

FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: December 10, 2018

Agenda Item: Stevensville Bridge Fishing Access Site acquisition and development

Division: Fisheries

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 minutes

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Background: The site of the proposed Stevensville Bridge Fishing Access Site (FAS) has been a popular user-pioneered area on the Bitterroot River for decades, despite being privately owned and undeveloped. Prior to January 2018, the landowner closed off (what had been unofficial) access to the public. Access to the river was being sought by many, including local citizens, anglers, sportsman's groups, Ravalli County and the Town of Stevensville (Town), as well as FWP. The new landowner is offering to donate approximately 6.25 acres of land to FWP at this site, which includes the area traditionally used by anglers and boaters. The donation requires that FWP develop and manage the site as a public FAS; therefore, development plans are included with this fee-title acquisition proposal. (The deed would include a reversionary clause that requires FWP to develop and manage the land as a public FAS; if FWP failed to do so, the land would revert to the private landowner. In accepting the donation, FWP would also agree to develop a Management Plan specific to the development and maintenance of the FAS and to meet regularly with the landowner regarding the plan.) Proposed development includes parking (including an agreement with the Town for space in its River Park that is adjacent to the FAS), a latrine, fencing the riparian area, and 4 camping spots. The current boat launch configuration would remain. If approved, construction could begin in the spring of 2019.

Public Involvement Process & Results: FWP met several times with the Town, including the mayor, citizens and the Parks Board, often in a public forum. FWP held a scoping meeting in Stevensville to get comment on draft design ideas prior to the release of the draft EA. A 30-day comment period was completed for the draft EA. FWP received public comment from 24 individuals and organizations; none were opposed to the proposed acquisition and development. Twenty commenters supported the preferred Alternative B as proposed; 2 wanted a different development plan (one chose Alternative C, the other had a significantly different design), and 2 supporting the proposal did not want camping.

Alternatives and Analysis: A) Do nothing: This would result in the likely loss of public fishing access that is very important locally. B) Implement the preferred fee-title land acquisition and development alternative that incorporates public sentiment and cooperation with the Town to partially utilize its River Park to provide recreational opportunity. C) Implement a fee-title land acquisition and develop the site--but do not work with the Town, in the event it does not want to provide parking at its River Park, which allows further protection of the riparian area. The Town is able and willing to cooperate, so Alternative C was not pursued.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: Implement Alternative B whereby FWP accepts the fee-title land donation and develops and manages the property as an FAS as proposed. Much effort has gone into finding a solution that incorporates landowner, public and Town input, and public comment in support reflects this work.

Proposed Motion: I move that the FW Commission approve the land acquisition and development per Alternative B in the EA, accepting fee-title donation of the land and developing the Stevensville Bridge FAS.