



MONTANA FWP

**Meeting Minutes**  
**ZOOM Virtual Meeting**  
**May 11, 2020**

**Parks & Recreation Board Members:**

Angie Grove, Chair; Mary Moe, Vice-Chair; Erica Lighthiser; Scott Brown and Betty Stone.

**Staff Present:**

Martha Williams, Director; Pat Doyle; Coleen Furthmyre; Karla Mertens-Morse; Tom Reilly; Beth Shumate; Ken Soderberg.

**Guests:** None

**Topics:**

1. **Call to Order**
2. **Board Member Reports**
3. **Administrator Report**
4. **Somers Beach Acquisition Proposal**
5. **Public Comment ~ For Issues Not On This Agenda**
6. **Adjournment**

**1. Call to Order**

Chair Grove called the meeting to order at 9:06 a.m.

**2. Board Member Reports**

Vice-Chair Moe: A couple of weeks ago I went to Giant Spring State Park and it is typical of other state parks, very heavily used, people enjoying being outdoors and were observing social distancing.

Member Brown: There is a counter on one of our trails and the traffic is over double from the same time last year. It's great to see people getting outside walking and being active with their families.

Member Lighthiser: I have not been able to see a state park since quarantine started. Seeing folks in our community enjoying our trailheads, public lands and being respectful of social distancing. I have seen some crowding at trailheads; happy to see everybody getting out.

Member Stone: I haven't had an opportunity to go to a state park since I've been back from Arizona, staying close to home.

Chair Grove: I went to Fort Owen; a lot of activity happening there. Drove through Medicine Rock State Park. I want to give a shout out to state parks and fishing access site staff; they are doing an excellent job of putting signs on the facilities and in the parks clarifying what cleaning activities we are doing and what the public needs to be aware of when they are at those sites. I attended the Citizens Advisory Council (CAC) in Kalispell the day after our last Board meeting. It was my first time visiting with CAC. Good discussions and very helpful. Toured the Somers beach property that we are discuss today and met with the family. It is a beautiful site. Received quite a few emails regarding how parks are responding to the virus and have received a few calls on Smith River. Park staff have done an amazing job; I know it's been another workload for them. Really appreciate all the parks staff efforts during this time.

### **3. Administrator Report**

Beth Shumate, Parks Administrator: We have not had an opportunity to really do much else other than respond to the coronavirus situation since our last Board meeting; the meeting is one of the last gatherings that we were able to have. COVID-19 has brought several changes and challenges to state parks, but we are very honored and happy that we were always deemed essential services throughout all the Governor's orders. Shout out to staff who have been working hard over the course of the past few weeks trying to make sure that all those signs are posted. Our number one goal throughout the pandemic has been for the protection of staff safety as well as protecting the public and all our park visitors. We very much realized the importance of keeping our sites open so people have that safe place to recreate during this pandemic and we understand that very critical role. Our parks visitation has increased 60% compared to this time last year. The Strategic Plan Advisory Committee has been working on the Strategic Plan. We are trying to update and revise our visitation methodology. Have been successful in securing two interns to help assist our parks staff this summer.

Board Members and Mrs. Shumate discussed federal guidelines, Governor's orders, tracking expenses and impact on revenue sources.

### **4. Somers Beach Acquisition Proposal**

The Flathead Land Trust (FLT) and the Sliter family have proposed the sale of 106-acres of Sliter family property on the Northwest shore of Flathead Lake to Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) to become a unit of the State Park System. The property is situated between the Flathead Lake Waterfowl Production Area and the Somers townsite. This property has been used for decades by the public for foot access to Flathead Lake and is locally referred to as the Somers Beach. The North shore of Flathead Lake is a shallow delta which provides swimming opportunity during full-pool and hiking and wildlife viewing opportunities during low pool. The area is a very popular day use site. The property is accessed via North Somers Road where a small gravel parking lot is provided. FLT and the Sliter family have solicited public comment on this proposal and have received a significant amount of positive comment. The property contains inholding property that is owned by BNSF Railway Company (BNSF), and a portion of this inholding is not available for public use because it is part of a larger Superfund site. The BNSF property contains sub-surface contaminants associated with a railroad tie making facility that existed decades ago. FLT and the Sliter family have been in contact with BNSF regarding design features that would accommodate public use while safeguarding the contamination site. The proposed acquisition area has contamination within the groundwater which requires that no soil excavation occur. No vault toilets would be allowed, but Somers does have sewer and water hook-ups. The north shore of Flathead Lake is subject to high levels of erosion and protection of the shoreline may be required to mitigate this phenomenon. We need to make sure any land proposal aligned with our existing policies and strategic plan. Formal public involvement has not been solicited by FWP to date but has been solicited by FLT. Upon endorsement by the Board, FWP would conduct appropriate due diligence, analysis, and a public review process.

Chair Grove: We are not making a final decision today; Beth did a good job of outlining the reason for today's meeting.

Board Members, Director Williams, Jim Williams (Region 1 Supervisor), Dave Landstrom (Region 1 Park Manager), Bill Schenk (FWP Lands Manager) and Mrs. Shumate discussed different logistics on the proposed acquisition.

***Motion: Chair Grove moved, and Vice-Chair Moe seconded that the Parks and Recreation Board endorse this proposal to initiate due diligence to explore purchase of this property.***

Vice-Chair Moe: I just want to clarify that due diligence means all the things we talked about today.

Chair Grove asked for public comment.

Andrea Sliter Goudge, Sliter family representative: We appreciate your thoughtful consideration of the acquisition of our family property. Our family is grateful for the interest by FWP. We hope that visitors will experience admiration and respect for water, mountains, fresh air, and the grandeur of Montana that we all love. We are very encouraged and excited that BNSF has indicated that a portion of its property may be included under a potential long-term lease and together these properties can create a park of exceptional significance.

Laura Katzman, Flathead Land Trust: Thanks to you, Board Members and FWP, for the support of this project and listening to all the comments and input that has been provided. We've been working a long time trying to get the various entities that are major stakeholders or folks that should be involved in this project to the table. Over the last 10 years, BNSF has been at the table and is a strong partner. There is a piece of property they want to keep out of the park, but they have offered funding for infrastructure on their property. We've also worked closely with the Environmental Protection Agency and Department of Environmental Quality and they both have voiced support for this site becoming a future public recreation site. US Fish and Wildlife Service is a key neighbor, efficient model and has also been involved in various parts over the years; they will be influenced by the number of visitors and the potential effects to the waterfowl production area in the future. We have had a lot of input from some of the neighboring landowners to the west, and I think they've had some very good input; their input could be very useful in making sure this site is something that other folks that are adjacent to the property throughout time will be able to live with them and enjoy.

**Action on Motion: Motion carried. 5-0.**

#### **5. Public Comment ~ For Issues Not On This Agenda ~ Adjournment**

Chair Grove asked for public comment.


#### **6. Adjournment**

**Motion: Vice-Chair Moe moved, and Member Brown seconded to adjourn the meeting.**

**Motion carried. 5-0.**

Chair Grove adjourned the meeting at 12:37 p.m.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Angie Grove, Chair

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Martha Williams, Director