



# MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

**Meeting Date:** April 18, 2023

**Agenda Item:** Sportsman's Bridge FAS Mitigation Plan for Sportsman's Bridge Replacement MDT Project (BR 82-1(5)5).

**Action Needed:** Final

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 10 Minutes

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**Background:** Sportsman's Bridge spans the Flathead River on Highway 82 between Bigfork and Kalispell. Sportsman's Bridge Fishing Access Site (FAS) is located on the east bank of the Flathead River immediately south of the existing bridge. In 2009, the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) nominated the 686-foot-long bridge for rehabilitation or replacement. MDT intends to replace the existing with a new, safer 706-foot-long structure.

The new bridge and approach will require a wider right of way. Therefore, MDT is requesting that FWP grant it a narrow strip of land (either in fee or easement) of about 1.5 acres along the north end of the FAS where it abuts the existing right of way. This wider right of way would reduce FWP's river front by roughly 70 feet and eliminate the existing access to the FAS, which is partially within the existing right of way. To mitigate project impacts on FWP, including both the grant of land and loss of the existing access, MDT intends to reconstruct the FAS, obtain an easement in FWP's name from the neighboring homeowner's association, and develop a new access road and low water boat launch.

**Public Involvement Process & Results:** MDT has engaged in significant public outreach and received overwhelming support for the project. MDT maintains a project webpage at <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/flathead/> that provides detailed information on the project. FWP is currently conducting a MEPA process to evaluate the proposed action of transferring ownership of land to MDT and securing easement from the Hanging Rock HOA. More details on public participation are included in supporting documents.

**Alternatives & Analysis:** *Alternative A:* FWP would transfer ownership of approximately 1.5 acres of land to MDT. In return, FWP would receive the upgraded FAS including an easement for permanent public access to the site on a new entrance and access road off Hanging Rock Road secured by MDT.

*Alternative B:* The commission could choose not to approve FWP moving forward with the disposal process to transfer approximately 1.5 acres of department land at the FAS to MDT, and MDT would lose the funds for this project and the bridge would not be replaced.

**Agency Recommendation & Rationale:** FWP recommends the commission approve the transfer of approximately 1.5 acres of department land at the Sportsman's Bridge FAS to MDT, and that FWP receive permanent access to the site via Hanging Rock Road secured by MDT contingent upon approval from the USFWS to dispose of the encumbered land.

**Proposed Motion:** I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission approve the transfer of approximately 1.5 acres of department land at the Sportsman's Bridge FAS to MDT and that FWP receive permanent access to the site via Hanging Rock Road secured by MDT contingent upon approval from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to dispose of the encumbered land.