



# Fish Creek Recreation Planning Workshop

## Meeting Summary

Of stakeholder workshop held on Thursday, July 28th, 2022

Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks Region 2 Headquarters

### Objectives:

- Provide an overview of the recently initiated Fish Creek Recreation Planning process
- Explore participants' vision(s) for future recreational use in the Fish Creek watershed and associated wildlife, habitat, and economic impacts
- Explore participants' interests and concerns regarding future recreational use in the Fish Creek watershed
- Discuss next steps and additional opportunities for engagement

### Participants:

- Great Burn Conservation Alliance, Montana Trout Unlimited, Mountain Bike Missoula, National Wildlife Federation, Local Area Outfitter
- Randy Arnold, Charlie Sperry, Loren Flynn, Kyan Bishop, Liz Bradley, Alicia, Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks (FWP)
- Amy Helena, Montana Department of Natural Resources & Conservation (DNRC)

### Facilitators:

- Jenn Thompson, Will Rice, Travis Anklam, Kaitlyn Reinstma, University of Montana (UMT)
- Charles Besancon, Global Park Solutions (GPS)



## **Meeting Summary**

### **Welcome and Introduction (FWP & UMT)**

Facilitators and FWP Region 2 Supervisor Randy Arnold welcomed participants and provided an overview of the meeting objectives (see above) and the recently initiated recreation planning process for the Fish Creek area.

Fish Creek was acquired by FWP in 2010 from the Nature Conservancy, establishing both the Fish Creek State Park and Wildlife Management Area in the drainage and on the north side of Interstate 90 and the Clark Fork River. The drainage currently comprises a mosaic of FWP, DNRC, and USFS lands (an Area Map is included in Appendix A, below). In 2013, FWP attempted to create a State Park Management plan, but did not finalize and implement the plan given concerns expressed during the public comment period.

After the recent reorganization of FWP and major increases in recreational use over the past several years, FWP is now working to establish a new management framework for the Fish Creek area. Initiated in the second half of 2022, FWP is now advancing a planning process that is taking a holistic look at the drainage and will be inclusive of perspectives from all user groups and partner agencies interested in recreational use management in the Fish Creek watershed. The process is looking at recreation management across the Fish Creek area, including the state park, wildlife management area, two fishing access sites along the Alberton Gorge, and School Trust lands owned by the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC). FWP has also hired the University of Montana and Global Park Solutions to lead the engagement process and assist in the creation of a planning document to guide future recreational use management in the Fish Creek area.

### **Visioning the Future of Fish Creek**

Following the introduction, participants were then invited to share their visions for future recreational use management in the Fish Creek Area. After a group brainstorming session, participants outlined a future where recreation amenities are expanded to meet and guide growing demand, diverse recreation opportunities exist, and the area's infrastructure and natural resources are stewarded. Most participants highlighted the need to balance recreational opportunities with fish, wildlife and habitat values in Fish Creek going forward. Several participants also envisioned a future where clearer expectations, greater enforcement of rules, and expanded agency resources provide for more responsible recreational use in the Fish Creek area.

### **Identifying Interests and Concerns in the Fish Creek Area**

Following the visioning exercise, participants were invited to identify (1) current recreational assets in the Fish Creek Area that they value, (2) areas of concern and potential resource degradation. Participants highlighted the area's fisheries, wildlife, and diverse recreational opportunities as valuable assets in the Fish Creek drainage. Participants also emphasized the area's fishing, hunting, camping, hiking, biking, and floating opportunities as valuable recreation



assets. Several participants also highlighted the importance of working across land jurisdictions – including with private landowners, DNRC, and the United States Forest Service, to successfully manage recreation in the Fish Creek Area.

When discussing interests and concerns in the Fish creek area, participants highlighted the value of the area’s fisheries and wildlife habitat, and the importance of protecting the drainage’s natural resources as recreational use continues to expand. Participants were especially concerned with increases in dispersed camping close to the creek, and the risk to the fishery posed by erosion from these sites and along Fish Creek Road. While most participants expressed a desire to limit recreational impacts on the main stem of Fish Creek, they also acknowledged the need to equitably provide access to recreational users on public lands.

Participants also highlighted the challenge of managing expanding recreational use in the Fish Creek area. Most participants present suggested expanding some recreational amenities in the Fish Creek area, especially at existing campsites, to guide and buffer against the impacts of expanded recreational use. Some participants suggested expanding established camping opportunities, while others suggested limiting and/or concentrating dispersed camping opportunities to reduce impacts to the area’s resources. Nearly all participants highlighted the value of FWP increasing its presence in the drainage through expanded enforcement, a campground host at one of the established campsites (Big Pine or Forks FAS), or both.

Nearly all participants present also agreed that areas in the upper reaches of the drainage should continue to be maintained for “primitive” recreational use (e.g., hiking, hunting, dispersed camping) while areas closer to Interstate 90 and the Clark Fork River are better suited for more “developed” recreation opportunities (e.g., established campgrounds, motorized recreational use). For at least one participant present, it is vital that existing access to road and trail infrastructure is maintained given the unique recreation opportunities such infrastructure provides. Several participants also highlighted the challenge of balancing motorized recreation opportunities with wildlife habitat and underscored their interest in not expanding motorized use opportunities if it were to detrimental impact wildlife in the drainage.

Throughout the discussion, participants indicated areas with important recreation assets, areas of interest and concern, and areas where future recreation opportunities could be expanded, on maps of the Fish Creek area (see Appendix A). The results of this exercise will be shared in the form of several maps that reflect the interests and concerns of stakeholders present, later in this planning process. The maps generated from these workshops do not necessarily reflect the interests of FWP and are intended to serve as a preliminary resource to aid in brainstorming and conversation as the planning process moves forward.



## Conclusion

To conclude the meeting, facilitators thanked participants for their engagement and highlighted that this workshop is just the beginning of the recently initiated and ongoing planning process aimed at understanding and incorporating the interests and concerns of diverse perspectives invested in future recreation management in the Fish Creek area. No decisions are being made at this point in the process. Instead, this workshop, along with additional stakeholder engagement efforts currently being conducted, is designed to identify the range of interests and concerns regarding the future of Fish Creek and potential management options that could be included in a planning document. There will be many more opportunities for engagement through the remainder of 2022, including:

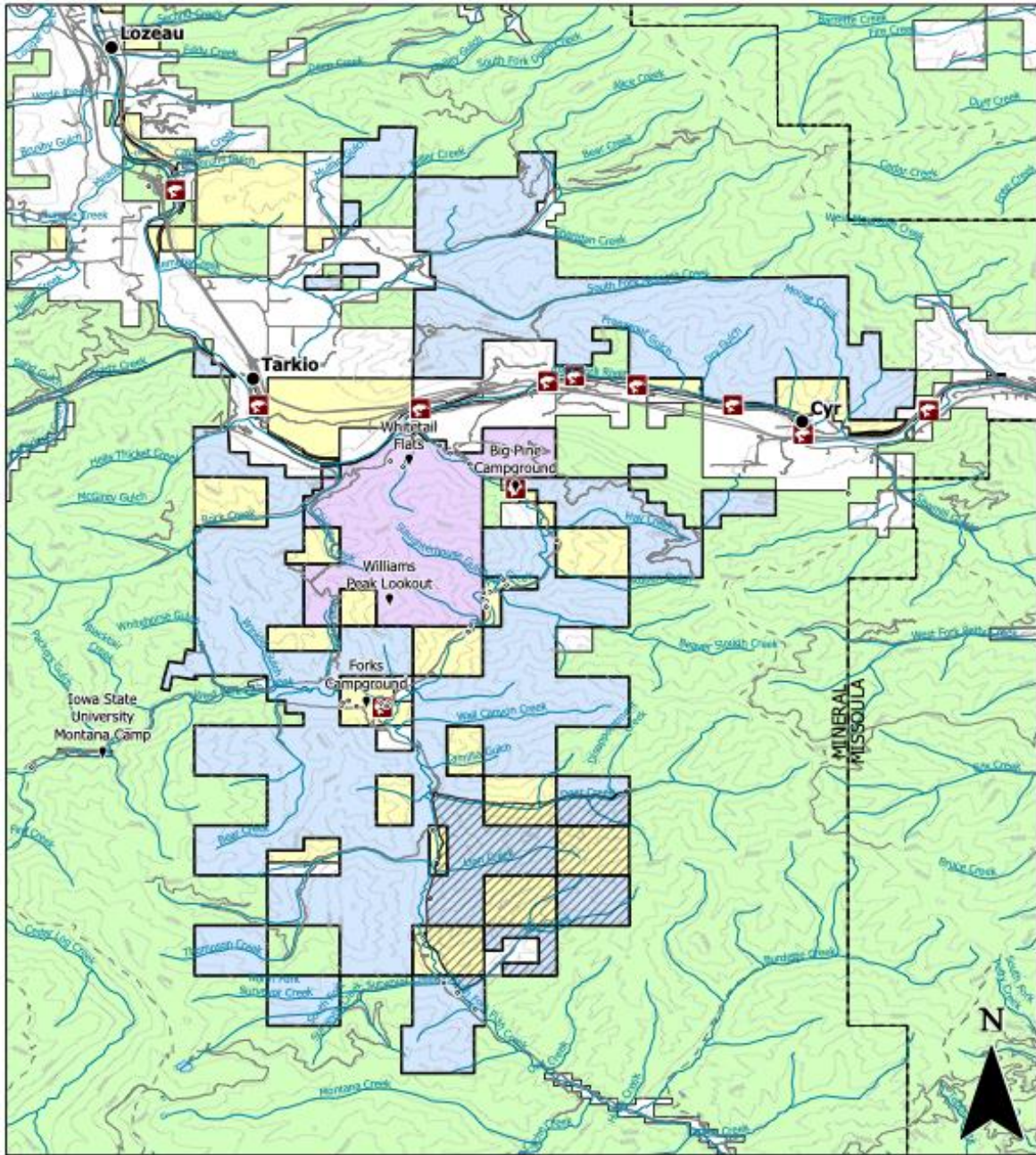
- Interviews with stakeholders (ongoing)
- Site tour with stakeholders (September)
- Online survey (October)
- Public meetings (November/December)
- Draft strategy/plan for review (February 2023)
- Final strategy/plan (March 2023)

Facilitators also invited participants to offer suggestions for additional stakeholders to engage and include in the process via email at [travis.anklam@umontana.edu](mailto:travis.anklam@umontana.edu).



**Appendix A: Fish Creek Participatory Mapping Exercise Map**

**Fish Creek Participatory Mapping Exercise**



Fishing access points	State Easement	Point of interest
Roads	DNRC	Campsite
Trails	USFS	
State Park	Private & other	
Wildlife Management Area	Winter area closure (12/1 - 5/15)	

