Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

PO Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620-0701
(406) 444-3186
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Ref. DO043-06
January 27, 2006

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen:

The attached Decision Notice approves the Ulm Pishkun State Park Final Management Plan for implementation. The plan will guide park operations, recreational opportunities, and visitor services, while protecting the park's resources into the future.

In April 2005, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) announced a draft Management Plan for the park. All public comments were considered and are summarized in the attached decision notice. The Management Plan was modified accordingly.

Copies of the final Management Plan can be obtained from Ulm Pishkun State Park, or by calling the park at 406-866-2217. The final plan can also be accessed on the FWP web site at www.*fwp.state.mt.us*.

Sincerely,

M. Jeff Hagener
Director

Enc.

DECISION NOTICE

ULM PISHKUN STATE PARK
FINAL
MANAGEMENT PLAN

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
1420 East 6th Ave South
PO Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620-0701

PROPOSAL

The proposal is to adopt the Ulm Pishkun State Park Final Management Plan and implement the outlined actions.

PUBLIC PROCESS

The Ulm Pishkun State Park management planning process began in 2003 with a visitor survey and ongoing input from a public advisory committee. A draft plan was released for public comment on April 3, 2005. Direct mailings and Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) web page announcements alerted the public about the draft plan and the opportunity to comment through May 9. Statewide press releases and legal notices were placed in the Great Falls Tribune and Cascade Courier newspaper. The 30-day comment period included an open house held at the park on April 14. FWP met directly with the Chamber of Commerce and several community service groups, the All Nations Pishkun Association (ANPA), and many neighbors during the comment period.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Five people submitted comments during the formal comment period. The draft management plan was modified in response to many of these comments. A summary of issues raised is listed below with FWP's response in italic text.

<u>Prairie dogs need to be controlled in the park.</u> *Prairie dogs will be actively managed to limit impacts to the state, visitors, and neighbors. The park will consult with biologists to develop managing strategies.*

Abandoned cropland should be reseeded into native species. Consider prescribed fire and concentrated cattle grazing, not buffalo, to manage the native prairie ecosystem. *A professional plant assessment will determine the feasibility and costs to revert parklands to native species. The assessment will also determine the need for fire and grazing to maintain native prairie conditions.*

Do not put buffalo at the park; people can view them at other public and private sites in Montana. *A committee will develop a management plan for buffalo to consider all feasibility and managing issues. An environmental assessment will determine impacts of management alternatives and provide additional public input prior to making a final decision about buffalo in the park.*

Redesign amphitheater and landscaping around the visitor center to reduce habitat for rattlesnakes and rodents and increase health and safety of employees and visitors. *FWP will modify maintenance and establish management procedures to reduce conflicts between visitors and rodents and snakes. These procedures will be part of an overall natural resource management plan.*

Cost estimates and funding sources should be considered in the plan. *This management plan provides broad direction for park management. Individual project costs and impacts to the human environment will be assessed as required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) and MCA 12.8.601 - 606. Project designs, further research, future costs, available funding and additional public comment are all needed to make accurate estimates and determine project feasibility. Approving the management plan does not guarantee that the plan's actions will be completed.*

Proposals for storage buildings, more parking space, concessions and vendors are not consistent with protecting the view shed and an area held sacred by Native Americans. *Man-made improvements proposed by the Department and the planning advisory committee will continue to be sensitive to view-shed impacts and Native American values. Individual projects may not be completed if costs, environmental impacts and public input are unfavorable. A storage/workshop facility is recommended to adequately care for equipment and carry out park maintenance. Visitor parking space is often inadequate. Mobile, temporary vendor services are proposed in response to visitor requests to provide better customer service.*

Incorporate adjacent leases held by ANPA into the park to protect the integrity of the jump. *FWP completed a land exchange with DNRC in 2001, which provided contiguous land ownership from the top of the jump to the visitor center. FWP will consider opportunities over the next ten years to protect adjacent lands as they arise and when feasible. Budgets and Parks Division priorities change and may influence the ability to consider land protection options.*

Do not close the park to hunting. *FWP supports land access and hunting, though we must balance those opportunities with visitor safety. The park will allow limited hunting and trapping in designated areas of the park (Section 13 south half, Section 19 south half, portion of Section 24 designated as park land). Weapons will be restricted to bow and arrow*

for big game, and shotgun for upland birds and waterfowl. Written permission must be obtained from the park manager. As the plan is implemented, hunting may be further limited to allow safe use of park land. The public would provide input on these actions through the Montana Environmental Policy Act procedures.

DECISION

Based on public input during the entire planning process and adjustments to the draft plan, it is my decision to adopt the Ulm Pishkun Final Management Plan. Goals and objectives will be pursued through implementing the actions outlined in the plan. Certain project outcomes will be contingent upon the findings of additional research and public input.

APPEALS

This plan is subject to appeal, which must be submitted to the FWP Director in writing, and postmarked within 30 days of the date on this decision notice. The appeal must specifically describe the basis for the appeal, explain how the appellant has previously commented to the department or participated in the decision-making process, and lay out how FWP might address the concerns in the appeal. If the appeal does not meet agency appeals criteria, it may be rejected. The appeal should be mailed to Director, Fish, Wildlife & Parks, PO Box 200701, 1420 East 6th Avenue, Helena, MT 59620. If you have questions regarding this decision notice, please contact the Parks Division at (406) 444-3750.

M. Jeff Hagener — 2/1/06

M. Jeff Hagener, Director
Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Date