

DECISION NOTICE
Cottonwood Fishing Access Site Acquisition
Prepared by Region 5, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
March 9, 2021

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes to acquire an island complex in the Yellowstone River downstream of Reed Point, MT.

MONTANA ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT (MEPA) PROCESS

The proposal has been analyzed in an Environmental Assessment (EA) to satisfy the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA). FWP is required to assess the impacts of the proposed action to the human and natural environment as directed by MEPA. Under the MEPA process, a 34-day public comment period ran from December 11, 2020 to January 13, 2021. Notice was published twice in the Stillwater County News, Billings Gazette, Helena Independent Record, and was posted on the MTFWP and Montana Department of Justice Natural Resource Damage Program web pages.

ISSUES RAISED IN THE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT (EA)

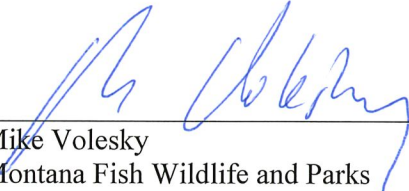
Comments received were largely supportive. Issues of support were public access, wild habitat, economic and human health values, and seeing agencies working together to benefit the public. Negative comments did not demonstrate an EA deficiency. Issues of concern were loss of public revenue through the sale of the land, questions about which agency holds title, camping, human waste, and site management.

GENERAL SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENTS

Fourteen comments were emailed, and one comment was mailed for a total of fifteen comments. There were no issues raised during the comment period requiring additional assessment. Twelve of the commenters provided direct support for the project. One commenter had questions about islands and public ownership. One commenter had concerns about FWP owning the property rather than Montana Department of Transportation. One commenter felt the islands should go to public auction with the funds supporting public agencies and provide relief to taxpayers. Within the supportive comments, these reasons were provided: already used by public, support additional public lands, habitat protection of riparian cottonwood forests, economic and human health value, will provide for a multitude of outdoor activities with unique boat in only access. One supportive commenter requested no camping allowed with recreationalists using the island to prove they can correctly poop in the woods to maintain quality visitation for other public at the site.

DECISION

After review of this proposal and public comment, it is my decision to accept alternative two and move forward with FWP acquisition of the Cottonwood Fishing Access Site.



Mike Volesky
Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks
Directors Office, Helena