DECISION NOTICE:
Little Blackfoot Fishing Access Site Improvement Project

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
3201 Spurgin Road
Missoula, MT 59804
(406) 542-5500

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED PROJECT
In 2005, FWP acquired approximately 4 acres of land near Avon for a new Fishing Access Site on the Little Blackfoot River. The acreage sits between Highway 12 and the Little Blackfoot River and two parcels had been owned by Montana Dept. of Transportation (MDOT) and private owners. The MDOT parcel was approximately 2.0 acres in size and had been a highway rest stop from 1964 to 1996. The parcel now consists of a grove of cottonwood trees with a dirt road looping around it and a partially reclaimed approach.

One of the reasons the rest area was closed down by MDOT was because the visibility for vehicles entering and leaving the site was insufficient. When FWP acquired the parcel from MDOT, an additional 2.3 acres of adjacent land was purchased at the same time from a private owner in order to construct a new, safe approach approximately 200 ft. west of the old one. Conditions on the approval of the new approach permit may include, but are not limited to; satisfying current sight distance standards (vegetation removal if necessary), paving the approach to the highway right-of-way boundary, sloping and seeding of reclaimed topsoil slopes, satisfying roadside ditch drainage, and meeting minimum signing and traffic control requirements. These conditions are based on approved approach permits at other FAS locations. Other conditions may be relevant depending on the site and MDT District preferences.

Monies are now available for the redevelopment of this site, which would include: the construction of the new approach referred to earlier; approximately 700 feet of new gravel-surface roadway (0.3 acres); 2200 square feet (0.05) of gravel surface parking area for 10 vehicle spaces; a latrine, barrier rock, and fencing. Five to ten hazard trees may be removed in and around the parking area and cul-de-sac for safety concerns. A minor amount of embankment material may be imported for the approach construction. The majority of the proposed development would be overlaid on existing roadbed that was used when the site was a rest area. This approach minimizes disturbance and lowers the cost. The Little Blackfoot is not a navigable water body so a boat ramp is not going to be constructed, but the parcel has stable banks for streamside angling and the river is generally shallow enough to wade in for fishing. The budget for the improvements is $45,000.

Alternative A: No Action
If no action were taken, the Little Blackfoot FAS would remain undeveloped and receive little use by the public. Public access to the Little Blackfoot would remain difficult, and use would continue to be concentrated along a handful of pullouts along state and county bridges or by permission of private landowners.

Preferred Alternative B: Proposed Action
In the preferred alternative, FWP would proceed with plans to implement various improvements to the Little Blackfoot FAS and open it to the public. These improvements include a new approach and entrance road, a 10-stall gravel parking lot, barrier rock, fencing, signage, and a latrine. The Little Blackfoot FAS is the only designated public FAS on the Little Blackfoot River, and FWP would like to implement the proposed developments in order to provide better public access to this high-quality fishery.

PUBLIC PROCESS AND COMMENT

The EA was sent out and the public comment period began November 10, 2007, and ran through December 11, 2007. Legal notices were published in the *Missoulian*, *Silver State Post* (Deer Lodge), and the *Helena Independent Record.* There were 15 full copies, 5 electronic versions, and 19 post cards about the EA were sent to interested parties consisting of neighbors, friends, conservation groups, Montana state legislators, county & state departments or agencies. The Little Blackfoot FAS Improvement Project EA was posted on the MFWP web site November 9, 2007. A statewide news release was also sent out.

Four comments were received. All four comments were in favor of the improvements. However, a couple of the people had some questions regarding the improvements & management of the site. Was MDOT consulted regarding safety concerns of ingress and egress to the site? *MFWP Response: MDOT was consulted during the acquisition phase to ensure that sight distance could be accomplished with the new approach to the site. Also, an MDOT permit will be needed in order to build the new approach.* Will camping be allowed? *MFWP Response: This FAS site will be managed as a day-use only site, no over night camping allowed.* Will the FAS be operated year-round or only for a portion of the year? If so, concerned that this FAS site will be used as a rest stop more than an FAS since there is a lack of rest areas between Missoula and Helena? *MFWP Response: FWP will have to monitor the use occurring at the site. Since there are year-round fishing opportunities on the Little Blackfoot, the site will need to stay open all year. We may find it necessary to pump the latrine more frequently.* How is FWP planning to manage and maintain this new facility knowing that FAS maintenance dollars are needed? *MFWP Response: FWP is always concerned about this issue whenever we purchase and develop a new site. For this site, we felt that adjustments within our existing budgets (seasonal caretakers and operations) could be made to bring this new site on-line. Also, knowing there are no other public access sites along the Little Blackfoot, FWP felt we needed to move forward with developing this site.*

DECISION

Based on the analysis in the Environmental Assessment (EA) and the applicable laws, regulations and policies, I have determined that this action will not have a significant effect on the natural or human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared. It is my decision to implement Alternative B, the *Preferred Alternative* and proceed with the improvements. By notification of this Decision Notice, the draft EA is hereby made the final EA with the MFWP responses in this Decision Notice. The final EA with Decision Notice may be viewed at or obtained from Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks at the above address or the FWP website at http://fwp.mt.gov/publicnotices/archive_2006,4.aspx.

In accordance with MFWP policy, an appeal may be made by any person who has either commented in writing to the department on the proposed project, or who has registered or commented orally at a public meeting held by the department on the proposed project, or who can provide new evidence that would otherwise change the proposed plan. An appeal must be submitted to the Director of FWP in writing and must be postmarked or received within 30 days of this decision notice. The appeal must describe the basis for the appeal, how the appellant has previously commented to the department or participated in the decision-making process, and how the department can provide relief. The appeal should be mailed to: Director, Fish, Wildlife & Parks, 1420 East 6th Avenue, Helena, MT 59620.

12/21/2007

Mack Long **Date**
Regional Supervisor