DRAFT
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Property Acquisition
Thompson River Fishing Access Site

March 2020

Thompson River Fishing Access Site
Draft Environmental Assessment
MEPA, NEPA, MCA 23-1-110 CHECKLIST

PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

1. Type of proposed state action:
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) proposes to purchase 40-acres on the Thompson River to be managed as an undeveloped, walk-in Fishing Access Site (FAS) approximately five miles east of the city of Thompson Falls. This proposal would preserve intact habitat for critical fish and wildlife species, while allowing public access.

2. Agency authority for the proposed action:
The 1977 Montana Legislature enacted Section 87-1-605, Montana Code Annotated (MCA), which directs Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks (FWP) to acquire, develop and operate a system of fishing accesses. The legislature earmarked a funding account to ensure that the fishing access site program would be implemented. Sections 23-1-105, 23-1-106, 15-1-122, 61-3-321, and 87-1-303, MCA, authorize the collection fees and charges for the use of state park system units and fishing access sites, and contain rule-making authority for their use, occupancy, and protection. Furthermore, Section 23-1-110, MCA, and Administrative Rules of Montana (ARM) 12.2.433 guides public involvement and comment for the improvements at state parks and fishing access sites, which this document provides.

ARM 12.8.602 requires the Department to consider the wishes of users and the public, the capacity of the site for development, environmental impacts, long-range maintenance, protection of natural features and impacts on tourism as these elements relate to development or improvement to fishing access sites or state parks. This document will illuminate the facets of the proposed project in relation to this rule. See Appendix A for HB 495 qualification.

3. Name of project:
Property Acquisition
Thompson River Fishing Access Site

4. Project sponsor:
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Region 1
5427 Highway 200
Thompson Falls, MT 59873
(406) 382-3032

5. Anticipated Schedule:
Estimated Public Comment Period: April 2020
Estimated Decision Notice: May 2020
FWP Commission and Land Board Consideration: June/July 2020

6. Location:

The Thompson River enters the upper end of Thompson Falls Reservoir on the Clark Fork River approximately five miles east of Thompson Falls, Montana. The proposed FAS is located on the lower mile of the Thompson River. The lower boundary of the property is about 1/3 mile upstream of Highway 200. The land is in Section 18, Township 21 North, Range 28 West (Figures 2 and 3).

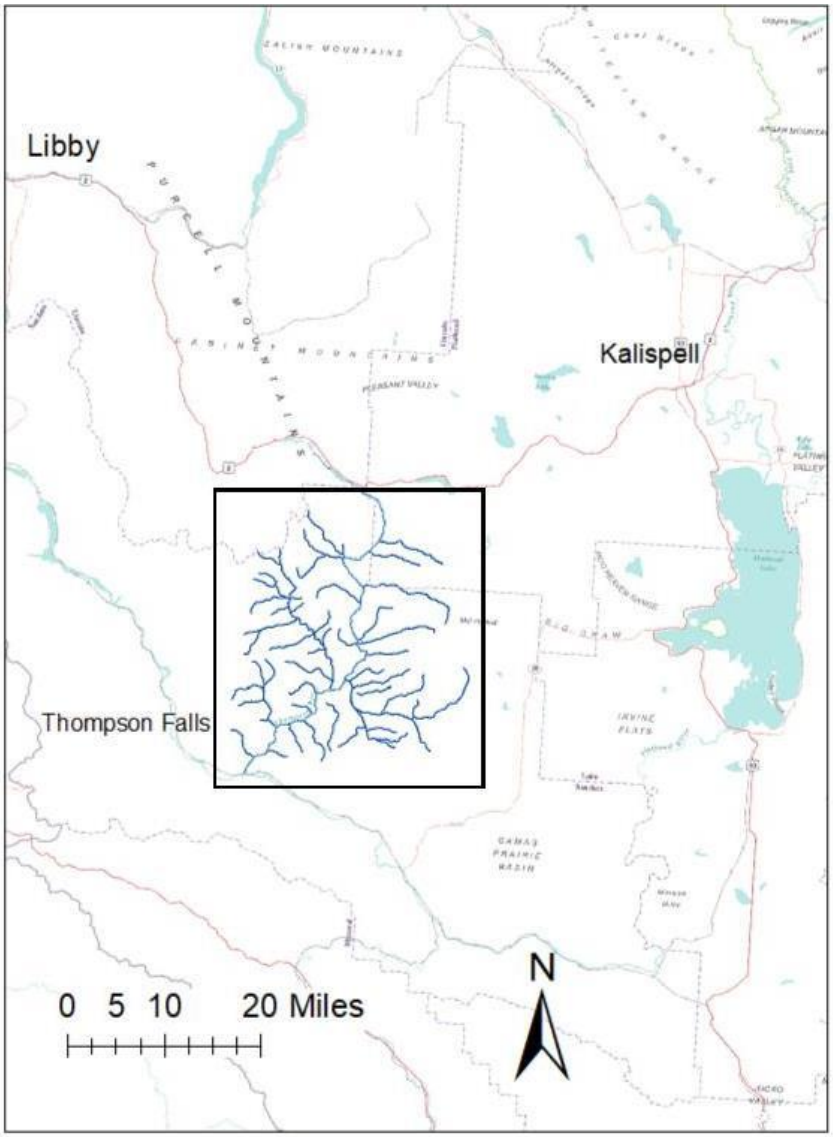

Figure 1. The Thompson River drainage in Northwest Montana.

Figure 2. Lots proposed for purchase on the lower Thompson River near Thompson Falls, Montana, with proximity to Thompson Falls Reservoir on the Clark Fork River.

Project size:

	Acres		Acres
(a) Developed:		(d) Floodplain	2.0
Residential	0		
Industrial	0	(e) Productive:	
		Irrigated cropland	0
(b) Open Space/ Woodlands/Recreation	33.5*	Dry cropland	0
		Forestry	0
(c) Riparian/Wetland Areas	6.5*	Rangeland	0
		Other	0

* Approximate acreages.

8. Local, State or Federal agencies with overlapping or additional jurisdiction:

(a) Permits: No permits required.

(b) Funding:

Agency Name	Funding Amount
Avista Clark Fork Settlement Agreement	$ 150,000
NorthWestern Energy Adaptive Mitigation Fund	$ 100,000
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Acquisition Fund	$ 40,000
Trout Unlimited Westslope Chapter	$ 5,000
TOTAL	$ 295,000

(c) Other Overlapping or Additional Jurisdictional Responsibilities

Agency Name	Type of Responsibility
Montana Natural Heritage Program	Species of Concern (Appendix B)
Sanders County Weed District	Weed Management Coordination (Appendix C)

Section 7-22-2154 (2), MCA requires a weed inspection by the county weed district before acquiring new land. The weed inspection has been completed by Sanders County Weed District (Appendix D Weed Inventory).

9. Narrative summary of the proposed action:

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks proposes to purchase 40-acres on the Thompson River from The Conservation Fund to be managed as an undeveloped, walk-in Fishing Access Site (FAS) approximately five miles east of the city of Thompson Falls. The property contains intact upland and riparian habitat and would provide access to approximately 2,500 feet of river frontage along both banks of the Thompson River. Since 1982, the Thompson River has averaged over 8,000 annual angler days with a maximum of over 13,000 in 2015. The mainstem fishery primarily consists of rainbow and brown trout, but many of the river's intact tributaries provide excellent spawning and rearing habitat for native salmonids. A recent study conducted on the Thompson River verified that bull trout which originate in its tributaries spend a considerable amount of time in the mainstem Thompson River (Glaid 2017). The lower seven miles of the Thompson River possess the coldest water and provide the best habitat for native fish. A PIT tag antenna near the confluence with the Clark Fork River recently documented bull trout usage of the lower Thompson River during every calendar month of the year. The property is also located close to the Mount Silcox Wildlife Management Area, and adjacent to United States Forest Service administered land. It provides excellent wildlife habitat for bighorn sheep, elk, deer and other game and non-game species (Figure 3).

Based on observational data provided by the Montana Natural History Program, 12 sensitive species are found in the vicinity of the proposed property acquisition including westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout (Table 1). Purchase of this property would prevent residential development, which would preserve sensitive fish and wildlife habitat and allow for continued terrestrial wildlife movement (Appendix B).

Other native fish species that occur within the property include mountain whitefish, longnose suckers, largescale suckers, northern pikeminnow, various sculpin species, and longnose dace. Non-native fish species include rainbow trout, brown trout, and brook trout. Terrestrial wildlife species that occur within the proposed acquisition area include white-tailed deer, elk, bighorn

sheep, coyote, red fox, mountain lion, moose, black bear, beaver, river otter, muskrats, small mammals, bald eagles, osprey, other raptors, waterfowl, and migratory and neotropical song birds.

Table 1. Montana State Species of Concern (SOC) or other sensitive species found near the property.

Common Name	Scientific Name
Bull Trout	Salvelinus confluentus
Westslope Cutthroat Trout	Oncorhynchus clarkii lewisi
Bald Eagle	Haliaeetus leucocephalus
Townsend's Big-eared Bat	Corynorhinus townsendii
Golden Eagle	Aquila chrysaetos
Hoary Bat	Lasiurus cinereus
Grizzly Bear	Ursus arctos
Pygmy Shrew	Sorex hoyi
Varied Thrush	Ixoreus naevius
Fisher	Pekania pennanti
Wolverine	Gulo gulo
Peregrine Falcon	Falco peregrinus

Figure 3. Bighorn Sheep on the Thompson River Road immediately adjacent to the property (left), and large bull trout sampled by FWP crews in the mainstem Thompson River which was documented within the property (right).

The vegetation found on the proposed acquisition consists of upland grassland, riparian shrub, and woodland. Noxious weeds found on the property include spotted knapweed, St. John's Wort, and common mullein. Noxious weeds are primarily limited to the old roadbed and existing power-line corridor and occur in low abundance.

The acquisition would maintain the habitat in its current primitive state and would allow for walk-in access only. The site would be managed by FWP as a Fishing Access Site (FAS) for day-use only, angling and other appropriate recreational access such as wildlife viewing, picnicking, walking, and hunting. An existing 240-foot pull-out (parking area) already exists on a county road easement less than 200 feet upstream of the proposed acquisition and adjacent to land administered by the Lolo National Forest (Figure 4). This parking area will accommodate greater than ten vehicles and already contains FWP signage with fishing regulations (Figure 5). An existing roadbed on the property will be blocked off to vehicle access. If the current parking area is found to be insufficient, a new EA would be released for the development of the existing roadbed into a parking area.

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks personnel would periodically monitor and patrol the site for violations, and FWP Game Wardens would enforce FWP rules and regulations at the site as needed. This would provide a unique access point to the lower Thompson River, as anglers would be able to walk in and separate themselves from the abundant roads present in the Thompson River drainage. Currently, most access to the lower Thompson River is within sight of at least one road. Noxious weeds would be controlled using the Statewide Integrated Weed Management Plan. If acquired, additional regulation and informational signs may be installed.

Figure 4. North end of the proposed acquisition showing proximity to established parking area and United States Forest Service land. If acquired, the existing roadbed would be closed to vehicular access.

Figure 5. The existing parking area on a county road right-of-way just upstream of the proposed FAS and adjacent to United States Forest Service land. Two FWP signs already exist at this parking area.

This site was first investigated for purchase in 2017. Local FWP biologists worked with hydropower company mitigation programs, the FWP lands unit, and Trout Unlimited to secure funding for the purchase. In June 2019, the Montana Fish and Wildlife Commission endorsed FWP continuing its assessment and due diligence of the acquisition. An appraisal was conducted on the property in summer 2019 at the recommendation of FWP, and the property appraised for $320,000 based on the property's development potential. Throughout the process, FWP has worked with The Conservation Fund, a national non-profit organization, to engage in discussions with the sellers. In January 2020, The Conservation Fund acquired the property. In March 2020, FWP anticipates that all pieces of the funding will be confirmed for FWP to acquire the property. The Conservation Fund will sell the property to FWP for $295,000, which is $25,000 less than the appraised value, assuming FWP can acquire the property in a timely manner. The final sale would be dependent on the Fish and Wildlife Commission and State Land Board approval.

PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

1. **Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives:**

   Alternative A: No Action
   If no action was taken, FWP would not purchase the property. The lots would remain private and closed to public access. The lots would likely be developed with septic systems, dwellings, and roads. Some level of modification to the riparian vegetation would likely occur.

   Alternative B: Proposed Action
   FWP would acquire forty acres of property along the Thompson River for inclusion in the statewide Fishing Access Site (FAS) system. The new FAS would be day-use only and managed for walk-in access with minimal development. Acquisition of the property by FWP would ensure future public access and resource protection and would preclude private development that would likely include roads, residences, septic systems, and other disturbances that could negatively impact this important aquatic and recreational resource. The existing roadbed between the highway and the river in Figure 4 would be closed to vehicle traffic and parking would be restricted to the pull-out area shown in Figure 5.

2. **Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency:**
   None

PART III. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW CHECKLIST

Evaluation of the impacts of the Proposed Action including secondary and cumulative impacts on the Physical and Human Environment.

A. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

1. LAND RESOURCES Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
a. **Soil instability or changes in geologic substructure?		X				1a.
b. Disruption, displacement, erosion, compaction, moisture loss, or over-covering of soil, which would reduce productivity or fertility?		X				1a.
c. **Destruction, covering or modification of any unique geologic or physical features?		X				1a.
d. Changes in siltation, deposition or erosion patterns that may modify the channel of a river or stream or the bed or shore of a lake?		X				1a.
e. Exposure of people or property to earthquakes, landslides, ground failure, or other natural hazard?		X			.	

1a. The proposed acquisition would have no effect on existing soil patterns, structures, productivity, fertility, or instability because no additional soil-disturbing activities are planned for the property by FWP. No development of the site is planned.

2. AIR Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
a. **Emission of air pollutants or deterioration of ambient air quality? (Also see 13 (c).)		X				2a.
b. Creation of objectionable odors?		X				
c. Alteration of air movement, moisture, or temperature patterns or any change in climate, either locally or regionally?		X				
d. Adverse effects on vegetation, including crops, due to increased emissions of pollutants?		X				
e. ***For P-R/D-J projects, will the project result in any discharge, which will conflict with federal or state air quality regs? (Also see 2a.)		NA				

2a. No impact to air quality is expected as vehicle use will be limited to existing parking areas on the perimeter of the property on an existing road. The old roadbed within the property will be blocked from vehicular access.

3. **WATER** **Will the proposed action result in:**	**IMPACT ∗**					
	Unknown ∗	**None**	**Minor ∗**	**Potentially Significant**	**Can Impact Be Mitigated ∗**	**Comment Index**
a. ∗Discharge into surface water or any alteration of surface water quality including but not limited to temperature, dissolved oxygen or turbidity?		X				3a.
b. Changes in drainage patterns or the rate and amount of surface runoff?		X				
c. Alteration of the course or magnitude of floodwater or other flows?		X				
d. Changes in the amount of surface water in any water body or creation of a new water body?		X				
e. Exposure of people or property to water related hazards such as flooding?		X				
f. Changes in the quality of groundwater?		X				
g. Changes in the quantity of groundwater?		X				
h. Increase in risk of contamination of surface or groundwater?		X				
i. Effects on any existing water right or reservation?		X				
j. Effects on other water users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quality?		X				
k. Effects on other users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quantity?		X				
l. ∗∗∗∗For P-R/D-J, will the project affect a designated floodplain? (Also see 3c.)		NA				
m. ∗∗∗For P-R/D-J, will the project result in any discharge that will affect federal or state water quality regulations? (Also see 3a.)		NA				

3a. No development is proposed within the potential project area. Therefore, no impacts to groundwater, run-off, floodwater, water quality, or water quantity are expected. It is expected that walk-in traffic will develop unofficial pathways through the property, but the effects on water will be minimal. Especially when compared to the proximity of the river to multiple roads which exist upstream.

4. VEGETATION Will the proposed action result in?	IMPACT *					
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
a. Changes in the diversity, productivity or abundance of plant species (including trees, shrubs, grass, crops, and aquatic plants)?		X				4a.
b. Alteration of a plant community?		X				4a.
c. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				4b.
d. Reduction in acreage or productivity of any agricultural land?		X				
e. Establishment or spread of noxious weeds?			X		Yes	4a.
f. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project affect wetlands, or prime and unique farmland?		NA				

4a. In its current state, the property contains low numbers of spotted knapweed, common mullein, and St. John's Wort which are primarily found near the old roadbed and power line corridor. If the acquisition were approved, FWP would initiate the Statewide Integrated Weed Management Plan using chemical, biological, and mechanical methods. Restricting access to walk-in only will greatly reduce the spread of weeds. Upland stands of trees are healthy so necessary forest management should be minimal.

4b. No rare vegetation is known to exist at this site. **A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program's (MNHP) Species of Concern database found no vascular or non-vascular plants of significance within the boundaries of the proposed acquisitions.**

** 5. FISH/WILDLIFE Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
a. Deterioration of critical fish or wildlife habitat?		X				5a.
b. Changes in the diversity or abundance of game animals or bird species?		X				5a.
c. Changes in the diversity or abundance of nongame species?		X				5a.
d. Introduction of new species into an area?		X				
e. Creation of a barrier to the migration or movement of animals?		X				
f. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?			X		Yes	5b.
g. Increase in conditions that stress wildlife populations or limit abundance (including harassment, legal or illegal harvest or other human activity)?			X		Yes	5b.
h. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project be performed in any area in which T&E species are present, and will the project affect any T&E species or their habitat? (Also see 5f.)		NA				
i. ***For P-R/D-J, will the project introduce or export any species not presently or historically occurring in the receiving location? (Also see 5d.)		NA				

5a. The proposed action would preserve fish and wildlife habitat in its current state by preventing residential or commercial development.

5b. Bull Trout are present within the proposed project area. While their abundance in the mainstem Thompson River is lower than other salmonid species, they have been detected near the project area at all months of the year. Allowing public access will increase angling activity in this location but will likely not increase overall angler use of the Thompson River. Angling access throughout the Thompson River is already high, including areas more prone to bull trout use (e.g., tributaries and tributary mouths). Additionally, enforcement will be more effective at a well-managed walk-in site than at developed private lots.

B. HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

6. NOISE/ELECTRICAL EFFECTS Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
a. Increases in existing noise levels?		X				6a.
b. Exposure of people to severe or nuisance noise levels?		X				6a.
c. Creation of electrostatic or electromagnetic effects that could be detrimental to human health or property?		X				6a.
d. Interference with radio or television reception and operation?		X				6a.

6a. No additional noise or disruption is expected.

7. LAND USE Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
a. Alteration of or interference with the productivity or profitability of the existing land use of an area?		X				7a.
b. Conflict with a designated natural area or area of unusual scientific or educational importance?		X				
c. Conflict with any existing land use whose presence would constrain or potentially prohibit the proposed action?		X				
d. Adverse effects on or relocation of residences?		X				

7a. The property is currently undeveloped. The property is not currently used for commercial or agricultural purposes. The proposed acquisition would not take land out of agricultural production and would not alter or interfere with the productivity or profitability of the existing land use of the property.

8. RISK/HEALTH HAZARDS Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown *	None	Minor*	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
a. Risk of an explosion or release of hazardous substances (including, but not limited to oil, pesticides, chemicals, or radiation) in the event of an accident or other forms of disruption?		X				8a.
b. Affect an existing emergency response or emergency evacuation plan, or create a need for a new plan?		X				
c. Creation of any human health hazard or potential hazard?		X				
d. ***For P-R/D-J, will any chemical toxicants be used? (Also see 8a)		NA				

8a. If acquired, FWP would address the noxious weeds on the property (Appendix D - Weed Inventory). In conjunction with the Sanders County Weed District, FWP would continue implementing an integrated approach to control noxious weeds, as outlined in the FWP Statewide Integrated Noxious Weed Management Plan. The integrated plan uses a combination of biological, mechanical, and herbicidal treatments to control noxious weeds. The use of herbicides would be in compliance with application guidelines to minimize the risk of chemical spills or water contamination and would be applied by people trained in safe handling techniques.

9. COMMUNITY IMPACT Will the proposed action result in:						
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
a. Alteration of the location, distribution, density, or growth rate of the human population of an area?		X				
b. Alteration of the social structure of a community?		X				
c. Alteration of the level or distribution of employment or community or personal income?		X				9a.
d. Changes in industrial or commercial activity?		X				
e. Increased traffic hazards or effects on existing transportation facilities or patterns of movement of people and goods?		X				

9a. No community impacts are expected. The property acquisition may increase angler use at the site but is not expected to impact overall fishing pressure on the Thompson River.

10. PUBLIC SERVICES/TAXES/UTILITIES Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
a. Will the proposed action have an effect upon or result in a need for new or altered governmental services in any of the following areas: fire or police protection, schools, parks/recreational facilities, roads or other public maintenance, water supply, sewer or septic systems, solid waste disposal, health, or other governmental services? If any, specify:		X				
b. Will the proposed action have an effect upon the local or state tax base and revenues?		X				10b.
c. Will the proposed action result in a need for new facilities or substantial alterations of any of the following utilities: electric power, natural gas, other fuel supply or distribution systems, or communications?		X				10c.
d. Will the proposed action result in increased use of any energy source?		X				
e. **Define projected revenue sources		X				
f. **Define projected maintenance costs.		X				10f.

The proposed project would have no impact on public services, taxes or utilities.

10b. There would be no change in the tax base since FWP would pay property taxes in an amount equal to that of a private individual.

10c. The existing power lines and associated right-of way will remain the same.

10f. Annual additional maintenance costs for the addition are expected to average over $1000.00 per year including weed control and staff time. Maintenance costs are part of the existing FAS Operations and Maintenance budget.

** 11. AESTHETICS/RECREATION Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
a. Alteration of any scenic vista or creation of an aesthetically offensive site or effect that is open to public view?		X				
b. Alteration of the aesthetic character of a community or neighborhood?		X				
c. **Alteration of the quality or quantity of recreational/tourism opportunities and settings? (Attach Tourism Report.)			X		Positive	11c.
d. ***For P-R/D-J, will any designated or proposed wild or scenic rivers, trails or wilderness areas be impacted? (Also see 11a, 11c.)		NA				

11c. Acquisition of the parcel would allow for public river access for fishing, wildlife viewing, and other walk-in activities.

12. CULTURAL/HISTORICAL RESOURCES Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
a. **Destruction or alteration of any site, structure or object of prehistoric historic, or paleontological importance?		X				12a.
b. Physical change that would affect unique cultural values?		X				
c. Effects on existing religious or sacred uses of a site or area?		X				
d. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project affect historic or cultural resources? Attach SHPO letter of clearance. (Also see 12.a.)		NA				

12a. No groundbreaking activities that could disturb cultural resources would be initiated as part of the proposed acquisition.

SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

13. SUMMARY EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE Will the proposed action, considered as a whole:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
a. Have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? (A project or program may result in impacts on two or more separate resources that create a significant effect when considered together or in total.)		X				13a.
b. Involve potential risks or adverse effects, which are uncertain but extremely hazardous if they were to occur?		X				
c. Potentially conflict with the substantive requirements of any local, state, or federal law, regulation, standard or formal plan?		X				
d. Establish a precedent or likelihood that future actions with significant environmental impacts will be proposed?		X				
e. Generate substantial debate or controversy about the nature of the impacts that would be created?		X				
f. ***For P-R/D-J, is the project expected to have organized opposition or generate substantial public controversy? (Also see 13e.)		NA				
g. ****For P-R/D-J, list any federal or state permits required.		NA				

13a. The proposed action would have no negative cumulative effects on the biological, physical, and human environments. When considered over the long-term, the proposed acquisition of property on the Thompson River would positively affect the community by providing public access for angling and walk-in recreation and by conserving the property in its currently undeveloped condition.

PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

The proposed action would have no negative cumulative effects on the biological, physical, and human environments. The preferred alternative would protect the property in its current state rather than allow development. Public access would increase but negative impacts would be minimal as no vehicle access would be allowed.

Based upon the weed inventory conducted by the Sanders County Weed Control District, the proposed acquisitions are relatively weed free, with scattered spotted knapweed, common mullein, and St, John's Wort. If acquired, FWP would initiate the Statewide Integrated Weed Management Plan using biological, chemical and physical methods of weed control.

The proposed addition would have positive effects on terrestrial wildlife species. The property contains intact habitat adjacent to United States Forest Service land and the Mount Silcox Wildlife

Management Area which would be preserved from development under the preferred alternative. Bighorn sheep, elk, whitetail deer, and black bear frequent the property.

The Thompson River is critical habitat for bull trout. The proposed acquisition would likely increase fishing pressure at this site but is not expected to increase overall pressure on the river. Additionally, restricting development and allowing only walk-in access will make for easier angler enforcement and reduce negative impacts on the riparian area.

PART IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

1. Describe the level of public involvement for this project, if any, and, given the complexity and the seriousness of the environmental issues associated with the proposed action, is the level of public involvement appropriate under the circumstances?

The public will be notified in the following manners to comment on the Thompson River FAS/Property Acquisition:

- Public notices in each of these papers: The *Sanders County Ledger, Clark Fork Valley Press, Helena Independent Record,* and the *Missoulian.*
- Public notice on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks web page: http://fwp.mt.gov/news/publicNotices.
- Direct notice will be given to adjacent landowners.
- Draft EA's will be available at the FWP Region 1 Headquarters in Kalispell and the Thompson Falls Field Office.
- A news release will be prepared and distributed to a standard list of media outlets interested in FWP Region 1 issues.

This level of public notice and participation is appropriate for a project of this scope having limited impacts, many of which can be mitigated.

2. Duration of comment period.

The public comment period will extend for (30) thirty days. Written comments will be accepted until 5:00 p.m., April 13th, 2020 and can be e-mailed to rkreiner@mt.gov.

or mailed to the address below:

Thompson River FAS/Property Acquisition
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
5427 Highway 200
Thompson Falls, MT 59873
(406) 382-3032

PART V. EA PREPARATION

1. Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required? NO
If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action.

Based on an evaluation of impacts to the physical and human environment under MEPA, this environmental review revealed no significant negative impacts from the proposed action: therefore, an EIS is not necessary and an environmental assessment is the appropriate level of analysis. In determining the significance of the impacts, Fish, Wildlife and Parks assessed the severity, duration, geographic extent, and frequency of the impact, the probability that the impact would occur or reasonable assurance that the impact would not occur. FWP assessed the growth-inducing or growth-inhibiting aspects of the impact, the importance to the state and to society of the environmental resource or value effected, any precedent that would be set as a result of an impact of the proposed action that would commit FWP to future actions; and potential conflicts with local, federal, or state laws. As this EA revealed no significant impacts from the proposed actions, an EA is the appropriate level of review and an EIS is not required.

2. Persons responsible for preparing the EA:

Ryan Kreiner
Lower Clark Fork River Fisheries Biologist
5427 Highway 200
Thompson Falls, MT 59873
(406) 382-3032

3. List of agencies consulted during preparation of the EA:

Sanders County Commissioners
Sanders County Weed District
Montana Department of Commerce – Tourism
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
- Design and Construction
- Lands Unit
- Responsive Management Unit
- Fisheries Division
- Wildlife Division

Montana Natural Heritage Program
US Fish and Wildlife Service

APPENDICES

A. MCA 23-1-110 Qualification Checklist
B. Native Species Report - Montana Natural Heritage Program (MNHP)
C. Tourism Report – Department of Commerce
D. Sanders County Weed Inventory

APPENDIX A
23-1-110 MCA PROJECT QUALIFICATION CHECKLIST

Date: February 20, 2020 **Person Reviewing:** ____

Project Location: Thompson River

Description of Proposed Work: FWP proposes to acquire two 20-acre lots on the lower Thompson River for conservation and recreational value. Motorized vehicle access will be restricted, but the site will be managed for walk-in fishing access. The protection of this property will continue to provide pristine fish and wildlife habitat.

The following checklist is intended to be a guide for determining whether a proposed development or improvement is of enough significance to fall under 23-1-110 rules. (Please check ✓ all that apply and comment as necessary.)

[ ] **A. New roadway or trail built over undisturbed land?**
Comments: No roadways or trails.

[ ] **B. New building construction (buildings <100 sf and vault latrines exempt)?**
Comments: No new construction.

[ ] **C. Any excavation of 20 c.y. or greater?**
Comments: No excavation.

[ ] **D. New parking lots built over undisturbed land or expansion of existing lot that increases parking capacity by 25% or more?**
Comments: No, parking will be on existing pull-outs.

[ ] **E. Any new shoreline alteration that exceeds a doublewide boat ramp or handicapped fishing station?**
Comments: No shoreline alteration.

[ ] **F. Any new construction into lakes, reservoirs, or streams?**
Comments: No new construction.

[ ] **G. Any new construction in an area with National Registry quality cultural artifacts (as determined by State Historical Preservation Office)?**
Comments: No construction.

[ ] **H. Any new above ground utility lines?**
Comments: No new utility lines.

[ ] **I. Any increase or decrease in campsites of 25% or more of an existing number of campsites?**
Comments: No camping.

[ ] **J. Proposed project significantly changes the existing features or use pattern; including effects of a series of individual projects?**
Comments: No.

APPENDIX B
NATIVE SPECIES REPORT – MONTANA NATURAL HERITAGE PROGRAM

Sensitive Plant and Animal Species in the Vicinity of Thompson River FAS

Species of Concern Terms and Definitions

A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program (MNHP) element occurrence database (http://nris.mt.gov) indicates occurrences of the federally listed threatened bull trout within two miles of the acquisition site in the Stillwater River. No other occurrences of federally listed endangered or threatened animal or plant species have been found within the vicinity of the proposed acquisition site. The search indicated that the project area is within the habitat for the westslope cutthroat trout, listed as sensitive by the U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Bureau of Land Management. MNHP has also recorded occurrences of great blue heron, lake trout, and hoary bat, Montana Species of Concern, within two miles of the proposed acquisition.

Montana Species of Concern. The term **"Species of Concern"** includes taxa that are at-risk or potentially at-risk due to rarity, restricted distribution, habitat loss, and/or other factors. The term also encompasses species that have a special designation by organizations or land management agencies in Montana, including: Bureau of Land Management Special Status and Watch species; U.S. Forest Service Sensitive and Watch species; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Threatened, Endangered and Candidate species.

Status Ranks (Global and State)

The international network of Natural Heritage Programs employs a standardized ranking system to denote global (**G** -- range-wide) and state status (**S**) (Nature Serve 2003). Species are assigned numeric ranks ranging from 1 (critically imperiled) to 5 (demonstrably secure), reflecting the relative degree to which they are "at-risk". Rank definitions are given below. A number of factors are considered in assigning ranks -- the number, size and distribution of known "occurrences" or populations, population trends (if known), habitat sensitivity, and threat. Factors in a species' life history that make it especially vulnerable are also considered (e.g., dependence on a specific pollinator).

Status Ranks	
Code	**Definition**
G1 S1	At high risk because of extremely limited and/or rapidly declining numbers, range, and/or habitat, making it highly vulnerable to global extinction or extirpation in the state.
G2 S2	At risk because of very limited and/or declining numbers, range, and/or habitat, making it vulnerable to global extinction or extirpation in the state.
G3 S3	Potentially at risk because of limited and/or declining numbers, range, and/or habitat, even though it may be abundant in some areas.
G4 S4	Uncommon but not rare (although it may be rare in parts of its range), and usually widespread. Apparently not vulnerable in most of its range, but possibly cause for long-term concern.
G5 S5	Common, widespread, and abundant (although it may be rare in parts of its range). Not vulnerable in most of its range.

MFWP Conservation Need. Under Montana's Comprehensive Fish and Wildlife Conservation Strategy of 2005, individual animal species are assigned levels of conservation need as follows:

Tier I. Greatest conservation need. Montana FWP has a clear obligation to use its resources to implement conservation actions that provide direct benefit to these species, communities and focus areas.

Tier II. Moderate conservation need. Montana FWP could use its resources to implement conservation actions that provide direct benefit to these species communities and focus areas.

Tier III. Lower conservation need. Although important to Montana's wildlife diversity, these species, communities and focus areas are either abundant or widespread or are believed to have adequate conservation already in place.

Tier IV. Species that are non-native, incidental or on the periphery of their range and are either expanding or very common in adjacent states.

SENSITIVE PLANT AND ANIMAL SPECIES IN THE VICINITY OF Thompson River FAS

1. **Bull trout Salvelinus confluentus**

Vertebrate animal- Fish	*Habitat- Mountain streams, rivers, lakes*
Natural Heritage Ranks	Federal Agency Status:
State: **S2**	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: **LT; CH**
Global: **G5**	U.S. Forest Service: **Threatened**
	U.S. Bureau of Land Management: **Threatened**

FWP CFWCS Tier: **1**

Bull Trout do occupy waters within the proposed property acquisition.

2. **Westslope cutthroat trout (Oncorhynchus clarkii lewisi)**

Vertebrate animal- Fish	*Habitat- Mountain streams, rivers, lakes*
Natural Heritage Ranks	Federal Agency Status:
State: **S2**	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: **Petitioned**
Global: **G4T3**	U.S. Forest Service: **Sensitive**
	U.S. Bureau of Land Management: **Sensitive**

FWP CFWCS Tier: **2**

Westslope Cutthroat Trout do occupy waters within the proposed property acquisition.

3. **Haliaeetus leucocephalus (Bald Eagle)**

Vertebrate animal- Bird	*Habitat- Riparian forests*
Natural Heritage Ranks	Federal Agency Status:
State: **S4**	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:
Global: **G5**	U.S. Forest Service**: Sensitive**
	U.S. Bureau of Land Management: **Sensitive**

FWP CFWCS Tier: **2**

Bald Eagles have been observed within the project area and have documented nesting areas nearby.

4. **Corynorhinus townsendii (Townsend's Big-Eared Bat)**

Vertebrate animal- Mammal	*Habitat- Riparian and forests*
Natural Heritage Ranks	Federal Agency Status:
State: **S3**	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:
Global: **G4**	U.S. Forest Service: **Sensitive**
	U.S. Bureau of Land Management: **Sensitive**

FWP CFWCS Tier: **2**

Observations of Townsend's Big-Eared Bats have been documented on the lower Thompson River 3 km to the north of the property and 15 km east of the property at Roundhorn WMA.

5. **Aquila chrysaetos (Golden Eagle)**

Vertebrate animal- Bird	*Habitat- Riparian forests*
Natural Heritage Ranks	Federal Agency Status:
State: **S3**	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: **BGEPA; MBTA; BCC17**
Global: **G5**	U.S. Forest Service**:**
	U.S. Bureau of Land Management: **Sensitive**

FWP CFWCS Tier: **2**

Confirmed nesting area buffered by a minimum distance of 3,000 meters in order to be conservative about encompassing the entire breeding territory and area commonly used for renesting and otherwise buffered by the locational uncertainty associated with the observation up to a maximum distance of 10,000 meters

6. **Lasiurus cinereus (Hoary Bat)**

Vertebrate animal- Mammal	*Habitat- Riparian and forests*
Natural Heritage Ranks	Federal Agency Status:
State: **S3**	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:
Global: **G3G4**	U.S. Forest Service:
	U.S. Bureau of Land Management:

FWP CFWCS Tier: **1**

Element Occurrence data was reported of hoary bat within two miles of the project area. The last recorded observation date was 2010.

7. **Ursos Arctos (Grizzly Bear)**

Vertebrate animal- Mammal	*Habitat- Riparian and forests*
Natural Heritage Ranks	Federal Agency Status:
State: **S2S3**	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: **PS: LT; XN**
Global: **G4**	U.S. Forest Service: **Threatened**
	U.S. Bureau of Land Management: **Threatened**

FWP CFWCS Tier: **1**

Species Occurrence polygons represent the greatest extent of 1) Recovery Zone Boundaries, 2) Demographic Monitoring Areas, and 3) Current Known Distribution within Montana as defined in the 2018 Grizzly Bear Recovery Program annual report. This includes the Bitterroot Recovery Zone, which is not currently occupied by a resident population of Grizzly Bears.

8. **Sorex hoyi (Pygmy Shrew)**

Vertebrate animal- Mammal	*Habitat- Riparian and forests*
Natural Heritage Ranks	Federal Agency Status:
State: **S3**	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: **MBTA**
Global: **G5**	U.S. Forest Service:
	U.S. Bureau of Land Management:

FWP CFWCS Tier: **1**

Confirmed breeding area based on the presence of a resident animal of any age. Point observation location is buffered by a minimum distance of 100 meters in order to encompass the population density reported for the species and buffered by the locational uncertainty associated with the observation up to a maximum distance of 10,000 meters.

9. **Ixoreus naevius (Varied Thrush)**

Vertebrate animal- Bird	*Habitat- Riparian forests*
Natural Heritage Ranks	Federal Agency Status:
State: **S3B**	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:
Global: **G5**	U.S. Forest Service**:**
	U.S. Bureau of Land Management:

FWP CFWCS Tier: **3**

Confirmed breeding area based on the presence of a nest, chicks, or territorial adults during the breeding season. Point observation location is buffered by a minimum distance of 225 meters in order to encompass the reported minimum stand size occupied by breeding pairs and otherwise is buffered by the locational uncertainty associated with the observation up to a maximum distance of 10,000 meters.

10. **Pekania pennanti (Fisher)**

Vertebrate animal- Mammal	*Habitat- Riparian and forests*
Natural Heritage Ranks	Federal Agency Status:
State: **S3**	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:
Global: **G5**	U.S. Forest Service: **Sensitive**
	U.S. Bureau of Land Management: **Sensitive**

FWP CFWCS Tier: **2**

Confirmed area of occupancy based on the documented presence of adults or juveniles within tracking regions containing core habitat for the species. Outer boundaries of tracking regions are defined by areas of forest cover on individual mountain ranges or clusters of adjacent mountain ranges with continuous forest cover.

11. **Gulo gulo (Wolverine)**

Vertebrate animal- Mammal	*Habitat- Riparian and forests*
Natural Heritage Ranks	Federal Agency Status:
State: **S3**	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: **P**
Global: **G4**	U.S. Forest Service:
	U.S. Bureau of Land Management: **Sensitive**

FWP CFWCS Tier: **2**

Confirmed area of occupancy supported by recent (post-1980), nearby (within 10 kilometers) observations of adults or juveniles. Tracking regions were defined by areas of primary habitat and adjacent female dispersal habitat as modeled by Inman et al. (2013). These regions were buffered by 1 kilometer in order to link smaller areas and account for potential inaccuracies in independent variables used in the model.

12. **Falco peregrinus (Peregrine Falcon)**

Vertebrate animal- Bird	*Habitat- Riparian and forests*
Natural Heritage Ranks	Federal Agency Status:
State: **S3**	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: **DM**
Global: **G4**	U.S. Forest Service: **Sensitive**
	U.S. Bureau of Land Management: **Sensitive**

FWP CFWCS Tier: **2**

Peregrine Falcons have confirmed nesting areas on the cliffs of Kookoosint Ridge near the site.

Appendix C
TOURISM REPORT
MONTANA ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT (MEPA) & MCA 23-1-110

The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks has initiated the review process as mandated by MCA 23-1-110 and the Montana Environmental Policy Act in its consideration of the project described below. As part of the review process, input and comments are being solicited. Please complete the project name and project description portions and submit this form to:

Jan Stoddard, Industry Services & Outreach Bureau
Montana Office of Tourism & Business Development, Department of Commerce
301 S. Park Ave.
Helena, MT 59601

Project Name: Thompson River Property/FAS Acquisition

Project Description: Montana State Parks (MSP), a Division of Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP), proposes to purchase 40-acres on the Thompson River to be managed as an undeveloped, walk-in Fishing Access Site (FAS) approximately five miles east of the city of Thompson Falls.

1. Would this site development project have an impact on the tourism economy?
   NO **YES** If YES, briefly describe:

   Yes, as described, the project has the potential to positively impact the tourism and recreation industry economy if properly maintained. The opportunity to fish Montana waters and native Montana fish populations is marketed to destination visitors from around the world, as well as in-state travelers. A 2016 report from the Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research states that Fishing/Fly Fishing as a "Top Outdoor Recreation Activity" reported by 2% of visitors to Montana (2016). Additionally, the report also notes that nationwide participation in outdoor recreation specific to fishing is expected to increase in the coming decades. The Thompson River is home to many larger rainbow trout and provides solid trout fishing in a remote and secluded environment. An additional, walk-in fishing access site would be a valuable addition for non-resident and resident recreationalists.

2. Does this impending improvement alter the quality or quantity of recreation/tourism opportunities and settings?
   NO **YES** If YES, briefly describe:

   Yes, as described, the project has the potential to improve quality and quantity of tourism and recreational opportunities. We are assuming the agency has determined it has necessary funding for the on-going operations and maintenance once this project is complete.

Signature *Jan Stoddard* Date: 2/7/20

APPENDIX D
SANDERS COUNTY WEED DISTRICT WEED INVENTORY

FWP Land Acquisition – Weed Inspection and Report

COMPLIANCE CHECKLIST FOR SECTION 7-22-2154, MCA

FWP Regional Staff: Please return this form to
FWP Lands Bureau, P.O. Box 200701, Helena, MT 59620

Property Name: Thompson River FWP Region: 1

County: Sanders

Date of Property Inspection with County Weed Management District: Feb 13, 2020

County Representative(s): Mark Lincoln

FWP Staff: Ryan Kreiner

County Weed Management District - Inspection Report (Please attach weed inspection report or use the space below to describe noxious weeds present on the property, including observations of weed distribution and abundance):

Spotted Knapweed, St. Johns Wort, Common Mullein

Noxious Weed Management Agreement (Please attach applicable weed management agreement or use the space below to indicate how noxious weeds on the property will be managed when the property is under FWP ownership. Indicate if property will be included in an FWP county or regional weed management plan):

FWP will monitor and treat noxious weeds on the property in accordance with Statewide weed management Plan. Once the property is acquired, the site will be incorporated into the agreement with the Sanders County Weed District.

County Weed Management District Representative: I have inspected the property, and reviewed the weed situation with a representative of Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks. I concur with FWP's weed management plan for the property, as presented above and/or described in the attached information.

Signed: [illegible] Date: 2-13-2020