



May 26, 2022

Dear Interested Citizen:

Thank you for your thoughtful comments on the February 2022 Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) that proposed a fee simple acquisition of approximately 3.5 acres of private land along the Beaverhead River west of Dillon and adjacent to Park Street, to be known as Cornell Park Fishing Access Site (FAS). As stated in the Environment Assessment, FWP is undertaking the process of acquiring this parcel of land as a fee simple donation from the Beaverhead Trails Coalition (BTC), a non-profit corporation located in Dillon, MT.

Enclosed you will find a Decision Notice that describes our decision in detail, a summary of the public comments, and agency responses to questions raised.

Please feel free to contact me at (406) 577-7890 with any questions you may have. Thank you for your interest and participation.

Sincerely,

Marina Yoshioka
FWP Region 3 Supervisor
1400 S. 19th Avenue
Bozeman, MT 59718
406.577.7890



Environmental Assessment Decision Notice

**Cornell Park Fishing Access Site
Proposed Land Acquisition and Development****I. INTRODUCTION**

The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) proposes an acquisition of approximately 3.5 acres of private land along the Beaverhead River west of Dillon and adjacent to Park Street, to be known as Cornell Park Fishing Access Site (FAS). FWP is undertaking the process of acquiring this parcel of land as a fee simple donation from the Beaverhead Trails Coalition (BTC), a non-profit corporation located in Dillon, MT.

Description of Proposed Project

Following the acquisition of the land, FWP proposes to develop it as a FAS. Proposed development at the site includes installing a gravel put-in boat ramp; creating walk-in access points along the river; restoring 325 feet of streambank for improved habitat and shoreline stability; adding new picnic sites with tables and fire rings; replacing the latrine with a modern concrete vault latrine; and improving the approach and parking areas accessed from Park Street.

FWP would undertake the process of acquiring the site and creating a new FAS, as well as providing landscape design and streambank restoration along the shoreline. The Kiwanis Club of Dillon (KCD) would continue managing and maintaining the park until the acquisition and improvements are completed. Upon completion, the Kiwanis club will continue basic maintenance of the site under a Memorandum of Understanding with FWP. Other nonprofit organizations would assist in raising funds for projects such as interpretive signage, and erosion control.

Acquiring the Cornell Park FAS would provide an educational opportunity by showcasing healthy riparian habitats and modern stream restoration techniques. Specifically, sloping the upstream streambank and planting native vegetation, the public would have a greater understanding of how healthy terrestrial systems provide a more meaningful, natural experience, including fishing, swimming, sightseeing, or picnicking. The proposed FAS would facilitate easy access to the Beaverhead River for fishing, floating, boating, swimming, picnicking, and wildlife-watching.

These improvements include improving and developing a new county road approach and parking area. A ramp for launching watercraft and walk-in river access points would also be installed. FWP would implement streambank restoration measures to mitigate erosion to the extent possible.

Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) Process and Public Involvement

FWP released a draft environmental assessment (EA) for a 30-day public review period on March 28, 2022, with comments closing on April 25, 2022.

A legal notice was published twice in the Dillon Tribune and posted on FWP's webpage: <http://fwp.mt.gov> ("News," then "Public Notices"). The Draft EA was also available on this webpage, along with the opportunity to submit comments online. Copies were available at the FWP Region 3 Headquarters in Bozeman and the FWP State Headquarters in Helena. A news release was prepared and distributed to a standard list of media outlets interested in FWP Region 3 issues. The news release was also posted on FWP's website <http://fwp.mt.gov> ("News," then "News Releases"). In addition, this news release was posted on FWP Region 3's website <http://fwp.mt.gov/regions/r3/>. Direct mailing or email notification was made to adjacent landowners and other interested parties to ensure their knowledge of the proposed project.

II. KEY MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

The EA evaluated the potential impacts of the following alternatives:

Alternative A: No Action

Under the No Action Alternative, FWP would not acquire and develop the Cornell Park FAS. Neither BTC nor KCD have the resources to maintain this land for fishing access over the long term, to install improvements such as a permanent latrine, new parking area, or erosion control measures, or to holistically manage for the public use. Existing cottonwoods would continue deteriorating, posing additional safety risks. There may be no further improvements to park infrastructure, safety, environment, or riverbank stability.

Alternative B: Proposed Action

Transferring ownership of the site to FWP would improve public access to the Beaverhead River. Development of this property as an FAS would facilitate floating between it and Selway Park FAS. FWP has a long-standing relationship with BTC which includes the development of the Selway Park FAS, also on the Beaverhead River. The proposed FAS would facilitate easy access to the Beaverhead River for fishing, floating, boating, swimming, picnicking, and wildlife-watching.

Improving the FAS site includes developing a new county road approach and parking area and reclaiming the existing approach and parking area. A put-in ramp and river access points would also be installed. The existing picnic area would be improved with updated picnic sites and fire rings. FWP would implement streambank restoration measures to halt erosion to the extent possible.

III. SUMMARY OF AND RESPONSE TO PUBLIC COMMENT

Public Comments Received:

FWP received 11 written submissions via email. In some cases, multiple people listed the same or similar comments; these comments are summarized and listed once, and one response is provided.

The following is a synopsis of public input received during the comment period and FWP's response to those comments organized by subject matter.

Public Comments with FWP responses

All 11 written comments received supported FWP's proposed option (Alternative B) for the acquisition of land and to improve on the current condition of the FAS.

Signage

1. Concern: There is a need for signs outlining regulations regarding dogs on leash and picking up after your pet.

FWP Response: FWP regulations signage states that dogs must be on leash.

Trash

1. Concern: Lack of trash receptacles specifically for fishing lines and other types of trash.

FWP Response: This site will be managed in a manner consistent with current FAS regulations which state, "Pack it In, Pack it Out."

Riparian Habitat

1. Concern: Has a Montana Natural Heritage Environmental Summary Report been done for the area?

FWP Response: Yes, a heritage report has been reviewed. The proposed restoration of riparian areas will be beneficial to a variety of species.

2. Concern: Were any Native American tribes consulted?

FWP Response: A Montana State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) concurrence letter is on file for this project, which includes tribal consultation efforts.

Location of Boat Ramp

1. Concern: Location of the boat ramp.

FWP Response: All potential sites were assessed, and the proposed location was ultimately selected due to topographic conditions.

2. Concern: Designation of 0 acres in the floodplain.

FWP Response: This site is not located on the current flood plain map and the proposed latrine installation has been permitted by Beaverhead County.

IV. DECISION

FWP Recommended Alternative and Final Decision

Based on an extensive review of public comments and best management practices, FWP recommends Alternative B.

Noting and including the responses to public comments, the draft EA will become the final EA and together with this decision notice will serve as the final documents for this action.

The final EA may be viewed at or obtained from Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Region 3 Office, 1400 S. 19th Ave, Bozeman, MT 59718. Please direct requests and questions to:

Marina Yoshioka
Region 3 Supervisor
1400 S. 19th Ave
Bozeman, MT 59718
406.577.7890



Marina Yoshioka
Region 3 Supervisor

5/26/22
Date

