. The proposed improvements should not impact historic or cultural resources since all proposed improvements will be completed within previously disturbed areas.

4. Fish and Wildlife – Animal life will not be significantly affected by the proposed project. The project is not located within general sage grouse habitat. The project will occur within a previously disturbed urban area so no critical wildlife habitat or known endangered species will be affected. Any habitat temporarily disturbed during construction will be restored to previously existing conditions. Care will be taken during construction to protect water quality and habitat in the North Fork of the Smith River.

5. Water Quality – The North Fork of the Smith River is located adjacent to the proposed project area. The contractor will be required to implement best management practices to eliminate sediment transport to surface water. The contractor may need to obtain a construction dewatering discharge permit from the DEQ if groundwater is encountered in trenches. The proposed improvements will have an overall beneficial impact to water quality by eliminating failing drainfields that have the potential to degrade groundwater and surface water quality.

6. The North Fork of the Smith River is classified as B-1 waters. Waters classified as B-1 are to be maintained suitable for drinking after conventional treatment, recreation, agriculture, industry, and propagation of salmonid fishes and associated aquatic life. With the North Fork of the Smith River adjacent to the project, shallow alluvial groundwater is anticipated to be encountered during construction. A plan for controlling storm water, dewatering, and protecting surface water will be required.

7. Air Quality – No long-term impacts to air quality are anticipated. Short-term negative impacts on air quality are expected to occur during construction from heavy equipment in the form of dust and exhaust fumes. Proper construction practices will minimize this problem. Project specifications will require dust control.

8. Public Health – Public health will not be negatively affected by the proposed project. The proposed project will have a positive impact on public health as the City will be better able to treat wastewater generated by the three homes, in comparison to using private drainfields.

9. Energy –The three proposed grinder pump stations will require energy to operate, while the existing drainfields at those residences are gravity fed, with no energy costs associated with them. The estimated annual to power cost for a grinder pump station is $15-$34. The consumption of energy resources directly associated with construction of the recommended improvements is minimal and unavoidable and will be short-term.

10. Noise – No long-term impacts from noise should occur. Short-term impacts from excessive noise levels may occur during construction activities. The construction period will be limited to normal daytime hours to avoid early morning or late evening disturbance to area residents.

11. Sludge Disposal – Abandonment of three existing septage tanks is included in the project's scope of work. The contents on the septic tanks will be removed and hauled by a licensed septic tank pumper.

12. Environmental Justice – Environmental Justice Executive Order 12898: The proposed project will not result in disproportionately high or adverse human health or environmental effects on minority or low-income populations. No disproportionate effects among any portion of the community would be expected.

13. Growth – The proposed project includes two future sewer service stub outs to undeveloped lots in conjunction with the connection of the existing homes to the City's public wastewater system. The proposed improvements will not impact growth within the city.

14. Cumulative Effects – Improvements to the existing wastewater collection system should have no secondary and/or cumulative impacts to the community or local area as the mains are serving existing residences.

15. Wild and Scenic River Act – The proposed project will not impact any rivers designated as wild and scenic by Congress or the Secretary of the Interior.

B. UNAVOIDABLE ADVERSE IMPACTS

Short-term construction related impacts (i.e., noise, dust, traffic disruption, etc.) will occur, but should be minimized through proper construction management. Energy consumption during construction cannot be avoided.

VI. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The City discussed the proposed project at six City Council meetings June 20, 2023; July 3, 2023; August 1, 2023; December 4, 2023; April 3, 2024; and August 5, 2024. At the meetings, the proposed project was explained, including the project's need, scope, budget, schedule, source of funding, and cost impacts to local citizens. These meetings were open to the public. No comments were received.

VII. AGENCY ACTION, APPLICABLE REGULATIONS AND PERMITTING AUTHORITIES

All proposed improvements will be designed to meet state standards in accordance with Design Standards for Public Sewage Systems (Circular DEQ-2) and will be constructed using standard construction methods. No additional permits will be required from the State Revolving Fund (SRF) section of the DEQ for this project after the review and approval of the submitted plans and specifications. However, coverage under the storm water general discharge permit and a groundwater dewatering discharge permit, will be required from the DEQ Water Protection Bureau prior to the beginning of construction. A Section 404 permit from the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, a 124 Permit from the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, and a 318 Authorization from the Department of Environment Quality will be required for any work that impacts surface water and will be obtained if necessary.

VIII. RECOMMENDATION FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

[ ] EIS [ ] More Detailed EA [X] No Further Analysis

Rationale for Recommendation: Through this EA, DEQ has verified that none of the adverse impacts of the proposed City of White Sulphur Springs collection system improvements project are significant. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not required. The environmental review was conducted in accordance with the Administrative Rules of Montana (ARM) 17.4.607, 17.4.608, 17.4.609, and 17.4.610. The EA is the appropriate level of analysis because none of the adverse effects of the impacts are significant.

IX. REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

The following documents have been utilized in the environmental review of this project and are part of the project file:

1. City of White Sulphur Springs Technical Memorandum Septic to Sewer System Improvements, August 2024, prepared by Great West Engineering.

2. Uniform Environmental Checklist; prepared by Great West Engineering; signed by the City of White Sulphur Springs on August 5, 2024.

X. AGENCIES CONSULTED

The following agencies have been contacted regarding the proposed construction of this project.

1. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was solicited for comments and did not provide a response on the White Sulphur Springs Collection System Improvements.

2. The Montana Historical Society's State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) reviewed the proposed project. According to their records, there have been a few previously recorded sites within the designated search locales. SHPO stated that

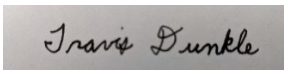
if any structure over 50 years old is to be altered, it is recommended that they be recorded and a determination of their eligibility for listing on the National Register of Historic Places be made. They indicated that as long as there will be no disturbance or alteration to structures over 50 years of age, there is low likelihood cultural property will be impacted. They stated that a cultural resource inventory is unwarranted at this time but should structures need to be altered or if cultural materials are inadvertently discovered during this project, their office must be contacted, and the site investigated.

3. The U.S. Department of the Army Corps of Engineers (USCOE) reviewed the proposed project. The USCOE is responsible for administering Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, which regulates the excavation or placement of dredged or fill material below the ordinary high-water mark of our nation's rivers, streams, lakes or in wetlands. They indicated that based on the information provided, they were unable to determine if regulated activities are proposed or if jurisdictional waters of the U.S. are present within the project area. If the final design includes any placement of fill material in any jurisdictional area, then a Department of the Army (DA) permit will be required.

4. The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) reviewed the proposed project and stated that they had no comments on the proposed project.

5. The Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) reviewed the proposed project and stated that they had no comments on the proposed project.

EA Prepared by:



Travis Dunkle, P.E. — Date: 3/10/25

EA Reviewed by:

Michele Marsh, P.E. — Date: 3/27/2025

Figure 1. Site Location Map – City of White Sulphur Springs

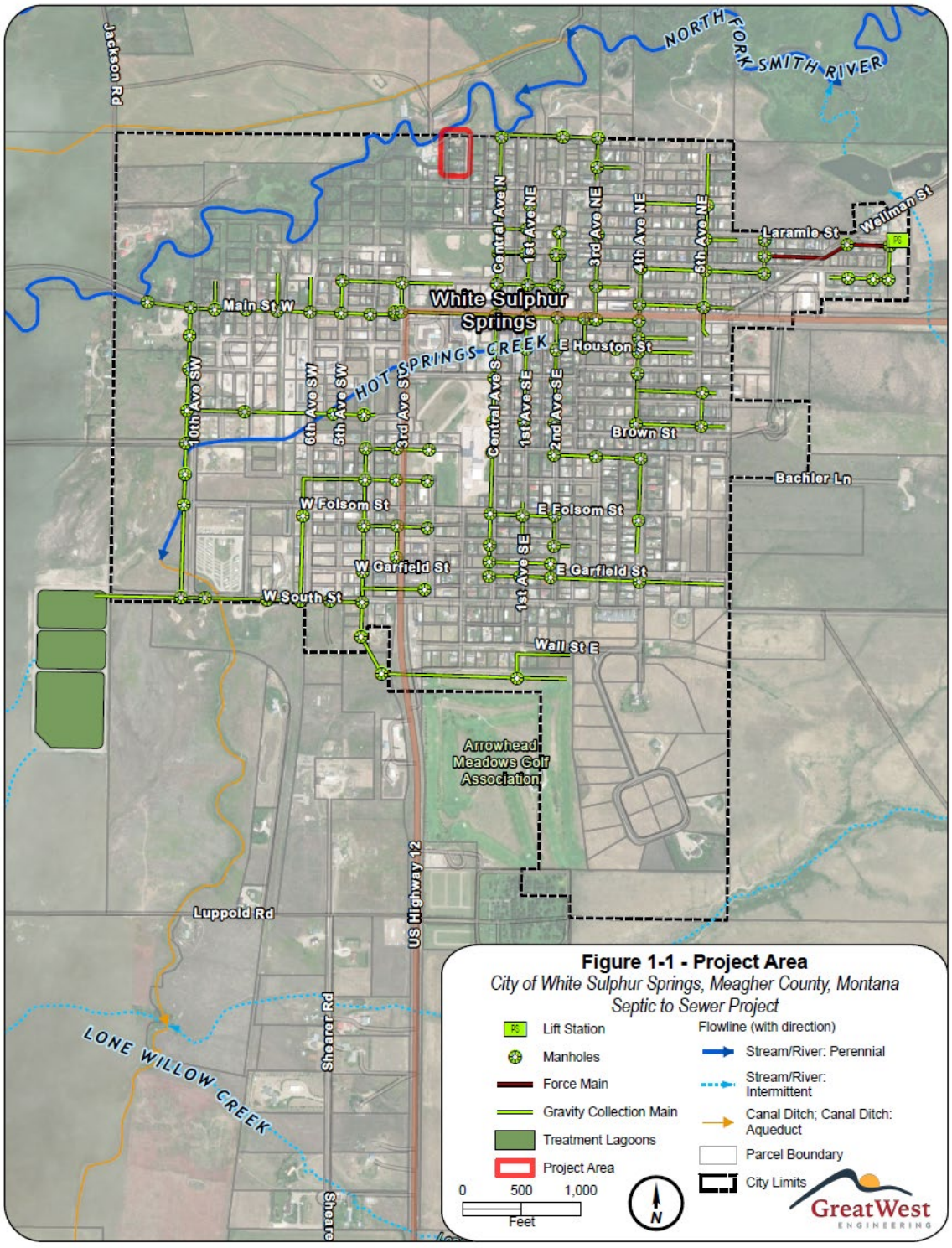


FIGURE 2

PROJECT AREA

Figure 4-2
Alternative 2
Low Pressure Sewer System

CITY OF WHITE SULFUR SPRINGS
SEPTIC TO SEWER IMPROVEMENTS

FIGURE 3

PROJECT PLAN