

**DRAFT
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

**LARGENT'S BEND FISHING ACCESS SITE
PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT**



November 2013



**Montana Fish,
Wildlife & Parks**

**Largent's Bend Fishing Access Site
Proposed Development
Draft Environmental Assessment
MEPA, NEPA, MCA 23-1-110 CHECKLIST**

PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

1. Type of proposed state action:

In 2008, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) acquired 163 acres of land along the Sun River on Highway 200 between Vaughn and Sun River for the purpose of establishing a fishing access site (FAS) known as Largent's Bend FAS. The site was named for John Largent, a prominent settler and merchant in the Sun River Valley and founder of the nearby town of Sun River. FWP proposes to develop Largent's Bend FAS including two parking areas, one to accommodate four single vehicles near a fishing pond and a second to accommodate four truck/trailers and 4 single vehicles near an improved gravel boat ramp. Also included in the proposed project are regulatory and informational signs, and boundary fencing. A concrete vault latrine and gravel access road, requiring slight modification, are already present on the property.

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 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:

Largent's Bend Fishing Access Site Proposed Development

4. Project sponsor:

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Region 4
4600 Giant Springs Road
Great Falls, MT 59405
(406) 454-5854

5. Anticipated Schedule:

Estimated Public Comment Period: December 2013
Estimated Decision Notice: January 2014
Estimated Construction/Commencement Date: Fall 2014

Estimated Completion Date: Fall 2014
Current Status of Project Design (% complete): 35%

6. **Location:**
Largent's Bend FAS is located along the Sun River on Highway 200 between Vaughn and Sun River, five mile west of Interstate 15 in Cascade County in Section 29 and 32, Township 21 North, Range 1 East.

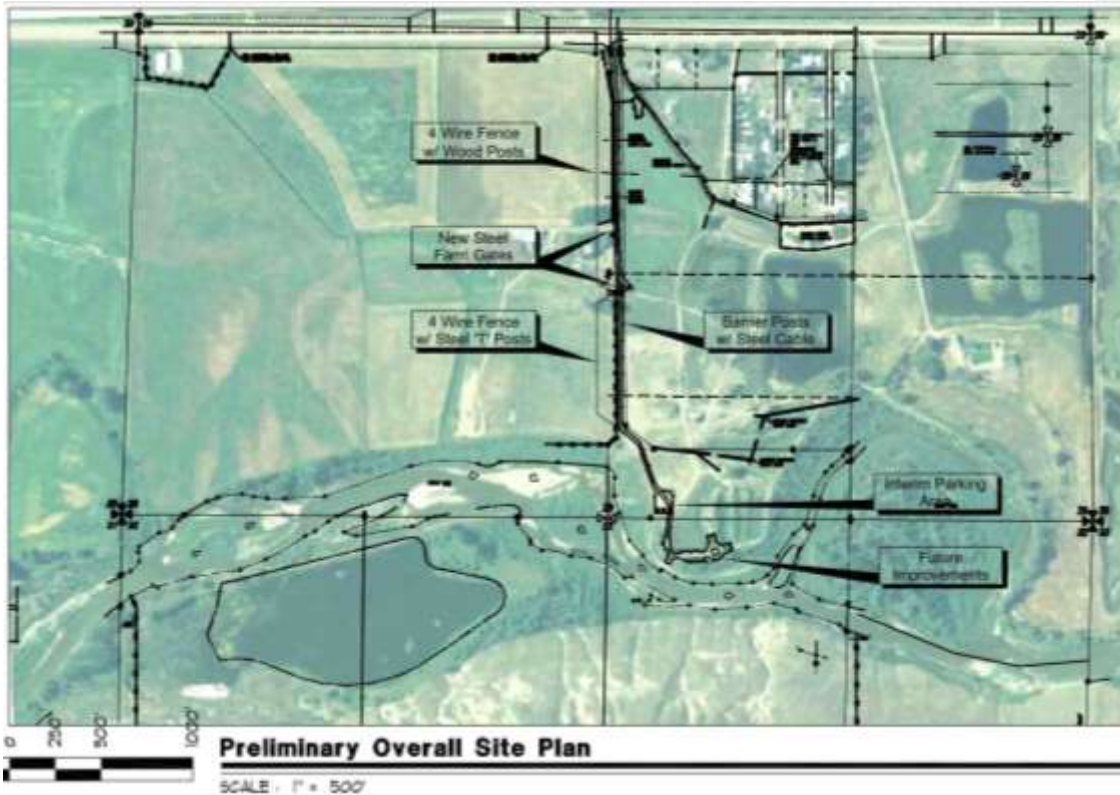
Figure 1. Largent's Bend FAS General Location



Figure 2. Largent's Bend FAS Highway Map Location

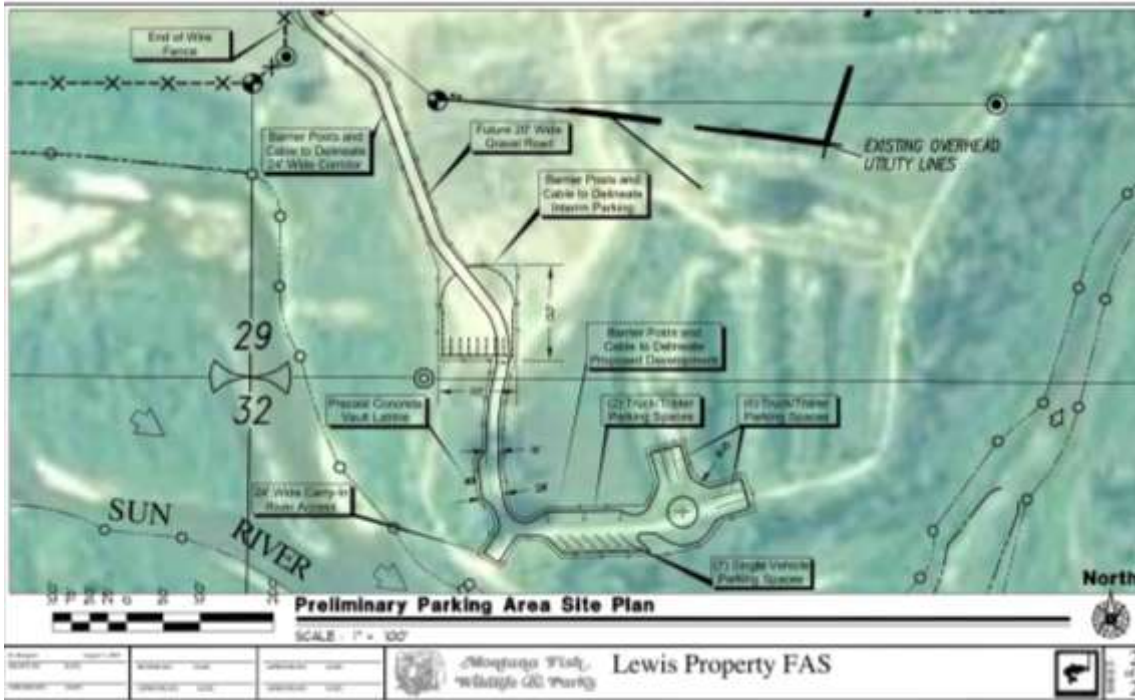


Figure 3. Proposed Largent's Bend FAS Preliminary Overall Site Plan



7. Project size:

	<u>Acres</u>		<u>Acres</u>
(a) Developed:		(d) Floodplain (100 year)	<u>.5</u>
Residential	<u>0</u>		
Industrial	<u>0</u>	(e) Productive:	
(b) Open Space/ Woodlands/Recreation	<u>0</u>	Irrigated cropland	<u>0</u>
(c) Wetlands/Riparian Areas	<u>0</u>	Dry cropland	<u>0</u>
		Forestry	<u>0</u>
		Rangeland	<u>0</u>
		Other	<u>0</u>



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

(a) Permits:

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Permit</u>
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP)	124 MT Stream Protection Act
Montana Dept. of Environmental Quality	318 Short Term Water Quality Standard for Turbidity
Cascade County	Stormwater Discharge Permit
US Corps of Engineers	Floodplain Permit and Sanitation Permit
	404 Federal Clean Water Act

(b) Funding: MT Fish Wildlife & Parks FAS Development \$80,000

(c) Other Overlapping or Additional Jurisdictional Responsibilities:

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Type of Responsibility</u>
Natural Heritage Program	Species of Concern (See Appendix B)
State Historic Preservation Office	Cultural Clearance (Appendix E)

9. Narrative summary of the proposed action:

There are three fishing access sites (FAS) managed by FWP along the Sun River: Fort Shaw FAS (river mile 34); Medicine River FAS (river mile 28); and Largent's Bend FAS (river mile 23). The proposed development of Largent's Bend FAS would provide the only public access to the Sun River between Medicine River FAS and the mouth of the Sun River near Great Falls, approximately 30 miles downstream.

The 102 mile long Sun River begins in the mountains of the Rocky Mountain Front at the confluence of the North and South Fork of the Sun River on the eastern edge of the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex. Because the river is located on the eastern side of the Rocky Mountain Front, the landscape through which the river flows is quite arid. From its origin, the river flows for approximately five miles before it flows through two dams, the Gibson Dam, at river mile 101, and the Sun River Dam at river mile 98. These dams regulate the flows of the Sun River, frequently leading to low water during the summer as irrigation draws off much of the river's flows. For 25 miles below the Sun River Dam, the Sun River becomes an isolated and wild river, flowing through the scenic and remote Sun River Canyon with many rapids and whitewater suitable for rafting. Below the Sun River Canyon, the river slows as it flows southeast through a mix of high prairie and sparse, rocky terrain. Once the Sun River leaves the mountains, public access to the river is difficult but the views are spectacular, with the Rocky Mountain Front extending for the entire western horizon. Below Vaughn at river mile 17, flows slow down substantially and the water frequently is muddy due to sedimentation from Muddy Creek, a tributary that joins the Sun River at Vaughn. Motorboats are frequently used on the stretch of river from Vaughn to the river mouth due to the slow current and high winds that are prevalent along the Rocky Mountain Front that make paddling difficult.

The Sun River has the potential to have an incredible fly fishery, but irrigation demand and frequent low water hampers successful trout reproduction. Proposals by several organizations are being considered to improve in-stream flows that would in turn improve fish habitat. Despite this, the Sun River still offers good fishing possibilities in a remote and scenic area of Montana. The Sun River is also popular for scenic and other recreational values. The river is popular for rafting of all levels from below Gibson Reservoir to its mouth near Great Falls, ranging from areas of Class II and III rapids to slow, meandering flows downstream of Vaughn. The Sun River is also very scenic, flowing from the mountains, through the scenic Sun River Canyon, out onto the high plains with the spectacular backdrop of the Rocky Mountain Front visible from the canyon to Great Falls.

Fish populations in the Sun River are below their biological potential due to chronic, seasonal dewatering from irrigation, and heavy sedimentation from Muddy Creek in the lower 17 river miles below Vaughn. At present, the river is open to angling year-round below Gibson Reservoir and use by anglers is light due to dewatering and limited river access. According to recent surveys by FWP, the number of angler days per year between 2001 and 2007 between the Sun River Dam and Vaughn averaged 6,237, with a low of 3,506 in 2007 and a high of 8,739 in 2003. The state ranking for angling pressure for this stretch of river ranged from 70 to 122 during this same period. The addition of a boat ramp in this reach of the Sun River along with improved parking has the potential to

lead to increased angler use, which could negatively impact trout numbers in the lower 23 miles of the Sun River. If so, impacts may need to be mitigated by adoption of more stringent fishing regulations. However, some visitor use of Fort Shaw FAS and Medicine River FAS could be diverted to Largent's Bend FAS, reducing fishing pressure on those sites and redistributing angler use of the Sun River. In addition, Largent's Bend FAS would likely be used as a takeout for anglers, hunters, and other floaters who launch at Medicine River FAS six river miles upstream, thereby increasing recreational opportunities on the Sun River. Common game fish include brown trout, rainbow trout, and mountain whitefish.

Vegetation found on Largent's Bend FAS consists of lowland and prairie grasslands and riparian woodland, with small areas of emergent and wetland vegetation around the gravel ponds. The grassland on disturbed ground north of the river consists primarily of smooth brome, prairie junegrass, and cheatgrass. Bluebunch wheatgrass, green needlegrass, needle-and-thread, prairie junegrass, and Idaho fescue comprise the grassland on the slope south of the river. The riparian woodland consists of plains cottonwood, narrow-leaf cottonwood, red-osier dogwood, sandbar willow, peach-leaf willow, hawthorn, Wood's rose, basin wildrye, and reed canarygrass. Cattails, sedges, and Russian olive are found around the gravel ponds. Common introduced species found on the property include Russian olive, smooth brome, cheatgrass, leafy spurge, spotted knapweed, whitetop (hoary cress), Canada thistle, and houndstongue. Weed infestations along the Sun River are common and Largent's Bend FAS has had a serious noxious weed infestation prior to FWP's acquisition of the property, due in part to soil disturbance from gravel mining and the construction business that operated on the property. The most common noxious weeds found on the property are leafy spurge and spotted knapweed with smaller concentrations of whitetop, Canada thistle and houndstongue. Since acquisition of the property in 2008, FWP has devoted considerable effort on weed control, which continues to be a high management priority. FWP would continue implementing the FWP Statewide Integrated Noxious Weed Management Plan to control noxious weeds on the property.

Common wildlife species whose habitat distribution overlaps Largent's Bend FAS include white-tailed deer, mule deer, pronghorn, beavers, otters, muskrat, mink, raccoons, skunks, pheasant, Hungarian partridge, osprey, and waterfowl. On occasion, black bears and mountain lions move through the riparian habitat. A wide variety of resident and migrant bird species use, or move through, the area seasonally, including Canada geese, ducks, and numerous songbirds. The site is also a popular place for raptors, specifically osprey and bald eagles, a federally threatened species, with an active bald eagle nest located 1.5 miles west of the FAS. The chestnut-collared longspur, a species of concern, has also been reported within two miles of the FAS. The project is unlikely to have any impact on bald eagles or chestnut-collared longspurs since the FAS and neighboring properties have been highly disturbed for years by gravel mining, operation of the construction business, the neighboring residential subdivision and crop production.

Largent's Bend FAS is split by the Sun River with 110 acres south of the river and 53 acres north of the river. Both portions of the FAS historically had been used for agricultural purposes. More recently, the northern portion and the southern riverbank had been mined for gravel creating the three gravel ponds that are found on the property. A highway construction business was also operated from the northern portion of the property.

Currently, there is only a concrete vault latrine and an undeveloped interim parking area on the northern portion of the FAS, which is accessible via a gravel access road. No designated boat launch exists on the property.

The purpose for development of this 163-acre parcel along the Sun River is to provide for public access to this stretch of river for fishing, boating, wildlife viewing, hiking and floating.

Development of the FAS is proposed to include two parking areas. One will accommodate four vehicles near a fishing pond and a second to accommodate four trucks with trailers and four single vehicles. Additional improvements will include a gravel boat ramp, boundary fencing, and directional, instructional and regulatory signs. An access road requiring slight modification and a concrete vault latrine are already located on the property. Additionally an access road to the large pond near the east boundary will be improved to provide vehicle access to the pond. A wind shelter and one or two picnic tables will also be constructed in this area

Public use of the existing access road would require either moving the eastern boundary of the access road entrance off Highway 200 approximately 25 feet to the east or obtaining an easement to cross a 75 square foot triangle-shaped section of private land located in the existing roadway to avoid trespass issues. Improvements to the access road would occur simultaneously with the proposed site development. FWP would construct, repair, and maintain fencing along the property boundaries.

PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

1. Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives:

Alternative A: No Action

If no action was taken with developing the road and the boat launch it could result in anglers and hunters continuing to use a pioneered launch on the Sun River. Pioneered launches generally result in: safety issues; degradation of the Sun River bank, riparian vegetation, and wildlife habitat; and increased erosion and sedimentation of the Sun River. Without a developed, designated parking area, safety hazards could develop from anglers and hunters parking in random locations on the property, along with potential degradation of riparian vegetation and wildlife habitat and soil erosion and sedimentation of the river and ponds.

Alternative B: Proposed Action

In 2008, FWP acquired this 163 acre-parcel of land for the purpose of establishing a FAS and providing public access to this stretch of the Sun River. FWP proposes to develop the Largent's Bend FAS including two parking areas to accommodate approximately eight total single vehicles and four truck/trailers with turn-around, a boat launch regulatory and informational signs, and boundary fencing. An existing concrete vault latrine and a gravel

access road, which would require slight modification, are already on the property. The proposed developments would improve the recreational opportunities, including fishing, hunting, boating, floating, picnicking, and wildlife viewing along the Sun River. The proposed developments would also minimize degradation of riparian and wildlife habitats and trespass onto neighboring private lands.

2. **Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency:** All county, state and federal permits listed in Part I 8(a) above would be obtained by FWP as required. A private contractor selected through the State's contracting processes would complete the construction.

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. <u>LAND RESOURCES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated *	
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			1b.
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				1d.
e. Exposure of people or property to earthquakes, landslides, ground failure, or other natural hazard?		X				

- 1a. The proposed development would not affect existing soil patterns, structures, productivity, fertility, erosion, compaction, or instability. The property north of the river is primarily an abandoned gravel mine with three ponds created from gravel pits. Soil and geologic substructure would remain stable during and after the proposed work.
- 1b. There are 3 county bridges in this reach and another city boat launch near Wadsworth Park. A boat launch at Largent’s Bend FAS would provide safe and convenient access to the Sun River,
- 1d. The proposed boat launch would have no long-term effects on the river channel or on flows. This design was selected due to the configuration of the river channel and seasonal low flows of the Sun River.

* 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. <u>AIR</u> 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		Yes	2a.
b. Creation of objectionable odors?			X			2b.
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. During construction, temporary amounts of dust may be generated during soil excavation and placement in the flood plain. If additional materials are needed off-site, loading at the source site would generate minor amounts of dust. FWP would follow the Best Management Practices (BMP's) during all phases of construction to minimize risks and reduce dust. See Appendix D for the BMP's.
- 2b. The vault latrine would be regularly maintained to minimize objectionable odors.

* 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.

3. <u>WATER</u> 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		Yes	3a.
b. Changes in drainage patterns or the rate and amount of surface runoff?			X		Yes	3b.
c. Alteration of the course or magnitude of floodwater or other flows?		X				3c.
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				3e.
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		Yes	3h.
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. Construction of the boat launch may cause a temporary, localized increase in turbidity in the Sun River. FWP would obtain a Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) 318 Authorization Permit for Short Term Water Quality Standard for Turbidity; FWP Best Management Practices would be followed (Appendix D). The construction of the boat ramp could cause temporary and minor amounts of turbidity during construction. Construction is planned during low flow to ensure minimal impact. FWP will follow the permit requirements for the Montana Department of Environmental Quality for Permit 318 for Short Term Water Quality Standard for Turbidity.

3b. Construction of the parking lot and boat ramp and modification of the access road may alter surface runoff. The proposed work would be designed to minimize any effect on surface water, surface runoff, and drainage patterns. FWP Best Management Practices would be followed (Appendix D).

* 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.

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3c./3e. Largent's Bend FAS falls entirely within the 50-year flood plain of this section of the Sun River. However, the limited improvements proposed with this project would not affect flood risks of neighboring properties.

3h. The use of heavy equipment during construction may result in a slight risk of contamination from petroleum products and an increase in sediment delivery to the river. FWP Best Management Practices would be followed during all phases of construction to minimize these risks. (Appendix D). The application of herbicides to manage the existing noxious weeds would be applied according to the guidelines in the FWP Statewide Integrated Noxious Weed Management Plan.

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** 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.

4. <u>VEGETATION</u> 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		Yes	4a
b. Alteration of a plant community?			X		Yes Positive	4b.
c. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				4c.
d. Reduction in acreage or productivity of any agricultural land?		X				4d.
e. Establishment or spread of noxious weeds?			X		Yes	4e.
f. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project affect wetlands, or prime and unique farmland?		NA				

4a./4b. Construction of the parking lot and boat ramp and modification of the access road would have a minor impact on the vegetation, removing existing vegetation in the area of construction and altering the diversity of the plant community on the construction site. Because the construction area is small, has been infested with weeds, and has been previously disturbed, impacts from construction would be minor.

Vegetation found on Largent's Bend FAS consists of lowland and prairie grasslands, riparian woodland, with small areas of emergent vegetation around the gravel ponds. The grassland on disturbed ground north of the river consists primarily of smooth brome, prairie junegrass, and cheatgrass. Bluebunch wheatgrass, green needlegrass, needle-and-thread, prairie junegrass, and Idaho fescue comprise the grassland on the slope south of the river. The riparian woodland consists of plains cottonwood, narrow-leaf cottonwood, red-osier dogwood, sandbar willow, peach-leaf willow, hawthorn, Wood's rose, basin wildrye, and reed canarygrass. Cattails, sedges, and Russian olive are found around the gravel ponds. Common introduced species found on the property include Russian olive, smooth brome, cheatgrass, mustard, leafy spurge, spotted knapweed, whitetop, Canada thistle, and houndstongue. Weed infestations along the Sun River are common and Largent's Bend FAS has had a serious noxious weed infestation for years, due in part to soil disturbance from gravel mining. The most common noxious weeds found on the property are leafy spurge and spotted knapweed with smaller concentrations of whitetop, Canada thistle and houndstongue. Since acquisition of the property in 2008, FWP has spent considerable time and money on weed control, which will continue to be a high management priority. FWP will continue implementing the FWP Statewide Integrated Noxious Weed Management Plan to control noxious weeds on the property.

The topsoil overburden stockpiled near Braden Tracts may be used throughout the disturbed areas to assist in establishing native grasses.

4c. A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program's (MNHP) Species of Concern database found no vascular or non-vascular plants of significance on or near Largent's Bend FAS.

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

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- 4d. The property has not been in agricultural production for years. A gravel mine and construction business were operated on the property for years by the previous owner.
- 4e. The property has noxious weeds present. FWP may spread topsoil from the mounds of overburden found on the property to provide a suitable seedbed for native grasses, which would help control the abundance of noxious weeds.

Disturbed areas would be re-seeded with a native reclamation seed mix where necessary to reduce the establishment of weeds. In conjunction with Cascade County Weed Control District, FWP would continue implementing the Statewide Integrated Weed Management Plan using chemical, biological and mechanical methods to control weeds on the property. Weed management would include the establishment of native vegetation to prevent the spread of weeds. Vehicles would be restricted to the parking area and access road, which would be maintained as weed-free, and vehicles would not be allowed on undisturbed areas of the site to minimize the spread of noxious weeds. FWP estimates that weed control will cost approximately \$5000 during fiscal year 2014. This annual treatment cost will likely remain steady for the next 3 years until the existing infestations can be controlled.

It is anticipated that the topsoil overburden stockpiled near Braden Tracts will be used throughout the disturbed areas to assist in establishing native grasses. These native grasses will assist in controlling the noxious weeds.

- 4f. No wetlands designated by Montana Department of Environmental Quality or prime farmlands are found on the FAS. The three ponds located on the property, two north of the river and one south of the river, were created as a by-product of gravel mining. Some common emergent and wetland vegetation, such as cattails and sedges, have volunteered in places around the ponds.

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** 5. FISH/WILDLIFE	IMPACT *						
	Will the proposed action result in:	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			Yes	5b.
c. Changes in the diversity or abundance of nongame species?		X					5c.
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					5f.
g. Increase in conditions that stress wildlife populations or limit abundance (including harassment, legal or illegal harvest or other human activity)?		X					5g.
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					

5b/5c. According to FWP Wildlife Biologist Brent Lonner, Wildlife Manager Graham Taylor and a review of Montana Natural Heritage Program Tracker, common wildlife species whose habitat distribution overlaps Largent's Bend FAS include white-tailed deer, mule deer, pronghorn, beavers, otters, muskrat, mink, raccoons, skunks, pheasant, Hungarian partridge, osprey, and waterfowl. On occasion, black bears and mountain lions move through the riparian habitat. A wide variety of resident and migrant bird species use, or move through, the area on a seasonal basis, including Canada geese, ducks, and numerous songbirds. The site is also popular for raptors, specifically osprey and bald eagles. An active bald eagle nest is located 1.5 miles west of the FAS, though the project is unlikely to have any impact on eagles since the property has been highly disturbed for years.

According to FWP fisheries staff, and a review of Montana Fisheries Information System (MFISH) mountain whitefish are abundant in this stretch of the Sun River; brown trout, rainbow trout, longnose dace, mottled sculpins, longnose suckers, white suckers, and mountain suckers are common; and brook trout and northern pike are rare. According to recent surveys by FWP, the number of angler days per year between 2001 and 2007 averaged 6,237, with a low of 3,506 in 2007 and a high of 8,739 in 2003. The state ranking for this stretch of river ranged from 70 to 122 during this same period. Common game fish include brown trout, rainbow trout, and mountain whitefish.

* 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.

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*** 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.

According to FWP fisheries staff, fish populations in the Sun River are below their biological potential due to chronic, seasonal dewatering from irrigation, and heavy sedimentation in the lower 17 river miles below Muddy Creek at Vaughn. At present, the river is open to angling year-round and use by anglers is light due to dewatering and limited river access. The addition of a boat ramp in this reach along with improved parking has the potential to lead to increased angler use, which could negatively impact trout numbers in the lower 23 miles of the Sun River. If so, impacts may need to be mitigated by adoption of more stringent fishing regulations. Use of Fort Shaw FAS and Medicine River FAS, nearby fishing access sites on the Sun River could be diverted to Largent's Bend FAS, reducing pressure on those sites and redistributing angler use of the Sun River. In addition, Largent's Bend FAS could be used as a takeout for anglers, hunters, and other floaters who launch at Medicine River FAS six river miles upstream, thereby increasing recreational opportunities on the Sun River.

A detailed survey of the fish species found in the three gravel pits on the property has not been conducted, though bullhead have been observed in the ponds. Proposals to plant these ponds with fish for family fishing are currently being considered.

- 5f. A search of the Natural Resources Information System (NRIS) provided by the Montana Natural Heritage Program showed that there are no federally endangered animal or plant species found in the vicinity of the development area. According to Graham Taylor, FWP Region 4 Wildlife Manager, an active bald eagle nest, a federally threatened species, is located 1.5 miles west of the FAS. The proposed development is unlikely to have a direct or indirect impact on bald eagles since there is so much disturbance and activity in the area from the previous gravel mine and nearby residential development and agricultural production. NRIS reported an Element Occurrence of chestnut-collared longspur, a Species of Concern, within two miles of the project area. A confirmed breeding site was observed at this location based on the presence of a nest, chicks, or territorial adults during the breeding season. The last observation date was 1998. The proposed project is unlikely to have any impact on the chestnut-collared longspur since it's preferred habitat consists of mixed native grasslands that have been recently grazed and grazing would not be encouraged on the FAS grasslands north or south of the Sun River (Appendix B – Native Species Report)

According Anne Vandehey, US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) project coordinator, gray wolves do not frequent the area, and there are no documented packs in the area. Therefore, wolves would not be directly or indirectly affected by the proposed development.

According to FWP fisheries staff and Montana Natural Heritage Program, no fish species of concern are found in the vicinity of Largent's Bend FAS.

- 5g. The improved facilities at Largent's Bend FAS is intended to result in increased use of the area for fishing in both the Sun River and gravel ponds, waterfowl and upland bird hunting, launching and takeout of boats and rafts, picnicking, and wildlife viewing. The site was previously disturbed with a gravel mine, including gravel pits, denuded mounds of overburden, storage of garbage and toxic wastes, and is adjacent to a residential subdivision and cultivated fields. Development of Largent's Bend FAS would not contribute to additional disturbance of the area and would have no permanent, detrimental impact on existing wildlife or wildlife habitat.

* 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.

The addition of a boat launch in this reach could lead to increased use by anglers, (which is the intended purpose) Largent's Bend FAS could be used as a takeout for anglers, hunters, and other floaters who launch at Medicine River FAS six river miles upstream, thereby increasing recreational opportunities on the Sun River.

In addition to improving access to the Sun River, the development of Largent's Bend FAS would provide family fishing opportunities in the three gravel ponds and waterfowl, upland bird and deer hunting opportunities on the property and along the river.

- * 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.

B. HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

6. <u>NOISE/ELECTRICAL EFFECTS</u> 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		Yes	6a.
b. Exposure of people to severe or nuisance noise levels?			X		Yes	6b.
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				

6a. Construction equipment would cause a temporary increase in noise levels at the site. Proximity to the highway with much higher sustained noise levels could help mask any increase in noise level at the construction site.

6b. A small residential subdivision is located adjacent to the north boundary of the FAS and two houses are located on the western boundary of the property. Visitor use could increase noise levels and disturb neighbors; however, no camping would be allowed within the FAS and the residential subdivision is located several hundred yards away from the proposed parking area, so adequate separation is provided.

7. <u>LAND USE</u> 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				

The property north of the river was operated as a gravel mine by the previous owner and is not currently used for agricultural or commercial purposes. In addition to the gravel mine, the previous owner operated a construction business from the property north of the river and stored equipment and hazardous wastes on the property. After acquisition, FWP cleaned up the property, removing equipment, old buildings, abandoned cars, and all obvious hazardous materials at a cost of approximately \$10,000. The property

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*** 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.

was delisted from Montana Department of Environmental Quality CECRA list after soil, groundwater, and surface water testing found the property was not contaminated with hazardous materials.

The portion along the south shore of the river was also mined for gravel and a pond was created as a by-product of mining. Livestock does not currently graze the upland portion of the property though the south fence is in condition and as a result, the neighbor's livestock have likely grazed the property at times. FWP does not plan to lease this land for livestock grazing in the future.

An undeveloped interim parking area with no launching facilities is located on the property. The proposed development would not alter or interfere with the productivity or profitability of the existing land use of the property and the addition of a boat launch and improved parking area would increase use in the area.

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** 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.

8. RISK/HEALTH HAZARDS	IMPACT *					
	Unknown *	None	Minor*	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
Will the proposed action result in:						
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		Yes	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		Yes	8c.
d. ***For P-R/D-J, will any chemical toxicants be used? (Also see 8a)		NA				

8a. Physical disturbance of the soil during construction would encourage the spread of noxious weeds to the site. In conjunction with Cascade 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 applied by people trained in safe handling techniques.

8c. Three sewage lagoons constructed to serve Braden Tracts, a 21-home subdivision adjacent to the property's north border, are located within the north property boundary. Although the lagoons are on FWP property, the Braden Tracts Homeowners Association has an easement for the lagoons from the previous landowner and is responsible for management of the lagoons and compliance with DEQ regulations. The lagoons are currently fenced to reduce safety hazards to residents and FAS visitors.

After acquisition, FWP hired a contractor to remove non-hazardous debris that had been left on the property by the previous owner, including demolishing and hauling away a trailer and abandoned buildings, and removing old car bodies, asphalt, concrete, wire, scrap materials, paint cans, transformers, and garbage. Most apparent safety hazards have been removed from the property.

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** 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.

9. <u>COMMUNITY IMPACT</u> 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		Yes Positive	9c.
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		Yes	9e.

9c. The proposed project is intended to increase public use in the area. This would likely benefit local retail and service businesses (Appendix C - Tourism Report).

9e. Establishing public access at Largent's Bend FAS would likely increase vehicle trips per day through Vaughn, which may slightly increase traffic hazards in Vaughn and along Highway 200.

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** 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.

10. <u>PUBLIC SERVICES/TAXES/UTILITIES</u> 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				
d. Will the proposed action result in increased use of any energy source?		X				
e. **Define projected revenue sources		X				10e.
f. **Define projected maintenance costs.		X				10 f.

The proposed development 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.
- 10e. Largent's Bend FAS would be operated for day use and camping facilities will not be provided so there would be no revenue from camping fees would be generated for FWP.
- 10f. Projected annual operating, maintenance, and personnel expense for fiscal year 2014 is estimated to be approximately \$3000. FWP projects that noxious weed control will cost an additional \$5000 for 2014. It is anticipated that weed control costs would decline over time as weed infestations are controlled.

* 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	IMPACT *					
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
Will the proposed action result in:						
a. Alteration of any scenic vista or creation of an aesthetically offensive site or effect that is open to public view?			X		Yes	11a.
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		Yes 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				

11a. The FAS would be operated for day use only, with no camping allowed, and development would include a gravel parking area, boat ramp, boundary fencing, and signs. A concrete vault latrine and gravel access road is present on the property. The boat launch would be visible from the river.

11c. The proposed development of Largent's Bend FAS would allow for public use for fishing, hunting, floating, picnicking, and wildlife viewing, improving recreational opportunities along the Sun River and obtaining additional public access to the Sun River, which has been a high priority for FWP.

12. CULTURAL/HISTORICAL RESOURCES	IMPACT *					
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
Will the proposed action result in:						
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.)		NA				

A clearance from the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) has been obtained (Appendix E). If cultural materials are discovered during the project, work would cease and SHPO will be contacted for a more in depth investigation.

SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

* 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.

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

During construction of the proposed improvements, there may be minor and temporary impacts to the physical environment, but the impacts would be short-term and the improvements would benefit the community and recreational opportunities over the long-term. The proposed development would have no negative cumulative effects on the biological, physical, and human environments. When considered over the long-term, the proposed development poses positive effects towards the public's access of the scenic Sun River, a popular river for recreation close to Great Falls.

* 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.

PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

During construction of the proposed improvements, there may be minor and temporary impacts to the physical environment, but the impacts would be short-term and the improvements would benefit the community and recreational opportunities over the long-term. The proposed action would have no negative cumulative effects on the biological, physical, and human environments. When considered over the long-term, the proposed development poses positive effects towards the public's access of the scenic Sun River, a popular river for recreation near Great Falls.

The minor impacts to the environment that were identified in the previous section are small in scale and would not influence the overall environment of the immediate area. The natural environment would continue to provide habitat to transient and permanent wildlife species and would be open to the public for access to the river.

Large populations of noxious weeds were present at Largent's Bend FAS prior to acquisition, with dense populations of leafy spurge and spotted knapweed north of the river and smaller populations south of the river. Since acquisition, FWP has spent over \$5000 per year controlling weeds and has implemented the Statewide Integrated Weed Management Plan using biological, chemical and physical methods to prevent the establishment or spread of noxious weeds. Weed control would continue to be a high management priority for the FAS.

The proposed development would have no negative impact on the local wildlife species that frequent the property and would not increase negative conditions that stress wildlife populations. The property is not considered critical habitat for any species. Even though the area is within the habitat of bald eagles, the proposed development is unlikely to have any impact on this species since there is already so much activity and disturbance in the area from the residential subdivision, Highway 200, and nearby agricultural production. While it is possible for wolves to travel through the project area, none have been sighted and there is no pack located in the area, so it is unlikely that the proposed development would impact gray wolves.

Fish populations in the Sun River are below their biological potential due to chronic, seasonal dewatering from irrigation, and heavy sedimentation in the lower 17 river miles below Muddy Creek at Vaughn. At present, the river is open to angling year-round and use by anglers is light due to dewatering and limited river access. The addition of a boat ramp in this reach along with improved parking has the potential to lead to increased angler use, which could negatively impact trout numbers in the lower 23 miles of the Sun River. If so, impacts may need to be mitigated by adoption of more stringent fishing regulations. Use of Fort Shaw FAS and Medicine River FAS, nearby fishing access sites on the Sun River, could be diverted to Largent's Bend FAS, reducing pressure on those sites and redistributing angler use of the Sun River. In addition, Largent's Bend FAS could be used as a takeout for anglers, hunters, and other floaters who launch at Medicine River FAS six river miles upstream, thereby increasing recreational opportunities on the Sun River.

The proposed development of Largent's Bend FAS along the Sun River would allow FWP to provide public access for fishing, hunting, boating, floating, picnicking, and

wildlife viewing to the Sun River, a river close to Great Falls with limited developed public access. This developed access would increase other public recreational opportunities, including waterfowl, upland bird, and deer hunting and family fishing of the gravel ponds, and provide safe and developed access to a stretch of river that has been a high priority for FWP and the public.

PART IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

1. Public Involvement:

The public will be notified in the following manners to comment on the Largent's Bend Proposed Development:

- Two public notices in each of these papers: the *Great Falls Tribune* and the *Helena Independent Record*
- Public notice on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks web page: <http://fwp.mt.gov>.
- Direct notice will be given to adjacent landowners.
- Draft EA's will be available at the FWP Region 4 Headquarters in Great Falls and the FWP State Headquarters in Helena.
- A news release will be prepared and distributed to a standard list of media outlets interested in FWP Region 4 issues.
- Copies of this environmental assessment will be distributed to the 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.

If requested within the comment period, FWP will schedule and conduct a public meeting on this proposed project.

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., December 30, 2013** and can be e-mailed to. or mailed to the address below:

Largent's Bend Fishing Access Site Proposed Development
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Region 4
4600 Giant Springs Road
Great Falls, MT 59405
(406) 454-5854

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:

4600 Giant Springs Road
Great Falls, MT 59405
vrobinson@mt.gov
(406) 454-5854

Field Code Changed

Region 4 Fisheries Office
4600 Giant Springs Road
Great Falls, MT 59405
(406) 454-5840

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

Cascade County Floodplain Administrator
Montana Department of Commerce – Tourism
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
 Director's Office
 Lands Unit
 Legal Unit
 Parks Division
 Design and Construction Section
 Fish and Wildlife Division
 Fisheries Bureau
 Wildlife Bureau
Montana Natural Heritage Program – Natural Resources Information System (NRIS)

APPENDICES

- A. MCA 23-1-110 Qualification Checklist
- B. Native Species Report - Montana Natural Heritage Program (MNHP)
- C. Tourism Report – Department of Commerce
- D. Best Management Practices
- E. State Historic Preservation Office Clearance for Largent's Bend FAS
- F. Delisting of Largent's Bend FAS Property from DEQ CECRA Priority List

APPENDIX A
23-1-110 MCA PROJECT QUALIFICATION CHECKLIST

Date: February, 2011

Person Reviewing: Andrea Darling

Project Location: Largent's Bend FAS is located along the Sun River on Highway 200 between the towns of Sun River and Vaughn, Montana five miles west of Interstate 15 in Cascade County, Section 29 and 32 T21N R1E.

Description of Proposed Work: In 2008, FWP acquired 163 acres of land along the Sun River between Sun River and Vaughn for the purpose of establishing a fishing access site. FWP proposes to improve the gravel access road, and construct parking areas to accommodate truck/trailers parking and singular vehicle parking and a 24-foot boat launch and install regulatory and informational signs and boundary fencing.

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.)

- JA. New roadway or trail built over undisturbed land?**
Comments: The existing road entrance will be moved 25" to the east but the rest of the road will be unchanged.
- JB. New building construction (buildings <100 sf and vault latrines exempt)?**
Comments: No buildings will be constructed. A vault latrine is already located on the property.
- JC. Any excavation of 20 c.y. or greater?**
Comments: Yes, for the boat launch and parking area.
- JD. New parking lots built over undisturbed land or expansion of existing lot that increases parking capacity by 25% or more?**
Comments: Yes, a new parking area would be constructed to accommodate seven vehicles and eight truck/trailers.
- JE. Any new shoreline alteration that exceeds a doublewide boat launch or handicapped fishing station?**
Comments: There would be no shoreline alteration
- JF. Any new construction into lakes, reservoirs, or streams?**
Comments: No new construction into river. Boat launch would not disturb riverbank.
- JG. Any new construction in an area with National Registry quality cultural artifacts (as determined by State Historical Preservation Office)?**
Comments: No.
- JH. Any new above ground utility lines?**
Comments: No new utility lines.
- JI. Any increase or decrease in campsites of 25% or more of an existing number of campsites?**
Comments: No camping.
- JJ. Proposed project significantly changes the existing features or use pattern; including effects of a series of individual projects?**
Comments: The gravel mine is no longer in operation and the property is not in agricultural production.

If any of the above is checked, 23-1-110 MCA rules apply to this proposed work and should be documented on the MEPA/HB495 CHECKLIST. Refer to MEPA/HB495 Cross Reference Summary for further assistance.

APPENDIX B
NATIVE SPECIES REPORT – MONTANA NATURAL HERITAGE PROGRAM

Sensitive Plants and Animals in the Vicinity of Largent’s Bend FAS

Species of Concern Terms and Definitions

A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program (MNHP) element occurrence database (<http://nris.mt.gov>) indicates no occurrences of federally listed endangered or threatened animal or plant species have been found within the vicinity of the proposed development and the chestnut-collared longspur is the only species of concern observed in the project area. More information on this species is included below.

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 PLANTS AND ANIMALS IN THE VICINITY OF LARGENT'S BEND FAS

1. Calcarius ornatus (Chestnut-collared longspur)

Natural Heritage Ranks

State: **S2B**

Global: **G5**

FWP CFWCS Tier: **3**

Federal Agency Status:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:

U.S. Forest Service:

U.S. Bureau of Land Management: **Sensitive**

Element Occurrence data was reported of chestnut-collared longspur within two miles of the project area. A confirmed breeding site was observed at this location based on the presence of a nest, chicks, or territorial adults during the breeding season. The last observation date was 1998.

Information courtesy of Montana Natural Heritage Program

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:

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

Project Name: Largent's Bend FAS Proposed Development

Project Description:

In 2008, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) acquired 163 acres of land along the Sun River on Highway 200 between Vaughn and Sun River for the purpose of establishing a fishing access site (FAS) and providing public access to this stretch of the Sun River. FWP proposes to develop a FAS including a parking area, a boat launch, and install regulatory and informational signs and boundary fencing. A gravel access road and vault latrine are already located on the property.

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. We are assuming the agency has determined it has necessary funding for the on-going operations and maintenance once this project is complete.

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 Carol Crockett, Visitor Services Manager Date: February 7, 2011

APPENDIX D
MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE AND PARKS
BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES FOR FISHING ACCESS SITES
10-02-02
Updated May 1, 2008

I. ROADS

A. Road Planning and Location

1. Minimize the number of roads constructed at the FAS through comprehensive road planning, recognizing foreseeable future uses.
 - a. Use existing roads, unless use of such roads would cause or aggravate an erosion problem.
2. Fit the road to the topography by locating roads on natural benches and following natural contours. Avoid long, steep road grades and narrow canyons.
3. Locate roads on stable geology, including well-drained soils and rock formations that tend to dip into the slope. Avoid slumps and slide-prone areas characterized by steep slopes, highly weathered bedrock, clay beds, concave slopes, hummocky topography, and rock layers that dip parallel to the slope. Avoid wet areas, including seeps, wetlands, wet meadows, and natural drainage channels.
4. Minimize the number of stream crossings.
 - a. Choose stable stream crossing sites. "Stable" refers to streambanks with erosion-resistant materials and in hydrologically safe spots.

B. Road Design

1. Design roads to the minimum standard necessary to accommodate anticipated use and equipment. The need for higher engineering standards can be alleviated through proper road-use management. "Standard" refers to road width.
2. Design roads to minimize disruption of natural drainage patterns. Vary road grades to reduce concentrated flow in road drainage ditches, culverts, and on fill slopes and road surfaces.

C. Drainage from Road Surface

1. Provide adequate drainage from the surface of all permanent and temporary roads. Use outsloped, insloped or crowned roads, installing proper drainage features. Space road drainage features so peak flow on road surface or in ditches will not exceed their capacity.
 - a. Outsloped roads provide means of dispersing water in a low-energy flow from the road surface. Outsloped roads are appropriate when fill slopes are stable, drainage will not flow directly into stream channels, and transportation safety can be met.
 - b. For insloped roads, plan ditch gradients steep enough, generally greater than 2%, but less than 8%, to prevent sediment deposition and ditch erosion. The steeper gradients may be suitable for more stable soils; use the lower gradients for less stable soils.
 - c. Design and install road surface drainage features at adequate spacing to control erosion; steeper gradients require more frequent drainage features.

Properly constructed drain dips can be an economical method of road surface drainage. Construct drain dips deep enough into the sub-grade so that traffic will not obliterate them.

2. For ditch relief/culverts, construct stable catch basins at stable angles. Protect the inflow end of cross-drain culverts from plugging and armor if in erodible soil. Skewing ditch relief culverts 20 to 30 degrees toward the inflow from the ditch will improve inlet efficiency.
3. Provide energy dissipators (rock piles, slash, log chunks, etc.) where necessary to reduce erosion at outlet of drainage features. Cross-drains, culverts, water bars, dips, and other drainage structures should not discharge onto erodible soils or fill slopes without outfall protection.
4. Route road drainage through adequate filtration zones, or other sediment-settling structures. Install road drainage features above stream crossings to route discharge into filtration zones before entering a stream.

D. Construction/Reconstruction

1. Stabilize erodible, exposed soils by seeding, compacting, riprapping, benching, mulching, or other suitable means.
2. At the toe of potentially erodible fill slopes, particularly near stream channels, pile slash in a row parallel to the road to trap sediment. When done concurrently with road construction, this is one method to effectively control sediment movement and it also provides an economical way of disposing of roadway slash. Limit the height, width and length of these “slash filter windrows” so not to impede wildlife movement. Sediment fabric fences or other methods may be used if effective.
3. Construct cut and fill slopes at stable angles to prevent sloughing and subsequent erosion.
4. Avoid incorporating potentially unstable woody debris in the fill portion of the road prism. Where possible, leave existing rooted trees or shrubs at the toe of the fill slope to stabilize the fill.
5. Place debris, overburden, and other waste materials associated with construction and maintenance activities in a location to avoid entry into streams. Include these waste areas in soil stabilization planning for the road.
6. When using existing roads, reconstruct only to the extent necessary to provide adequate drainage and safety; avoid disturbing stable road surfaces. Consider abandoning existing roads when their use would aggravate erosion.

E. Road Maintenance

1. Grade road surfaces only as often as necessary to maintain a stable running surface and to retain the original surface drainage.
2. Maintain erosion control features through periodic inspection and maintenance, including cleaning dips and cross-drains, repairing ditches, marking culvert inlets to aid in location, and clearing debris from culverts.
3. Avoid cutting the toe of cut slopes when grading roads, pulling ditches, or plowing snow.
4. Avoid using roads during wet periods if such use would likely damage the road

drainage features. Consider gates, barricades or signs to limit use of roads during wet periods.

II. RECREATIONAL FACILITIES (parking areas, campsites, trails, ramps, restrooms)

A. Site Design

1. Design a site that best fits the topography, soil type, and stream character, while minimizing soil disturbance and economically accomplishing recreational objectives. Keep roads and parking lots at least 50 feet from water; if closer, mitigate with vegetative buffers as necessary.
2. Locate foot trails to avoid concentrating runoff and provide breaks in grade as needed. Locate trails and parking areas away from natural drainage systems and divert runoff to stable areas. Limit the grade of trails on unstable, saturated, highly erosive, or easily compacted soils
3. Scale the number of boat launches, campsites, parking areas, bathroom facilities, etc. to be commensurate with existing and anticipated needs. Facilities should not invite such use that natural features will be degraded.
4. Provide adequate barriers to minimize off-road vehicle use

B. Maintenance: Soil Disturbance and Drainage

1. Maintenance operations minimize soil disturbance around parking lots, swimming areas and campsites, through proper placement and dispersal of such facilities or by reseeding disturbed ground. Drainage from such facilities should be promoted through proper grading.
2. Maintain adequate drainage for ramps by keeping side drains functional or by maintaining drainage of road surface above ramps or by crowning (on natural surfaces).
3. Maintain adequate drainage for trails. Use mitigating measures, such as water bars, wood chips, and grass seeding, to reduce erosion on trails.
4. When roads are abandoned during reconstruction or to implement site-control, they must be reseeded and provided with adequate drainage so that periodic maintenance is not required.

III. RAMPS AND STREAM CROSSINGS

A. Legal Requirements

1. Relevant permits must be obtained prior to building bridges across streams or boat launches. Such permits include the SPA 124 permit, the COE 404 permit, and the DNRC Floodplain Development Permit.

B. Design Considerations

1. Placement of boat ramp should be such that boats can load and unload with out difficulty and the notch in the bank where the ramp was placed does not encourage bank erosion. Extensions of boat ramps beyond the natural bank can also encourage erosion.
2. Adjust the road grade or provide drainage features (e.g. rubber flaps) to reduce the concentration of road drainage to stream crossings and boat ramps. Direct drainage flow through an adequate filtration zone and away from the ramp or

crossing through the use of gravel side-drains, crowning (on natural surfaces) or 30-degree angled grooves on concrete ramps.

3. Avoid unimproved stream crossings on permanent streams. On ephemeral streams, when a culvert or bridge is not feasible, locate drive-throughs on a stable, rocky portion of the stream channel.
4. Unimproved (non-concrete) ramps should only be used when the native soils are sufficiently gravelly or rocky to withstand the use at the site and to resist erosion.

C. Installation of Stream Crossings and Ramps

1. Minimize stream channel disturbances and related sediment problems during construction of road and installation of stream crossing structures. Do not place erodible material into stream channels. Remove stockpiled material from high water zones. Locate temporary construction bypass roads in locations where the stream course will have a minimal disturbance. Time the construction activities to protect fisheries and water quality.
2. Where ramps enter the stream channel, they should follow the natural streambed in order to avoid changing stream hydraulics and to optimize use of boat trailers.
3. Use culverts with a minimum diameter of 15 inches for permanent stream crossings and cross drains. Proper sizing of culverts may dictate a larger pipe and should be based on a 50-year flow recurrence interval. Install culverts to conform to the natural streambed and slope on all perennial streams and on intermittent streams that support fish or that provide seasonal fish passage. Place culverts slightly below normal stream grade to avoid culvert outfall barriers. Do not alter stream channels upstream from culverts, unless necessary to protect fill or to prevent culvert blockage. Armor the inlet and/or outlet with rock or other suitable material where needed.
4. Prevent erosion of boat launches and the affected streambank through proper placement (so as to not catch the stream current) and hardening (riprap or erosion resistant woody vegetation).
5. Maintain a 1-foot minimum cover for culverts 18-36 inches in diameter, and a cover of one-third diameter for larger culverts to prevent crushing by traffic.

APPENDIX E
STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE CLEARANCE FOR
LARGENT'S BEND FAS

From: "Murdo, Damon" <dmurdo@mt.gov>
Date: September 11, 2009 4:11:17 PM MDT
To: "Mangum, Bardell" <bmangum@mt.gov>
Subject: RE: Lewis Property FAS File Search Request

September 11, 2009

Bardell Mangum
FWP
PO Box 200701
Helena MT 59620

RE: LEWIS PROPERTY FAS, SUN RIVER, CASCADE COUNTY. SHPO Project #:
2009091110

Dear Mr. Mangum:

I have conducted a cultural resource file search for the above-cited project located in Sections 29, 32, T21N R1E. 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.

Based on the previous extensive ground disturbance associated with the gravel pit we feel that there is a low likelihood cultural properties will be impacted. We, therefore, feel that a recommendation for a cultural resource inventory is unwarranted at this time. However, should cultural materials be inadvertently discovered during this project we would ask that our office be contacted and the site investigated.

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: FWP/FISH/2009

APPENDIX F
DELISTING OF LARGENT'S BEND FAS PROPERTY FROM DEQ CECRA
PRIORITY LIST



November 18, 2005

RECEIVED
NOV 22 2005
FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
FIELD SERVICES

Ms. Darlene Edge
Montana Department of Fish Wildlife and Parks
Lands Division
P.O. Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620-0701

Subject: Delisting of Lewis Construction Company - Vaughn Gravel Pit Facility

Dear Ms. Edge:

In accordance with 17.55.114(6) of the Administrative Rules of Montana (ARM), the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) provided notice of its proposal to delist the Lewis Construction Company – Vaughn Gravel Pit facility. Under ARM 17.55.114(1)(c), DEQ shall delist a facility from the Comprehensive Environmental Cleanup and Responsibility Act (CECRA) Priority List if another state program assumes jurisdiction of the facility and that state program addresses all the releases and threatened releases of all hazardous or deleterious substances at the facility. Based on a closure letter issued by the Montana Department of Health and Environmental Sciences (MDHES) Underground Storage Tank program in 1993, the Settlement Agreement entered into with the MDHES Hazardous Waste Program in 1992, and the additional information provided in your delisting report and report revisions, no further remedial action is necessary at the facility to address the releases or threatened releases of hazardous or deleterious substances. Notice of the proposed delisting was published in the Great Falls Tribune and the public comment period ran from October 16, 2005 to November 14, 2005. No comments were received during the public comment period. Therefore, this facility will be removed from the CECRA Priority List.

If you have any questions, please feel free to call me at (406) 841-5072.

Sincerely,

Lawrence Hanson
Site Response Section
Remediation Division

CC: Cynthia Brooks, DEQ Legal
Aimee Reynolds, Site Response Section
Garry Lewis, Attn: Lewis Construction Company, 1024 11th Ave. North, Great Falls, MT 59401

Enforcement Division • Permitting & Compliance Division • Planning, Prevention & Assistance Division • Remediation Division