

FEMA grant to help keep the creek in the creek

By **KARIN RONNOW**
Chronicle Staff Writer

Park County will receive \$2.28 million in funding aimed at mitigating Fleshman Creek floodwaters

LIVINGSTON — Park County is poised to receive a \$2.28 million federal grant for flood-mitigation work along a section of Fleshman Creek, pending an environmental review of the project, state officials announced.

Fleshman Creek is a Yel-

lowstone River tributary that flows southeast through ranchland, residential subdivisions and ultimately through the city itself.

The project focuses on the bottom two miles of the creek — from the Sacajawea Park lagoon inlet to the creek's confluence

with the Yellowstone, according to the grant application.

The creek is considered an asset, but agricultural runoff, residential development and plain old littering have taken a toll over the years. The \$4.04 million project would be one piece of an ongoing public-private effort

to improve water quality and enhance fish habitat.

The \$2.28 million FEMA grant was the largest of four natural disaster "mitigation grants" totaling \$3.6 million allocated statewide by the Montana DES earlier this month. Those funds were part of a \$50 million national program.

"Independent studies have proven that every \$1 spent on mitigating natural hazards

such as flooding, wildfire in the urban interface, earthquake retrofits or severe summer or winter weather saves \$4 in future disaster-recovery costs for the nation as a whole," according to a FEMA press release.

What part Fleshman Creek plays in the city's vulnerability to flooding has been a topic of some dispute in recent years.

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Floodplain research by the Army Corps of Engineers in 2006 raised enough red flags that the city hired Clear Creek Hydrology of Bozeman to take another look.

That study concluded that Fleshman Creek has its own floodplain and floodway. Floodwaters from the Yellowstone, even during 100-year and 500-year floods don't flow into the creek, "due to the presence of natural high ground along the western bank of the Yellowstone,"

according to Clear Creek's May 2008 final report.

Nevertheless, the creek swells to dangerously high levels in the city during big spring runoff years.

The FEMA-funded project has five goals: reduce the risk of flood-related damage to property, improve Fleshman Creek's water quality and quantity, restore aquatic and riparian habitat, and enhance the creek as a community resource and public amenity, according to Lori Benner of Nittany

Grantworks in Livingston, a project consultant working with the county.

If the project passes the environmental-review test, the county must match the FEMA grant with \$760,000, said Kent Atwood, hazard-mitigation officer in the state Disaster and Emergency Services division.

For matching funds, the county has received a \$300,000 grant from the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation; a \$255,000

in-kind donation from the county roads department for labor and equipment; and a \$60,000 in-kind donation from the Livingston School District and Trout Unlimited volunteers.

Applications for four other grants totaling \$145,000 are pending, Benner said.

The other three mitigation projects in Montana selected by FEMA in this round of funding were:

■ Custer County's Harris Creek flood-mitigation project: \$139,870 federal

share, \$62,330 local match;

■ Yellowstone County's Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan update: \$229,467 federal share, \$76,489 local match;

■ State of Montana PDM Plan update: \$45,000 federal share, \$15,000 local match, plus a technical-assistance grant: \$23,688 federal share, \$7,896 local match.

In each case, FEMA funds 75 percent of the project cost and the other 25 percent is local or state matching money. And all

the projects must undergo an environmental review prior to funding.

The four Montana grants "were not legislative PDM projects and competed nationally with 481 other applications from 45 states, five territories and six tribes," Atwood wrote in the release.

"Montana did very well considering how stiff the competition was," he said.

For more information, visit www.fema.gov/government/grant/fs_mit_grant_prog.shtml