Montana State Parks
Decision Notice
for the
Implementation of a Campsite Reservation Program

Description of Proposed Action

Montana State Parks proposes to implement a campsite reservation program at up to 21 state parks throughout Montana to address the primary service received by administrative staff. The new program would be developed during the 2010 and go on-line in early 2011. The proposed reservation program would be developed in cooperation with the current system that has been successfully implemented by Idaho State Parks. The program proposed for Montana State Parks would also allow continued "first come, first served" camping opportunites at some percentage between 25% and 50% of the sites in individual campgrounds as they have traditionally existed.

Public Involvement

A draft Environmental Assessment (EA) describing the proposed action was issued April 27, 2010, with the public comment period extending to May 18, 2010. Besides the standard posting of the draft EA on the FWP website, a special website address was created to allow interested parties to comment on the proposed action.

Additionally, a statewide press release was issued and two legal notices were published in the following Montana newspapers:

- Helena Independent Record (Helena)
- Missoulian (Missoula)
- The Montana Standard (Butte)
- Billings Gazette (Billings)
- Great Falls Tribune (Great Falls)
- The Daily Inter Lake (Kalispell)
- Miles City Star (Miles City)

Public Comments Received

Total of 128 public comments were received. Of these, 85 expressed support, or qualified support, for the proposed action and 43 opposed the proposed action. The general themes of the comments received are expanded upon below.

Comment Categories

Support – 85 comments. Those members of the public expressing support for proceeding with the proposed campsite reservation program provided comments such as: they have used other states' (or federal) reservation systems and liked the benefits; it is getting increasingly difficult to be assured of a campsite at a state park in the summer; planning ahead will be easier, and the like.
The following are general categories of those who support the concept of a campsite reservation program, including some qualifying supportive comments:

Support the Proposed Reservation Program–68 individual comments.

- Yes, But Concerned About The Reservation Service Fee –5 comments.
- Yes, But Limit the Number of Nights Reservable – 7 comment.
- Yes, But Limit # of Non-Residents Who Can Use the Program – 1 comment.
- Yes, But Limit the How Far In Advance Reservations Can Be Made – 2 comments.
- Yes, But Provide Montana Residents a Preference (larger % of sites, first access, etc.) – 1 comment.

Montana State Parks Response: To address the comments who were supportive, but with a qualifying statement or question, these are the responses.

- Service Fees – These fees are the direct costs of the reservation convenience fee. Of the proposed $10 reservation fee, $9 will go to the private vendor who operates the program and $1 to Idaho State Parks who will provide technical assistance to get the system up and operating. The proposed fees are typical of those within state park and national park systems throughout the United States and Canada.
- Number of Reservable Nights – As currently planned, the standard 14 day camping stay limit will be the controlling factor, just as exists under the current system. That is, an individual would be able to reserve a stay for up to 14 days, just as they are able to by arriving at a park today.
- Limit Non-Resident Use – There are no plans to limit non-resident use. This is a continuation of the existing state park campground policy direction.
- Limit Advance Reservations – A standard of successful reservation systems is that reservations can be made far in advance so individuals can plan far ahead for their trips. It is anticipated that reservations will be available on a given day each year in, say in early March, and individuals would be able to make (and cancel or change) campsite reservations throughout the year. The decision, with approval of the FWP Commission, would establish that limit in the parks Biennial Fee Rule.

Oppose – 43 comments. Those members of the public not supporting the proposed action provided general comments such as; the service fee proposed is too great, the perception that a reservation program will lead to greater non-resident use, the feeling that camping 'spontaneity' will be lost, and that some campers will not have a computer or Internet access. The following are general categories of those who submitted comments in opposition to the proposed reservation program. Note that the number of individual comments below is greater than the (43) public comments received as some individual provided multiple comments in more than one category;

Opposed to the Proposed Reservation Program – 6 individual comments.
Concerned about the Reservation Service Fee – 12 comments.

Concerned About the Imposition of Additional Rules/Regulations – 1 comment.
Concerned the Proposed Reservation Program Will Lead to More Non-Resident Use – 10 comments.
Concerned that the Spontaneity of Camping Would be Reduced – 12 comments.
Implement the Reservation Program for a Trial Period – 2 comments.
Don't Utilize an Out-Of State Company – 2 comments.
It will lead to More and Larger RV's in Montana's State Parks – 1 comment.
Local Residents Will Reserve Too Many Sites – 1 comment.
Many People Don't Have a Computer or Internet Service – 2 comments.
Limit Non-Resident Use of the Reservation Program – 3 comments.
Implement Only in the Most Heavily Used Campgrounds – 1 comment.

Montana State Parks Response: To address the comments who were not supportive, but with a qualifying statement or question, these are the responses:

- Service Fee – Same response as above for those individuals commenting as supportive; the proposed convenience fees are typical of those within state park and national park systems throughout the United States and Canada.
- Imposition of Additional Rules/Regulations – In no way is it the intent for the proposed campsite reservation program to lead to more or unnecessary rules or regulations. It is likely that the reservation program will result in a simpler process for those individuals who choose to use the reservation service once they arrive at a state park.
- Lead to More Non-Resident Use – It is not anticipated that a reservation program will either increase or decrease camping usage in state parks statewide.
- Reduced Spontaneity of Camping – The perception of some commenter's is that campsite reservations would now be required in order to stay at a Montana State Parks campground. This is not the case. A certain percentage (between 25% and 50%) of all campsites in a given state park will remain for 'walk-in' visitors, just as the sites have always been.
- Implement for a Trial Period – In a manner of speaking, this will be the case. It is anticipated that the contractual arrangement will be for a 3-5 year period, with Montana exploring all options at the end of this initial period.
- Out-of-State Reservation Company – Two commenter's expressed concern that an out-of-state company should not be providing this private service for Montana State Parks. Given that the number of private reservation provider vendors is very small and none are based in Montana, there are not obvious options. The private vendor, while not based in Montana, is very experienced and capable.
- Will Lead to More and Larger RV's – It is not anticipated that the type or size of vehicles will change in any way as the result of a campsite reservation program.
- Local Residents Will Reserve Too Many Sites – It is not anticipated that local area residents, or Montana residents in general, will reserve an excessive number of campsites. It must be kept in mind that a significant number of sites in each campground will remain for 'first come, first served' campers. Existing stay limits will be maintained for all campers.
- Lack of Computer or Internet Service – While it is true that some individuals may not have access to a computer or internet to make an on-line reservation, it is anticipated that a staffed call-center will be a component of the overall program. Any individual can phone the call center to make a campsite reservation as well.
- Limit Non-Resident Use – Some commenter's expressed a desire to limit non-resident use of the proposed campsite reservation program. This is intended to be a service and convenience to all

campers who choose to visit state parks. No individual lor group can be excluded. We don't anticipate that either Montana residents, or non-residents, would have an advantage in the new program.

- Implement Only in Heavily Used campgrounds – The reservation is intended to be a convenience for all campers. Thus, it is important for statewide consistency to implement the program throughout the park system, not just in a few sites.

Finally, it is important to reiterate that campsite reservations will not be necessary to camp in a Montana State Park. A percentage of sites at each campground will remain available for traditional 'first come, first served' camping opportunites as they have traditionally been.

Finding of No Significant Impact

Based upon the analysis in the EA and the public comments received, I find Alternative 1 to be the preferred alternative. Based upon the management-type nature of the proposed action, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not applicable.

The final EA may be viewed at or obtained from Montana State Parks, 1420 East 6th Avenue, Helena, MT 59620, or via the FWP website at fwp.mt.gov under 'Recent Public Notices'. The contact person for this project is Tom Reilly at 444-3752.

In accordance with FWP policy, an appeal may be made to this Decision Notice by any person who has commented in writing to the Department on the proposed project, or who can provide new evidence that would change the proposed action. An appeal must be submitted to the Director of Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks in writing and must be postmarked or received within 30 days of the date of this Desion Notice. The appeal must clearly describe the basis of 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, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, PO Box 200701, Helena, MT 59620-0701.

Tom Reilly 6/30/10

Tom Reilly
Assistant Administrator
Montana State Parks