Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

1400 South 19th Avenue
Bozeman, MT 59718

September 21, 2012

To: Governor's Office, Mike Volesky, State Capitol, Room 204, P.O. Box 200801, Helena, MT 59620-0801
Environmental Quality Council, State Capitol, Room 106, P.O. Box 201704, Helena, MT 59620-1704
Dept. of Environmental Quality, Metcalf Building, P.O. Box 200901, Helena, MT 59620-0901
Dept. of Natural Resources & Conservation, P.O. Box 201601, Helena, MT 59620-1601
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks:

Director's Office	Parks Division	Lands Section	FWP Commissioners
Fisheries Division	Legal Unit	Wildlife Division	Design & Construction

MT Historical Society, State Historic Preservation Office, P.O. Box 201202, Helena, MT 59620-1202
MT State Parks Association, P.O. Box 699, Billings, MT 59103
MT State Library, 1515 E. Sixth Ave., P.O. Box 201800, Helena, MT 59620
James Jensen, Montana Environmental Information Center, P.O. Box 1184, Helena, MT 59624
Janet Ellis, Montana Audubon Council, P.O. Box 595, Helena, MT 59624
George Ochenski, P.O. Box 689, Helena, MT 59624
Jerry DiMarco, P.O. Box 1571, Bozeman, MT 59771
Montana Wildlife Federation, P.O. Box 1175, Helena, MT 59624
Wayne Hurst, P.O. Box 728, Libby, MT 59923
Jack Jones, 3014 Irene St., Butte, MT 59701

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The enclosed Decision Notice has been prepared for the Three Dollar Bridge Fishing Access Site Improvements. This proposed action authorizes improvements at Three Dollar Bridge Fishing Access Site (FAS) on the Madison River. The proposed improvements include enhancing the entrance road, graveling existing parking areas on both sides of the river, improving a designated trail to the water on both sides of the river, and blocking access to the pioneered boat ramp. Worn signs would be replaced and a new informational sign added. The proposed improvements would prevent further degradation concerns at the site. Six public comments were received during the February 8 to March 8 comment period.

Sincerely,

Patrick J. Flowers
Region Three Supervisor
Attachment

Region Three
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
1400 South 19th Ave
Bozeman, MT 59718
September 21, 2012

Decision Notice
Three Dollar Bridge
Fishing Access Improvement Project

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED PROJECT

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposed to initiate a fishing access site improvement project at Three Dollar Bridge which would include adding additional gravel and grading of the existing entrance road and parking areas on both sides of the river, improving a designated trail to the water on both sides of the river, blocking access to the existing pioneered boat ramp and replacing worn signs and adding new informational signs. The improvements will prevent further degradation concerns at the site.

Montana Environmental Policy Act

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks is required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) to assess potential impacts of a proposed action to the human and physical environment. In compliance with MEPA, an Environmental Assessment (EA) was completed for the proposed project by FWP and released for public comment on February 8, 2012.

Alternative A: No Action

If no action were taken, Three Dollar Bridge FAS would continue to be open to the public and resource values would likely continue to be degraded by continued use/expansion. Indiscriminate vehicle parking as well as continued use of the pioneered trails and pioneered boat ramp to the water would continue to degrade the soil and vegetation in the area and would likely promote the spread of weeds and increase erosion and sediment delivery to the river.

By not adding new gravel to the parking area at the boat launch area, users of this area would continue to park on an uneven and rough parking area.

Preferred Alternative B: Proposed Action

In the preferred alternative, FWP would improve the Three Dollar Bridge FAS. FWP proposes to enhance the access road to the site, gravel three existing parking areas, add barrier rock to define designated parking areas and protect vegetation, and establish a designated trail to the water on both sides of the river. The pioneered boat ramp at the site will be blocked by adding barrier rock. Worn signs would be replaced and a new informational sign added. The proposed improvements are primarily maintenance in nature, but are also intended to enhance public access and use while preventing further site degradation.

PUBLIC PROCESS AND COMMENT

A Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for the proposed project was made available for public review and comment from February 8, 2012 through March 8, 2012. Legal notices were published in the Bozeman Chronicle, the Ennis Madisonian, and Helena Independent Record newspapers. FWP distributed 81 copies of the EA and mailed out notices to nearby landowners. The EA was available for public review on FWP's website (http://fwp.mt.gov) under "Recent Public Notices" beginning February 6, 2012.

Summary of Public Comment

FWP received four comments; one comment was in opposition to the proposed project. Three comments supported the project.

Comment: "More and better parking and another toilet, etc. are only going to attract more anglers and users to an already problematic social conflicted spot. I think the money might be better spent looking at another access point on the Madison or another river. I do feel that to initiate any change(s) before the recreation plan is adopted is not the way to go or in the best interest of the resource we all want to protect and preserve here."

FWP Response: The purpose of the proposed project is not to expand the Three Dollar Bridge Fishing Access Site, but rather to define roads, parking areas, and trails to decrease degradation throughout the site caused from the current indiscriminate public use. As FWP is improving the site by delineating areas of public use it will have no discernible impact on the future Madison River Management Plan.

Due to the archeological concerns on the west side of the Madison River, FWP has decided against adding a second latrine to the site.

Comment: "I've read it and found the proposal to be very well done and I will be looking forward to the improvements. Delineating the actual parking areas with gravel and stone should help keeping vehicles parked inside the lines so to speak. I fish the area frequently and would welcome the improved pedestrian paths to the water, so long as they do not become mini launch ramps."

FWP Response: As part of improvement of this site, FWP will be adding a rock barrier to the current pioneered boat ramp located at the site. The trails to the water on each side of the Madison River will be designed for pedestrian use and improved signage will show no boat launch available at this site.

Comment: "This is to inform you that the Anaconda Sportsmen's Club strongly supports the Three Dollar Bridge Project."

FWP Response: Duly noted

Comment: "The EA refers to an upper parking area. I was wondering why that parking area is being kept. Is it needed?"

FWP Response: The upper parking area is located just off the entrance road prior to reaching the east parking area at the Three Dollar Site. This upper parking area is currently used by the public for convenient access to the trails leading further downstream from the fishing access site. This parking area helps disperse river users, potentially increasing the satisfaction of the recreation experience.

DECISION

Based on the analysis in the Draft Environmental Assessment (EA), along with the public comments and the applicable laws, regulations and policies, it is my decision to proceed with the proposed action in preferred alternative B.

I have determined that the decision to proceed with the proposed action will not have a significant effect on the natural or human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared. By notification of this Decision notice, the Draft EA is hereby made the final EA. The draft EA with the Decision Notice may be viewed at or obtained from Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks at the address on page 1. This EA is still available for review on FWP's web site (http://fwp.mt.gov), under "Recent Public Notices"

APPEAL

In accordance with FWP 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 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, P.O. Box 200701 Helena, MT 59620-0701.

If you have any questions regarding this environmental assessment decision notice, please contact Cheryl Morris, Region 3 River Recreation Manager, at 406-994-6359 or at cherylmorris@mt.gov.

9/21/12

Pat Flowers **Date:**

R-3 Regional Supervisor