Draft
Environmental Assessment

Ennis Fishing Access Site
River Trail Project

MADISON BYWAYS
May 2010

Draft Environmental Assessment
MEPA, NEPA, MCA 23-1-110 CHECKLIST

PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

1. Type of proposed state action: Madison Byways, a community trail group, proposes to create a walking trail loop through riparian meadows and along the Madison River within the Ennis Fishing Access Site. The property is owned by Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks.

Development ___X____

Renovation _____

Maintenance _____

Land Acquisition _____

Equipment Acquisition_____

Other (Describe) _____

2. Agency authority for the proposed action: The 1977 Montana Legislature enacted statute 87-1-605, which directs Fish, Wildlife & 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.

3. Name of project: Ennis Fishing Access Site - River Trail Project

4. Name, address and phone number of project sponsor (if other than the agency):
Madison Byways, c/o Janet Bean-Dochnahl
PO Box 764
Ennis, MT 59729
406 682-4463

5. Anticipated Schedule:
Estimated Construction Commencement Date: July 10, 2010
Estimated Completion Date: July 31, 2010
Current Status of Project Design (% complete): 0

6. Location affected by proposed action (county, range and township):
Ennis Fishing Access Site, Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks
Madison County, Montana
T6S, R1W, Section 4, SE ½ NE ¼, NE1/2 SE1/4

7. Project size:

	Acres		Acres
(a) Developed:		(d) Floodplain	0
Residential	0		
Industrial	0	(e) Productive:	
(existing shop area)		Irrigated cropland	0
(b) Open Space/	20	Dry cropland	0
Woodlands/Recreation		Forestry	0
(c) Wetlands/Riparian	57	Rangeland	0
Areas		Other	0

8. Listing of any other Local, State or Federal agency that has overlapping or additional jurisdiction.

(a) Permits: None required

(b) Funding:

Madison Byways operating for the Town of Ennis — Voluntary Contributions and Labor

(c) Other Overlapping or Additional Jurisdictional Responsibilities:

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks – routine maintenance

9. Narrative summary of the proposed action:

Ennis Fishing Access site is located on the Madison River across the river from the town of Ennis, Montana, 51 miles from the river mouth near Three Forks. The Fishing Access Site comprises 77 acres. Approximately 20 acres of the site is occupied by a campground and boat launch. The remainder is an open riparian meadow and willow bottom which serves as a floodplain for the Madison River.

About the organization proposing the Project:
Madison Byways, an organized local volunteer group, proposes to develop and improve a trail system as a utilitarian, educational and recreational resource for the citizens of and visitors to the Madison Valley. Madison Byways originated from the Horizons project, a community enhancement and health effort initiated across the state by Montana State University Extension Service under a Grant funded by Northwest Foundation. The need for safe and pleasant pedestrian and bicycle corridors in and out of town surfaced as an immediate priority.

The network of byways will:

1) Provide safe routes for pedestrians and bicyclists connecting residential areas to schools, businesses, and recreational facilities.
2) Provide recreational trails accessible from town to contribute to the health and enjoyment of residents and visitors
3) Connect the town of Ennis to public lands, publicly usable lands, and other communities, for hikers, bicyclists, and horse riders.
4) Educate residents and visitors about the natural environs of the Madison Valley, so important to livelihoods and lifestyles in southwest Montana.

Madison Byways has been endorsed by the Town of Ennis and Madison County. The construction

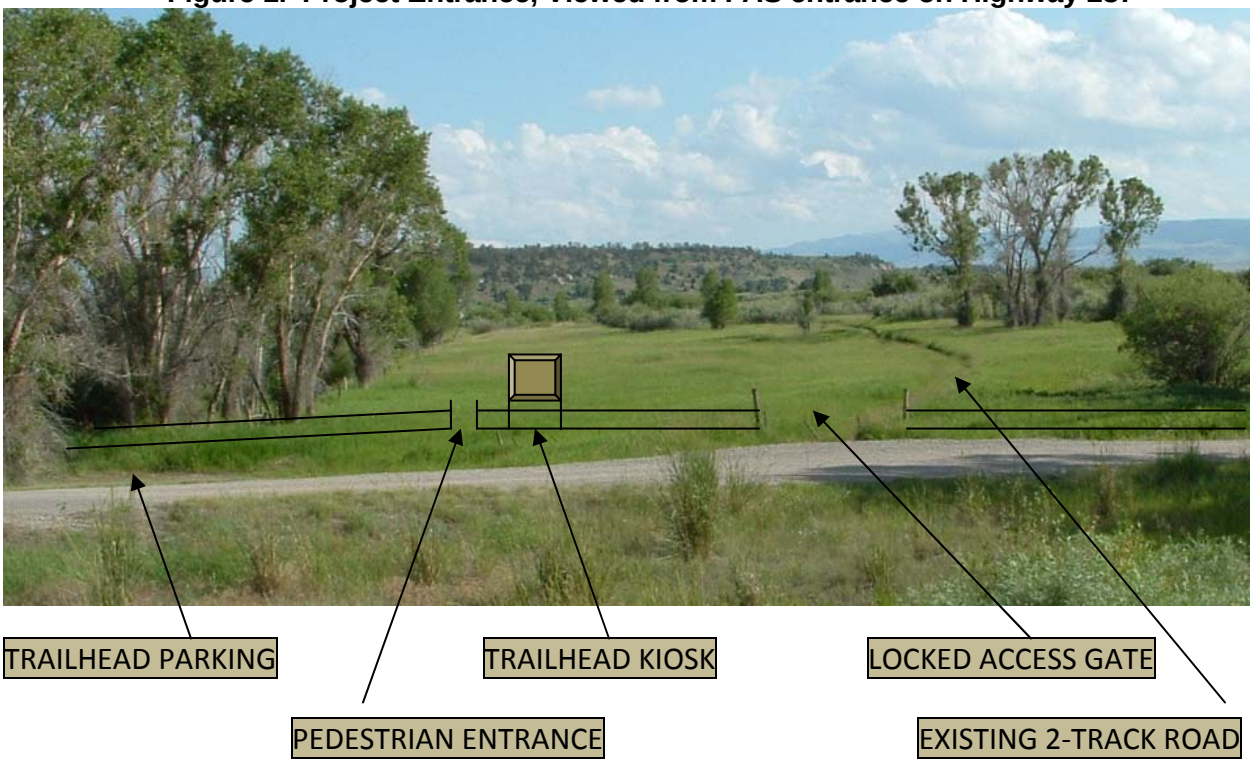
and maintenance associated with this proposal will be conducted under a Cooperative Management Agreement between Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) and the Town of Ennis, representing Madison Byways. Funding requirements will be minimal and will be sought through a grant and voluntary donations of labor, materials and equipment. MFWP will not be providing funding.

About the Project at Ennis Fishing Access Site:
The River Trail Project is a 1.25 mile loop river trail through the Ennis Fishing Access site. This trail is the first phase of an extensive trail system proposed by Madison Byways which will hub out of Lions Club Park, just to the west across the Madison River bridge. The Lions Club Park provides parking, restrooms, and a short paved trail loop, a logical hub for the recreational portion of the Madison Byway system. Trail users who don't walk from town may park at either Lions Club Park or just off the Fishing Access site turn off.

The River Trail Project includes mowing and brushing 1/2 mile of new trail, posting 3/4 mile of existing two-track road as a trail, installation of a trail head sign, reconstruction of 100 feet of property boundary fence with a pedestrian walk-through, and providing interpretive brochures to accompany numbered markers installed along the trail. See Map 1, attached. Ground disturbance will be confined to the post holes dug for trailhead kiosk installation, replacement of a portion of existing fence, and installation of route and interpretive markers.

Winter gorging of the Madison River provides both an interpretive opportunity and a construction and maintenance challenge at the Fishing Access site. In about 40% of the winters, the river leaves its banks, forced out by ice backing up from Ennis Lake, and flows across the floodplain east of the river. The force of water has the power to pick up and move branches, dead snags, rocks, and other obstacles. The water can also scour out sites disturbed by equipment. This project was designed with that impact in mind; no new material will be added to trail locations or remove existing ground cover. Trail clearing will be confined to mowing and brushing. Visitor use over time is expected to compact soils enough to limit vegetative growth on routes without disturbing roots or soil. Signage along the trails will be Carsonite posts which can bend with water flow. The trailhead kiosk is located out of the path of gorge water flow. The trail will be closed during any winter months the river gorges or gorge ice remains across the trail. (*NOTE: over the last 12 years, the river gorged; 2002, 2004, 2007, 2008, 2009 and did not gorge in 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2003 or 2005*.)

Figure 1. Project Entrance, Viewed from FAS entrance on Highway 287



Parking at the trail head is currently available on a hardened unimproved gravel surface. No improvement to the parking area is proposed at this time. The long range plan is for this River Trail and future trails on the north side of the bridge to hub out of Lions Club Park where ample parking is available on paved surface with bathrooms close by.

***Benefits*:** (1) A trail within easy walking distance of downtown Ennis will provide residents and visitors with an exercise path off of traffic routes and a (2) place to appreciate the Madison River and its natural environs. (3) The open riparian river bottom and wetlands provide an excellent interpretive opportunity to educate residents and visitors alike about the Madison River fisheries, waterfowl, wetlands, wildlife habitat, links between open space/wildlife/agriculture, noxious weeds, and the unique hydro-geologic process of river "gorging". (4) The path will also move fishing and campground related traffic from the immediate river bank, protecting bank stability and bankside vegetation, and facilitating fisherman movement. (5) By connecting to the campground road, the trail offers campers an additional recreational opportunity without leaving the site.

10. Alternatives:

<u>Alternative A:</u> No Action

No trail system is developed. Occasional use of the existing two track road continues by the few residents who are aware this is public land. Trail users continue to step over the wire fence. Fishermen access the riverbank from the campground and clamber along the banks.

Figure 2. Fisherman path on the river bank

Figure 3. Existing FAS boundary fence

<u>Alternative B:</u> Proposed Action –

Install a trailhead kiosk. Establish a trail on the native soil/vegetation that won't be scoured by water flow during the gorge. Mark the route and post interpretive sign numbers that link to information provided by brochures available at the trailhead. Replace the steel post barbed wire fence on the FAS property boundary with a pedestrian entrance of wood posts and rails to facilitate pedestrian traffic and continue to exclude motorized traffic other than authorized private access. The fence west of the lockable gate will be steel post and wire. Post a sign along the private land boundary on the south end of the trail loop to prevent trespass onto private land.

Figure 4. Trailhead Kiosk Example

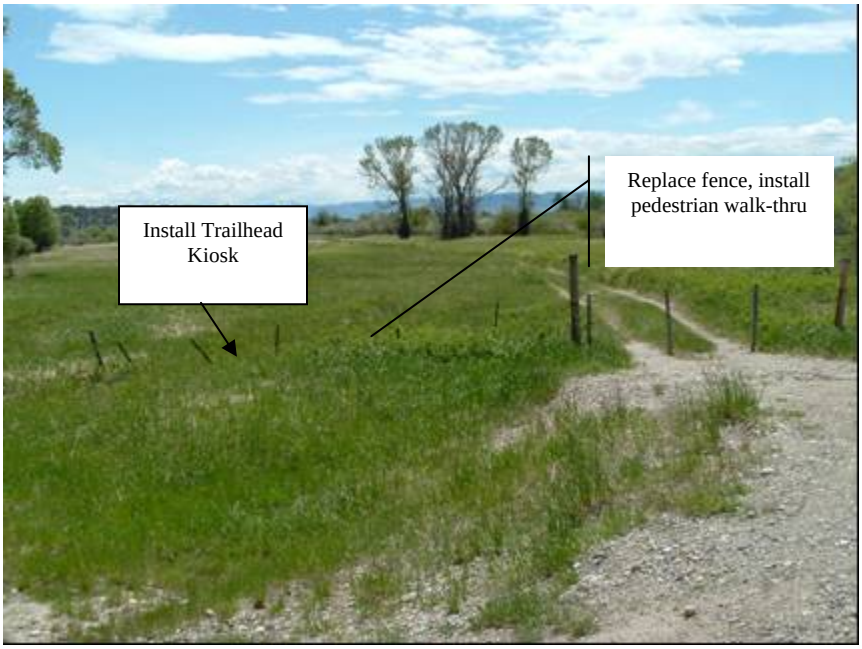


Figure 5. Location of Trailhead Kiosk

<u>Alternative C</u>: ADA Compliant Trail System: Madison Byways considered constructing a trail through the FAS compliant with the American with Disabilities Act, removing existing vegetation and laying packed road mix as a finished surface. In consulting with the FAS manager, the FAS maintenance foreman, and locals who have monitored the effects of gorge water on the FAS, we decided not to fully develop this as an alternative. Gorge water movement is unpredictable. It moves loose material across the floodplain and scours areas where soil is exposed by disturbance. River gorging could destroy any improved surfaces or permanent structures in its path.

PART II. 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				
b. Disruption, displacement, erosion, compaction, moisture loss, or over-covering of soil, which would reduce productivity or fertility?			X			
c. **Destruction, covering or modification of any unique geologic or physical features?		X				
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				
e. Exposure of people or property to earthquakes, landslides, ground failure, or other natural hazard?		X				
f. Other:						

Item b. Trails will be established by mowing vegetation with a brush-hog. No soil disturbing activity will be associated with trail location and establishment due to concerns about the forces of overland water flow during the winter river gorge. No material will be imported to create trail surfaces. Use of trails is expected to be heavy enough to cause compaction along the trail itself, impacting soil productivity in a corridor approximately 2 feet wide by 1/2 mile. No additional compaction will occur on the ¾ mile two track road portion of the trail where occasional vehicle passage will continue on already compacted tracks. Any impact to soil productivity is limited in scale and reversible by removing use of the trail.

Soil will also be disturbed where fence posts are replaced at the trail entrance and the trailhead kiosk is installed. This impact is very confined in scale, to approximately 12 sites less than 2 feet in diameter. Use of a trail and installation of the kiosk are not expected to influence the natural movement of river gorge water through the floodplain.

Item c. The trail will be closed to use during the river gorge

* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.

** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

*** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

**** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

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				
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.)		X				
f. Other:		X				

Item (a) and (b): Establishing hiking/biking trails or recreational use of these trails will not contribute any emissions to the environment. Chainsaw use while reconstructing a short segment of fence and installing a trail kiosk may contribute an insignificant amount of emissions or odor for less than one hour. Bi-annual mowing of the trails will also contribute an insignificant amount of emissions or odor.

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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				
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.)		X				
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.)		X				
n. Other:		X				

Items (a) and (b): Most months of the year, the riparian bottom in the Ennis Fishing Access site has no surface water. Trail establishment and marking will not affect ground water.

Item (e): Five of the last 12 winters, the Madison River has "gorged" out of its banks for variable durations. This is a unique natural hydro-geologic response seen in only a few rivers around the world. Gorge ice forms from the bottom of the river up, forcing the water out of the river banks and across the floodplains. Gorge ice remains in place for some time after the river returns to its banks, being a more dense material than surrounding snow. The force of the river water flowing overland has the power to pick up, move, and redistribute fish, branches, dead snags, rocks, and other obstacles. The water can also scour out sites disturbed by equipment which has been a perennial problem in maintenance of campground and fishing access roads at this site. The trail will be closed during periods the river gorges.

* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.

** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

*** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

**** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

This project was designed with that impact in mind. No new material will be added to trail locations nor will existing ground cover be removed. Trail clearing will be confined to mowing and brushing. Visitor use over time is expected to compact soils enough to limit vegetative growth on routes without disturbing roots or soil. Signage along the trails will be Carsonite posts which can bend with water flow. The trailhead kiosk is located out of the path of gorge water flow near the highway turnoff. The trail will be closed during any winter months the river gorges or gorge ice remains across the trail. (*NOTE: over the last 13 years, the river gorged; 2002, 2004, 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010 and did not gorge in 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, or 2001, 2003, 2005 and 2006.)*

* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.

** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

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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				
b. Alteration of a plant community?			X			
c. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				
d. Reduction in acreage or productivity of any agricultural land?		X				
e. Establishment or spread of noxious weeds?			X			
f. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project affect wetlands, or prime and unique farmland?		X				
g. Other:		X				

Items (a) and (b): Trails will be established by mowing and brushing. Plants will not be destroyed or removed from the site. Compaction will alter the productivity of plants immediately on or adjacent to the trail. Existing use of the two-track road has already affected vegetation along that route. Establishing the additional single track trails will affect plants in a 2 foot by 1/2 mile route. Vegetation in the project area is composed mostly of native and non-native grasses, riparian forbs, and willows. These plant species are common and abundant locally and regionally. The overall effect would not be significant. A portion of the new trail, highlighted in yellow on attached Map 1, will move fishing traffic from the immediate stream bank to a route off the bank 15-30 feet. This will improve the condition of vegetation on the immediate stream bank.

Item (c): The Montana Natural Heritage Program does not identify any species of concern in this area.

Item (e): Canadian thistle already occupies sites within the Fishing Access site. It is scattered throughout the meadow cover type, not just concentrated near roads or walkways. Knapweed has appeared occasionally but has been removed by hand by fishermen and walkers. Mowing and brushing trails and trail use are not expected to exacerbate spread of Canadian thistle. Additional use of the area by pedestrians and bicyclists could conceivably import new weed seeds. Motorized vehicles, more commonly known to transport weed seeds, will continue to be prohibited on the site with the exception of authorized use by adjacent landowners. A commitment to trail maintenance by Madison Byways (Memorandum of Understanding between Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks and the Town of Ennis) will include monitoring and removal of knapweed or other weeds listed by the State of Montana. Canadian thistle, which is ubiquitous on the site, will not be treated. Treatment may cause more damage than the weed itself, and hand removal is not effective due to its rhizomatous nature.

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** 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				
b. Changes in the diversity or abundance of game animals or bird species?		X				
c. Changes in the diversity or abundance of nongame species?		X				
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				
g. Increase in conditions that stress wildlife populations or limit abundance (including harassment, legal or illegal harvest or other human activity)?			X			
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.)		X				
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.)		X				
j. Other:		X				

Item (f):

Species of Concern:

The Montana Natural Heritage Program lists 5 species of concern for this area within Madison County: grey wolf, ferruginous hawk, Sprague's pipit, Brewers sparrow, and bald eagle.

Threatened and Endangered Species: Wolves were removed from the federal Endangered Species List in late March 2008, however legal challenges are already underway. FWP is committed to maintaining a secure, recovered population and will manage for 400 or more wolves. Today, 422 wolves inhabit Montana in about 73 packs and 39 breeding pairs. The FWP Montana Interim Wolf Management Areas with 2007 pack locations shows no wolf packs in this general area.

No bald eagle nests have been observed in the project area, although it is likely that they utilize habitat within the area to some degree. FWP staff have noted 2 nearby bald eagle nests. One is 1.2 miles north east of the northeast corner of the section, the other is ½ mile south of the southwest corner of the section. These nests will not be visible from the trails. .

No Sprague's pipit or Brewers sparrow have been observed in the project area, although it is unlikely that they utilize the wetland/riparian habitat within the area. Sprague's pipit prefers native medium to intermediate grass prairie habitat, and Brewer's sparrow prefer sagebrush habitat. The Natural Heritage Tracker data base does not include any observations for these species in this area.

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No ferruginous hawk nests have been observed in the project area, although it is likely that they utilize habitat within the area to some degree. In southwestern Montana ferruginous hawks nest primarily in rolling sagebrush grasslands. Please see Appendix 1 for more information on these species and their habitat preferences.

Item (g) **General Wildlife Habitat:** White-tailed deer, small mammals (including beaver and muskrat), and the occasional black bear or moose utilize the productive riparian habitat in the Fishing Access Site along with a variety of birds and waterfowl. While residents and fishermen currently use the existing two-track road as a walking trail, visitor use is primarily concentrated in the campground, boat launch, and parking area, approximately 1/3 of the 77 acres. Posting and marking the walking trail will increase the number of visitors to the area. Trails will distribute visitors along corridors throughout the 77 acres. The increased presence of recreationists on the property could cause stress to wildlife populations. Since the site is well-used by the public already, limited added stress may result. Visitation would not be expected to ever be high, and most wildlife species present on the parcel are accustomed to human presence given the presence of a campground and the site's proximity to Ennis.

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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				
b. Exposure of people to serve or nuisance noise levels?		X				
c. Creation of electrostatic or electromagnetic effects that could be detrimental to human health or property?		X				
d. Interference with radio or television reception and operation?		X				
e. Other:		X				

Item (a): During trail construction, use of a brush hog and chain saw may create noise in the FAS for one day. Mowing of the trail for annual maintenance is expected to occur twice a season.

Trail use by hikers and bicyclists will have no effect on noise or electrical levels.

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				
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				
e. Other:		X				

Item (a): The proposed action would not alter or interfere with the productivity or profitability of the existing land use, nor does it conflict with a designated natural area or area of unusual scientific or educational importance.

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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				
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)		X				
e. Other:		X				

Establishing a recreational trail through the FAS, installing a trailhead sign, and replacing an existing fence do not involve activities or materials which may increase human health hazards at the FAS. Any removal of noxious weeds associated with trail use will be done by hand.

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9. COMMUNITY IMPACT Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	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				
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				
f. Other:		X				

Item b): A recreational trail this close to town can serve as an exercise path, a destination for enjoying the Madison River and its natural setting, and an educational experience for residents and visitors alike. As a first phase of an expanded trail system in and adjacent to the Town of Ennis, use of trails by pedestrians and bicyclists can contribute to the health and fitness of the community, reduce the use of vehicles (and the communities' contribution to greenhouse gas emissions) and increase awareness of our environment.

Item (e): Traffic flow: until a safe solution for pedestrians crossing the highway bridge between Lions Club Park and the FAS is worked out with Montana Dept. of Transportation, trail users that don't walk from town will continue to park at the FAS entrance road. As the trail becomes more well-known, vehicles pulling off the highway at the FAS may increase, and the small parking area at the entrance may experience some congestion.

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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				
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				
d. Will the proposed action result in increased use of any energy source?		X				
e. **Define projected revenue sources	Membership fees for Madison Byways Volunteer contribution of machine and labor.					
f. **Define projected maintenance costs.	Trail mowing = 8 hours x $21 (value of volunteer labor) =$ 168 Trail head sign maintenance = 2 hours x $21 (value of volunteer labor) = $42 Fence maintenance = 1 hour x $21 (value of volunteer labor)=$21 TOTAL IN KIND CONTRIBUTION OF Annual MAINTENANCE COSTS = $231					
g. Other:						

Item (a): Maintenance of the 1.25 miles of river trail will require mowing twice a year. This is estimated to require 8 hours of volunteer labor per year after the trail is established. The Trail Kiosk will require annual replacement of the map and interpretive brochures, estimated at 2 hours per year and another 1 hour per year for upkeep of the entrance fence. Maintenance will be covered by a Cooperative Agreement (CA) between the Town of Ennis and Montana FWP. Entering into a new CA will add to government service currently provided by the Town of Ennis. Should Madison Byways default on their obligation to support the CA on behalf of the Town of Ennis, the worst case scenario would be the trails reverting to their original condition and the Trail Kiosk sign would have to be removed.

Additional use of the site may incur some minor increase in Town of Ennis police monitoring of the FAS in the long run, simply because there will be a few more vehicles and individuals coming and going at the site. Most users are expected to be residents and campers.

* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.

** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

*** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

**** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

** 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			
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.)		X				
e. Other:		X				

Item (b) and (c): An exercise/interpretive trail next to town is expected to improve the general aesthetic character of the community. The project will improve the appearance of the entrance to the FAS by restoring the boundary fence and installing a Trail Kiosk with trail and area information (See Figure 2: existing condition of FAS boundary). It will also improve recreational opportunities near the community and increase the quality of recreation at this site.

The Ennis Fishing Access site was established with receipts from hunting and fishing licenses for the purpose of enhancing fishing access. Recreational use of the proposed trail will not interfere with the existing access for fishermen or campers at the FAS. The segment of trail proposed along the river bank should enhance access for fishermen parking in the campground and hiking along the river bank from the end of the campground road. Fishermen currently struggle along a narrow user-created path on the immediate river bank which circumvents large willows and collapsed sections of riverbank. Relocating and brushing out an improved trail set 15 to 30 feet back from the riverbank will facilitate fishing access along this stretch of river. Walkers with loose dogs might conflict with fishermen during busy periods. Dog use in the area will be monitored by Madison Byways, and dogs will be confined to leashes if it appears there is a user conflict. The Trail Kiosk will provide informational signing advising dog owners of potential wildlife and fishermen conflicts.

Item (d): There are no special designations in this FAS.

* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.

** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

*** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

**** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

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				
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.)		X				
e. Other:		X				

Item 12a: The proposed action would not destroy or alter any site, structure or object of historic importance. The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) clearance has been obtained for the proposed project. Please see attached SHPO clearance letter

* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.

** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

*** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

**** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

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				
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.)		X				
g. ****For P-R/D-J, list any federal or state permits required.		X				

Item (a): This EA found no significant impacts to the human or physical environment from the proposed action.

Item (e) and (f): This project originated from a community desire for an improved trail system as expressed at a series of Horizon meetings (2009) sponsored by MSU Extension Service. Preliminary meetings with other agencies, local non-profit organizations, and residents established general support for the project. Only positive response has been received from a series of articles about Madison Byways published in the Madisonian (weekly local newspaper) during the summer, and a Community Open House to sense the need and support for trails held September 30, 2009, attended by 31 people.

* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.

** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

*** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

**** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency:

1. Land Resources: no soil disturbing activity will be associated with trail location and establishment. No material will be imported to create trail surfaces.
2. Vegetation: Noxious weeds listed by the State of Montana will be monitored and removed except for Canadian thistle which is ubiquitous on the site. Treatment may cause more damage than the weed itself, and hand removal is not effective.

PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

No cumulative negative effects are anticipated. No public opposition has been expressed, though the River Trail could increase use up against the adjacent private landowners (Loves and Sonderers) creating a need for better posting of the private land boundary to the south and east.

Cumulative positive effects of this trail, along with trails added to the system in the future, include increasing the attraction of visitors in Ennis to staying longer, increased appreciation for the natural environment, improved health of residents taking advantage of trails for exercise, and reduced green house gas emissions as a result of residents walking on local access routes.

Based on an evaluation of the primary, secondary, and cumulative impacts to the physical and human environment, this environmental review found no significant impacts from the proposed action. In determining the significance of the impacts, Madison Byways (MB) 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. MB 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 affected, 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.

PART IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

1. Public involvement:

The public will be notified in the following manners to comment on this current EA, the proposed action and alternatives:

- Two public notices in each of these papers: *Montana Standard, Bozeman Chronicle, Helena Register* and the local *Madisonian.*
- One statewide press release;
- Public notice on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks web page: *http://fwp.mt.gov.*

Copies of this environmental assessment will be distributed to the 2 neighboring landowners and interested parties to ensure their knowledge of the proposed project.

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 following the publication of the second legal notice in area newspapers. Written comments will be accepted until 5:00 p.m., July 2, 2010 and can be mailed to the address below:

Jerry Walker
Ennis FAS Comment
1400 South 19th Avenue
Bozeman MT 59718-5496

Electronic comments may be sent to gwalker@mt.gov

PART V. EA PREPARATION

1. Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required? (YES/NO)? No

If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action.

Physical impacts of a low-impact trail system through the Fishing Access Site are minimal. Some increased use may disturb movement of white-tailed deer, but no other species of concern or critical habitats will be affected. Social impacts include increased use of the area, minor potential for conflict of use with dog-walkers, and minor increased use of the parking area just off highway 287. River gorging some winters may require closing the area to use, and affects the design and location trails and signing in the area.

2. Person responsible for preparing the EA:

Janet Bean-Dochnahl, Madison Byways, River Trail Coordinator
Employed as an Environmental Planner, US Forest Service
PO Box 764
Ennis, MT 59729

406 682-4463
beandocs@gmail.com

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

Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks:
- Fishing Access Site Manager, Todd Garrett
- River Recreation Manager, Molly Wainwright
- State Fishing Access Site Coordinator, Alan Kuser
- State Recreational Trails Grant Coordinator, Steve Gilbert
- Fisheries Biologist, Mike Vaughn
- Wildlife Biologist, Julie Cunningham (see attached Appendix C)
- Legal Bureau

Madison Conservation District, Mel McKitrick
USDA, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Marni Thompson, Sheridan, MT
Montana State Historic Preservation Office (see attached Appendix E)
Montana Department of Commerce, Tourism Bureau (see attached Appendix D)
Montana Natural Heritage Program, Species of Concern Data Base
http://mtnhp.org/SpeciesOfConcern/Default.aspx
Town of Ennis, Council of Commissioners
Madison County Commissioners and County Planner

Other Organizations Consulted about this trail proposal:

- Ennis Lions Club
- Madison River Foundation
- Madison Ranchlands
- Madison County Economic Development Council

APPENDICES

A. Sensitive Plants and Animals in the Ennis FAS Area
B. Ennis FAS Map with Proposed Trails
C. Fish Wildlife and Parks Wildlife Biologist Review
D. Tourism Report – Department of Commerce
E. Clearance Letter – State Historic Preservation Office

Appendix A

Sensitive Plants and Animals in the Ennis FAS Area

Species of Concern Terms and Definitions

A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program (MNHP) element occurrence database (http://nris.mt.gov) indicates no known occurrences of federally listed threatened, endangered, or proposed threatened or endangered plant species in the proposed project site. The search did indicate the project area is within Gray Wolf, Bald Eagle, Sprague's Pipit, Brewers Sparrow and Ferruginous Hawk habitat.

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.

Threatened or Endangered Plants and Animals in the Ennis FAS Area

1. Canis lupus (Gray Wolf)

Natural Heritage Ranks:
State: **S3**
Global: **G4**

Federal Agency Status:
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: **Endangered**
U.S. Forest Service: **Endangered**
U.S. Bureau of Land Management: **Special Status**

Today, 422 wolves inhabit Montana in about 73 packs and 39 breeding pairs. No element occurrence of wolves were identified in the proximate area of the FAS.

2. *Haliaeetus leucocephalus* (Bald Eagle)

Natural Heritage Ranks:	Federal Agency Status:
State: **S3**	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: **DM**
Global: **G5**	U.S. Forest Service: Threatened
	U.S. Bureau of Land Management: **Special Status**

No element occurrence of the bald eagles were identified in the area.

3. *Anthus spragueii (*Sprague's Pipit)

Natural Heritage Ranks:	Federal Agency Status:
State: **S3B**	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:
Global: **G4**	U.S. Forest Service:
	U.S. Bureau of Land Management: **Sensitive**

No element occurrence of Sprague's Pipit were identified in the area.

4. Buteo regalis (Ferruginous Hawk)

Natural Heritage Ranks:	Federal Agency Status:
State: **S2B**	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:
Global: **G4**	U.S. Forest Service:
	U.S. Bureau of Land Management: **Sensitive**

No element occurrence of the ferruginous hawk were identified in the area.

5 *Spezella breweri* (Brewer's Sparrow)

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: **Sensitive**

No element occurrence of the Brewer's sparrow were identified in the area.

Information courtesy of Montana Natural Heritage Program.

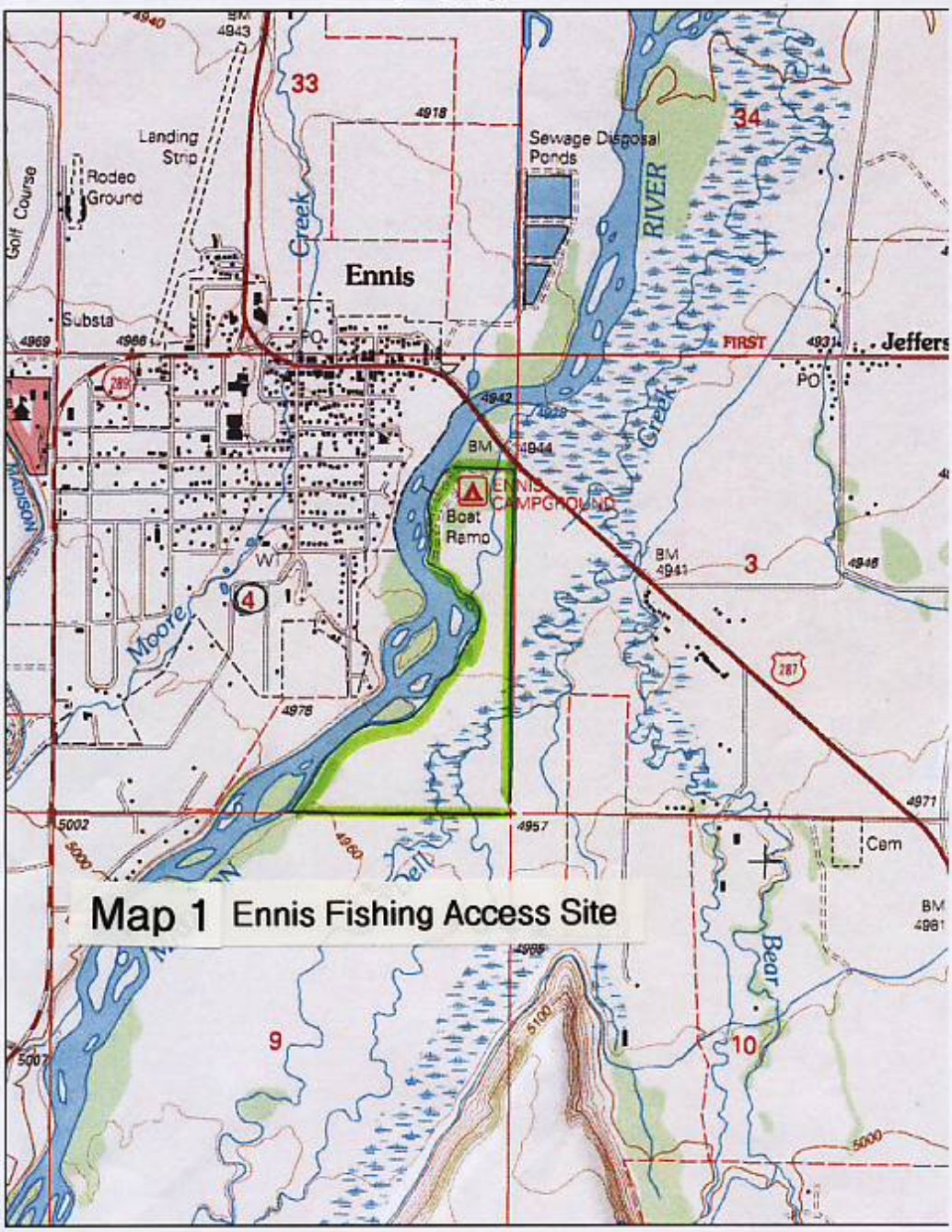
APPENDIX B
Ennis FAS Site Maps

MyTopo Map Print

Page 1 of 2

T 6 S

R 1 W



http://map-pass.mytopo.com/maps/print_mytopo.asp?print=20&scale=5&layer=DRG&laye... 7/1/2009

MAP 2. Trail Routes
Existing Two-Track Road
New Trail
FAS Property Boundary Fence

APPENDIX C

Fish Wildlife and Parks Biologist Review

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

8/17/09

Madison Byways
c/o Janet Bean-Dochnahl
PO Box 764
Ennis, MT 59729

Dear Ms. Bean-Dochnahl;

I have reviewed the Draft Environmental Assessment for the River Trail Project, Ennis Fishing Access Site dated July 2009. Having reviewed this document for wildlife impacts and concerns, I have only a few comments.

First, throughout the document, language suggested "replacement" of existing fences. I would like to know how the fence would be replaced: with a wildlife-friendly fence structure? Of what design? Preferably, the fencing would be removed entirely.

Second, it is worth mentioning that there is 1 active and 1 inactive bald eagle nest nearby. The inactive nest is the one referenced in the EA, is 1.2 miles northeast of the northeast corner of the section. This nest blew over in the winter of 2002-2003. The active nest is 1.5 mile south of the southwest corner of the section. Eagle home ranges generally include all foraging area within 2.5 miles of their nest, and so this FAS is included within the home ranges of this pair, and could possibly affect their foraging behavior. However, the distance between the FAS and these nests is large enough to expect the effects of recreation to be minimal, especially as the bulk of recreation will likely happen during months when eagles are less-susceptible to disturbance (May-Sept). I recommend that Appendix 1 be amended to reflect that the FAS is likely within the home range of a bald eagle pair, but that it is more than 1.5 miles from the nest and expected impacts are negligible.
On the whole, I believe this project will provide safe and pleasant recreation opportunities to residents and visitors to the Madison Valley.

Thank you for the opportunity to review this document, and do not hesitate to contact me with further questions.

Sincerely,

Julie Cunningham
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Wildlife Biologist
1400 S. 19th Ave
Bozeman, MT 59718
(406) 994-6341 juliecunningham@mt.gov

APPENDIX D

Montana Office of Tourism – Dept. of Commerce Review

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:

Carol Crockett, Visitor Services Manager
MT Office of Tourism-Department of Commerce
301 S. Park Ave.
Helena, MT 59601

Project Name: **Ennis Fishing Access Site, River Trail**

Project Description: The River Trail Project is a 1.25 mile loop river trail through the Ennis Fishing Access site. This trail is the first phase of an extensive trail system proposed by Madison Byways, a non-profit trail group, which will hub out of Lions Club Park, just to the west across the Madison River bridge. The Lions Club Park provides parking, restrooms, and a short paved trail loop, a logical hub for the recreational portion of the larger Madison Byway trail system. Trail users who don't walk from town may park at either Lions Club Park or just off the Fishing Access site turn off.

The River Bridge Trail Project improves and marks 1.25 miles of recreational trail through the 77 acre Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks Ennis Fishing Access Site and provides interpretive information for the users. The proposal includes mowing and brushing 1/2 mile of new trail, posting of 3/4 mile of existing two-track road as a trail, installation of a trail head sign at an existing parking area, replacement of 100 feet of property boundary fence, and providing interpretive brochures to accompany numbered markers installed along the trail. Ground disturbance will be confined to the post holes dug for trailhead kiosk installation fence replacement, and installation of route and interpretive markers.

This project was designed to add no impact to the riparian floodplain through which the trail passes. No new material will be added to trail locations, nor will existing ground cover be removed. Trail clearing will be confined to mowing and brushing. Visitor use over time is expected to compact soils enough to limit vegetative growth on routes without disturbing roots or soil. Signage along the trails will be carsonite posts which can bend with water flow. The trailhead kiosk is located at an existing parking area where the ground has already been disturbed.

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.

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 the quality and quantity of tourism and recreational opportunities.

Signature Carol Crockett, Visitor Services Manager Date 1/29/10

2/93
7/98sed

APPENDIX E
State Historic Preservation Office Review

Big Sky. Big Land. Big History.
Montana
Historical Society

Historic Preservation
Museum
Outreach & Interpretation
Publications
Research Center

July 10, 2009

Janet Bean-Dochnahl
Madison Byways
PO Box 764
Ennis MT 59729

RE: ENNIS FISHING ACCESS SITE, RIVER BRIDGE TRAIL PROJECT. SHPO Project #: 2009071003

Dear Janet

I have conducted a cultural resource file search for the above-cited project. According to our records there have been no previously recorded sites within the designated search locales. The absence of cultural properties in the area does not mean that they do not exist but rather may reflect the absence of any previous cultural resource inventory in the area, as our records indicated none within the existing FAS.

Because this project is located on land owned by FWP we will be expecting to receive a notice of the EA when it comes out and will respond to them whenever that occurs. However, I will tell you that based on the lack of ground disturbance associated with this project we feel that there is a low likelihood cultural properties will be impacted. I will look for the FWP notice in the next few weeks.

If you have any further questions or comments you may contact me at (406) 444-7767 or by e-mail at dmurdo@mt.gov. Thank you for consulting with us.

Sincerely,

Damon Murdo
Cultural Records Manager
State Historic Preservation Office

File: MISC/FILE SEARCH/2009

225 North Roberts Street
P.O. Box 201201
Helena, MT 59620-1201
(406) 444-2694
(406) 444-2696 FAX
montanahistoricalsociety.org

See Hard Copy