DRAFT
Environmental Assessment

WHITE BEAR
FISHING ACCESS SITE
IMPROVEMENTS

August 2003

White Bear Fishing Access Site Improvements
Draft Environmental Assessment

DRAFT

MEPA/NEPA/23-1-110 MCA CHECKLIST

PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

1. **Type of Proposed State Action:** Enhance the White Bear fishing access site by providing vehicle access, a non-motorized boat launch, and water access for the local fire department. Enhancement will include: constructing an entry road, a cul-de-sac with a parking area, and a fire truck access pad; installing a latrine; fencing the road, parking area, and boat launch; posting an entrance sign and regulation sign; and securing the fire truck pad with posts, cable, and lock.

2. **Agency Authority for the Proposed Action:** The 1977 Montana Legislature enacted statute 87-1-605, which directs Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) to acquire, develop and operate a system of fishing accesses. The legislature established an earmarked funding account to ensure that this fishing access site function would be accomplished.

3. **Name of Project:** White Bear Fishing Access Site Improvements

4. **Name, Address and Phone Number of Project Sponsor (if other than the agency):** Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks is the project sponsor.

5. **If Applicable:**
   Estimated Construction/Commencement Date: Spring 2004
   Estimated Completion Date: Fall 2004
   Current Status of Project Design (% complete): 100%

6. **Location Affected by Proposed Action (county, range and township)**
   The White Bear Fishing Access Site is located approximately 7.5 miles south of Great Falls off Fox Farm Road on Fawn Road. The site is located in section 1 of Township 19 North, Range 3 East, NE ¼; Cascade County, Montana. The site is 41.4 acres in size.

7. Project Size: Estimate the number of acres that would be directly affected that are currently:

	Acres		Acres
(a) Developed:		(d) Floodplain	40
residential	0		
industrial	0	(e) Productive:	
		irrigated cropland	0
(b) Open Space/Woodlands/Recreation	20	dry cropland	0
		forestry	0
(c) Wetlands/Riparian Areas	20	rangeland	0
		other	0

8. Map/site plan: attach an original 8 1/2" x 11" or larger section of the most recent USGS 7.5' series topographic map showing the location and boundaries of the area that would be affected by the proposed action. A different map scale may be substituted if more appropriate or if required by agency rule. If available, a site plan should also be attached.

Please see attachment Appendix 2 for site location and Appendix 3 for site plan.

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

(a) Permits:

Agency Name	Permit	Date Filed/#
Army Corps of Engineers	404	
Fish Wildlife and Parks, Stream Bank Protection	124	
DEQ, Short Term Water Quality Exemption	318	
DNRC, Navigable Rivers Land Use license/easement		
Cascade County Flood Plain Permit		
DEQ, Storm water runoff plan		
Cascade County, Weed plan		
Cascade County, County Sanitarian		

(b) Funding:

Agency Name	Funding Amount
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (Fishing License Revenue)	$50,631.75

(c) Other Overlapping or Additional Jurisdictional Responsibilities:

Agency Name	Type of Responsibility

10. Narrative summary of the proposed action or project including the benefits and purpose of the proposed action:

Fish, Wildlife & Parks proposes to develop the White Bear Fishing Access Site (FAS) by providing vehicle access, a non-motorized launch point, a latrine, and a fire truck water retrieval station. The site plan calls for a single lane gravel entry road with two turnout lanes, off road cul-de-sac parking, and a fire truck pad. All these areas would be fenced to avoid off-road vehicle traffic. The fire truck water retrieval station would be gated off with a lock to avoid use by other vehicles. Additionally, the boat launch would be fenced to minimize erosion and loss of vegetation. A vault latrine would be installed to maintain a healthy and sanitary site. An entry sign would identify the site from the road; and a regulations sign would be posted in the parking area.

The White Bear FAS is located on the west bank of Missouri River south of Great Falls. It was donated through a series of six transactions in 1981, 1982, and 1984. The two closest river access sites are both located on the east bank of the Missouri River. Big Bend FAS is located 3.8 river miles upstream from White Bear FAS, and Broadwater Bay boat launch is located 5 river miles downstream. White Bear FAS provides a unique opportunity for access to the river due to its close proximity to Great Falls, and its location on the west bank of the Missouri River.

In the mid 1980's, improvements to this FAS were proposed; however, the proposal irritated the surrounding landowners. Their concern was that the roads leading to the site would have too much traffic for a gravel road. Thus, the proposal was withdrawn, and the property was left in an undeveloped state. Recently, the boundaries have been fenced, and signs have been posted to designate the land as Montana, Fish Wildlife, & Parks and to list rules. All roads to the FAS have been paved, and the surrounding area is developed with numerous houses. Recently, the local volunteer fire department asked Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks to provide them access to the Missouri River via the White Bear FAS. In the event of fire, the proposed access would allow the fire department to utilize the Missouri River via pumper-truck hoses. The volunteer fire department may in the future at their expense install a dry hydrant to facilitate drawing water. In addition, the volunteer fire department would use the site 1 to 5 times a year for training. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks proposed developing the FAS to provide access for the fire department and to improve access for recreationists.

The nearby homeowners are still concerned with increased traffic on roads and potential trespassing. However, they are now eager to allow the volunteer fire department access to the water of the Missouri River. Thus, improvements to this site are to be kept minimal to balance the concerns for the homeowners and to provide access for recreationists and the volunteer fire department. To minimize the number of people who will utilize the site at one time, only one sign will identify the area, only access for non-motorized boats will be available, and limited parking space will be provided. A latrine is proposed due to the potential for increased numbers of visitors. The latrine will promote a healthy, sanitary site and avert indecent exposure, which is another concern of local homeowners.

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

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
- Parks Division
- Wildlife Division
- Fisheries Division
- Design and Construction Bureau
- Maintenance
- Enforcement Division

Montana Department of Commerce – Tourism

Montana Natural Heritage program – Natural Resources Information System (NRIS)

Cascade County Conservation District

Location proposed for entry road. Gate can be seen in the background. Photo taken from middle of entry-road looking west.

Location proposed for non-motorized vehicle launch. Path leads down to river bank. Photo taken from proposed parking area looking east.

Location proposed for parking area. Photo taken from river bank looking west.

Photo of cottonwood forest at the site. Photo taken from parking area looking north.

PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

1. Evaluation of the impacts of the Proposed Action including secondary and cumulative impacts on the Physical and Human Environment.

A. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

1. LAND RESOURCES Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
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		Yes	1b.
c. **Destruction, covering or modification of any unique geologic or physical features?		X				1c.
d. Changes in siltation, deposition or erosion patterns that may modify the channel of a river or stream or the bed or shore of a lake?		X				
e. Exposure of people or property to earthquakes, landslides, ground failure, or other natural hazard?			X		Yes	1e.
f. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

1a. The proposed project will not alter geologic substructure, and will minimally impact soil stability. The parking area, road, fire truck pad, and latrine will be located in the 100-year flood plain area. Erosion is expected to be minor, with potential flooding in the spring. Surface runoff should be minimal due to the low slope (0-2 percent) and the gravel sandy loam.

1b. The proposed project will cause further erosion of the river bank due to the increased use by recreationists, the establishment of a non-motorized boat launch, and the fire truck hoses. The volunteer fire department may in the future, at their expense, install a dry hydrant to facilitate drawing water. This impact will be minimal, as vehicle traffic and boat launching activities will be confined to a small area and the volunteer fire department will only use the site one to five times a year for training or during an emergency. The road, parking area, fire truck pad, and latrine will cause over-covering of soil. To minimize disturbance, these areas will be fenced to confine vehicle traffic and avoid bank erosion.

1c. The proposed project will not destroy, cover or modify any unique geologic or physical feature.

1e. With increased visitation there is an increased potential for a forest fire. Not permitting fires on the site, and posting and enforcing these regulations will mitigate this potential.

* 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 can not be evaluated.

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

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

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

2. AIR Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. **Emission of air pollutants or deterioration of ambient air quality? (also see 13 (c))			X		Yes	2a.
b. Creation of objectionable odors?			X		Yes	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)		X				
f. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Air Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

2a. Minor amounts of dust will be temporarily created during construction of road and parking area.

2b. Vault latrines can create foul odors; but regular latrine maintenance and "sweet smelling design" will help to minimize offensive 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 can not 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. WATER Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
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				
d. Changes in the amount of surface water in any water body or creation of a new water body?		X				
e. Exposure of people or property to water related hazards such as flooding?		X				
f. Changes in the quality of groundwater?		X				
g. Changes in the quantity of groundwater?		X				
h. Increase in risk of contamination of surface or groundwater?		X				
i. Effects on any existing water right or reservation?		X				
j. Effects on other water users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quality?		X				
k. Effects on other users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quantity?		X				
l. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project affect a designated floodplain? (Also see 3c)		X				
m. ***For P-R/D-J, will the project result in any discharge that will affect federal or state water quality regulations? (Also see 3a)		X				
n. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Water Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

3a. The proposed plan will cause a minor increase in the discharge of sediments into river due to increased foot traffic and boat launching activities. This increase can be minimized by fencing off the boat launch area to confine boat launching activity to a particular area (e.g. 30 feet). This mitigating activity will help minimize disruption of bank and vegetation. In addition terracing or another type of bank stabilization structure may be needed at the boat launch to avoid erosion. The fire truck hoses may also contribute to bank erosion and vegetation damage. The volunteer fire department may in the future, at their expense, install a dry hydrant to facilitate drawing water. The volunteer fire department will only utilize the site one to five times a year for training or during emergencies.

3b. To help minimize changes in drainage pattern caused by construction, the parking area, road, fire truck pad, and latrine will be located on an area with low slope (0-2 percent) and gravel sandy loam. The proposed plan may increase surface runoff due to changes in vegetative cover from increased foot traffic, boat launching activities, and fire truck activities. This increase can be minimized by fencing off the boat launch area to confine boat launching activity to a particular area. This mitigating activity will help minimize disruption of bank and vegetation. The fire truck hoses may also contribute to bank erosion and vegetation damage. The volunteer fire department will only utilize the site one to five times a year for training or during emergencies.

* 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 can not 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.

4. VEGETATION Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
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				
c. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				4c.
d. Reduction in acreage or productivity of any agricultural land?		X				
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?		X				
g. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

4a. Approximately one acre of cottonwood forest understory will be displaced to build the road, parking lot, fire truck pad, and latrine. A limited amount of trees along the entry road edge (to accommodate the single lane road with turn outs) will be removed during construction. Increased foot traffic and boat launching will reduce vegetation at the non-motorized boat launch. Fencing the non-motorized boat launch to focus activities to one area will help minimize this loss. The fire truck hoses may also contribute to vegetation damage. The volunteer fire department may in the future, at their expense, install a dry hydrant to facilitate drawing water. The volunteer fire department will only utilize the site one to five times a year for training or during emergencies.

4c. The Montana Natural Heritage Program (Natural Resources Information System) found no species of concern in their database for this area (March 31, 2002). A field survey has not been completed.

4e. Currently, leafy spurge is present at the site. Development of an area often leads to the establishment and spread of noxious weeds. To decrease the establishment and spread of weeds, maintenance crews will follow Fish Wildlife & Parks Region 4 Weed Management Plan protocol.

* 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 can not 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.

** 5. FISH/WILDLIFE Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Deterioration of critical fish or wildlife habitat?			X		Yes	5a.
b. Changes in the diversity or abundance of game animals or bird species?		X				
c. Changes in the diversity or abundance of nongame species?		X				
d. Introduction of new species into an area?		X				
e. Creation of a barrier to the migration or movement of animals?		X				
f. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?			X			5f.
g. Increase in conditions that stress wildlife populations or limit abundance (including harassment, legal or illegal harvest or other human activity)?			X		Yes	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)			X			See Comment 5f.
i. ***For P-R/D-J, will the project introduce or export any species not presently or historically occurring in the receiving location? (Also see 5d)		X				
j. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

5a. The White Bear FAS is the one of the last remnants of unaltered cottonwood riparian habitat in the area. The FAS is bordered by numerous subdivisions. Confining vehicle access and boat launching activities and minimal development to a small portion of the site will mitigate the deterioration of the site. Posted regulation signs and enforcement activities will help prevent activities that deteriorate wildlife habitat. A limited amount of trees along the entry road edge (to accommodate the single lane road with turn outs) will be removed during construction.

5f. The FAS is contained within the territory of a bald eagle, and a nest is located upstream from the site near the Missouri River. This type of development should not adversely affect the bald eagle or the nest site.

5g. Increased site visitation may increase conditions that cause stress to wildlife populations, but limiting vehicle access, limiting site usage, posting regulations, and enforcement activities will help to minimize increased stress to wildlife populations.

* 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 can not 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. NOISE/ELECTRICAL EFFECTS Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Increases in existing noise levels?			X		Yes	6a.
b. Exposure of people to serve or nuisance noise levels?		X				
c. Creation of electrostatic or electromagnetic effects that could be detrimental to human health or property?		X				
d. Interference with radio or television reception and operation?		X				
e. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

6a. An increase in existing noise levels may occur with increased traffic and number of people visiting the site. The enhancement of the fishing access site has been kept minimal to avoid any major problems between visitors and homeowners. To minimize the number of people who will utilize the site at one time, only one sign will identify the area, only access for non-motorized boats will be available, and limited parking spaces will be provided.

* 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 can not 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.

7. LAND USE Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Alteration of or interference with the productivity or profitability of the existing land use of an area?		X				
b. Conflicted 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		Yes	7d
e. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

7d. Homeowners in the area expressed concern about trespassing and increased noise due to increased visitors to the site. The enhancement of the fishing access site has been kept minimal to avoid any major problems between visitors and homeowners. To minimize the number of people who will utilize the site at one time, only one sign will identify the area, only access for non-motorized boats will be available, and limited parking spaces will be provided.

* 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 can not 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.

8. RISK/HEALTH HAZARDS Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
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 Positive		8b.
c. Creation of any human health hazard or potential hazard?		X				
d. ***For P-R/D-J, will any chemical toxicants be used? (Also see 8a)			X		Yes	See comment 8a
e. Other:		x				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

8a. Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks uses herbicides for weed control via a contract with the Cascade County Weed District. To minimize accidental spills Fish wildlife & Parks Region 4 Weed Management Plan will be followed. The latrine vault will be pumped out approximately every 2 years to manage collected human waste.

8b. The access road and fire truck pad will facilitate the emergency response of the local volunteer fire department. They will have access to water from the Missouri River. This will decrease response time to fires in the area.

* 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 can not 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.

9. COMMUNITY IMPACT Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Alteration of the location, distribution, density, or growth rate of the human population of an area?		X				
b. Alteration of the social structure of a community?		X				
c. Alteration of the level or distribution of employment or community or personal income?		X				
d. Changes in industrial or commercial activity?		X				
e. Increased traffic hazards or effects on existing transportation facilities or patterns of movement of people and goods?			X			9e.
f. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

9e. There will be a minimal increase of traffic on roads leading into the site. All of these roads are paved and maintained. The entrance into the site is visible and should not create a traffic hazard.

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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. PUBLIC SERVICES/TAXES/UTILITIES Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
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		Yes	10a.
b. Will the proposed action have an effect upon the local or state tax base and revenues?		X				
c. Will the proposed action result in a need for new facilities or substantial alterations of any of the following utilities: electric power, natural gas, other fuel supply or distribution systems, or communications?		X				
d. Will the proposed action result in increased used of any energy source?		X				
e. **Define projected revenue sources						10e.
f. **Define projected maintenance costs.						10f.
g. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

10a The entry road and fire truck pad will allow the volunteer fire department to have access to a water source near the housing developments. Improvements to the site may increase visitor usage and with more visitors there is a greater potential for visitor landowner conflict. The proposed enhancement and expansion will affect Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Enforcement Division with an increase in personal services and operations monies having to be redirected towards this access site. Game Wardens may have to patrol the area more frequently for fishing license compliance, water safety, littering, drug and alcohol use, vandalism, trespassing and other issues. The Cascade County Sheriff's office will need to increase their presence in the area and respond to complaints from concerned neighbors. However, minimal development is proposed to avoid this type of conflict. Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks Maintenance Department will maintain the entry road, fences, and signs. In addition, they will pump out the latrines every 2 years, and perform standard weed prevention as presented in Fish, Wildlife & Parks Region 4 Weed Management Plan.

10e. The proposed project will be funded through Fishing License Revenue.

10f. Maintenance costs will be funded from the Region 4 Fishing Access Site Maintenance Account.

Weed Control	$400
Latrine pumping and site maintenance	$600
Estimated Total Maintenance Cost	$1000

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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.

** 11. AESTHETICS/RECREATION Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
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		Yes	See Comments 11a.
c. **Alteration of the quality or quantity of recreational/tourism opportunities and settings? (Attach Tourism Report)			X			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)		X				
e. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

11a. Increased traffic to the site may negatively affect local landowners. The enhancement of the fishing access site has been kept minimal to minimize increased use and to avoid any major problems between visitors and homeowners. To minimize the number of people who will utilize the site at one time, only one sign will identify the area, only access for non-motorized boats will be available, and limited parking spaces will be provided. Latrines may create an aesthetically offensive site or odors; however they will not be visible by the local landowners because of the cottonwood forest, and maintenance will keep odors minimal.

11c. White Bear FAS provides a unique opportunity for access to the Missouri River due to its close proximity to Great Falls, and its location on the west bank of the Missouri River. The two closest river access sites are both located on the east bank of the Missouri River. Big Bend FAS is located 3.8 river miles upstream from White Bear FAS, and Broadwater Bay boat launch is located 5 river miles downstream. The project is intended to improve quality and quantity of services available at this FAS. Not only will the site provide fishing access, but also will provide canoeing, hiking, wildlife viewing, and bird watching opportunities. The entrance road, parking area, and non-motorized boat launch will allow for greater access to the site and permit recreationists to launch boats. The latrine will help maintain a sanitary site and provide comfort for recreationists. Please refer to the Tourism Report, Appendix 4.

* 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 can not be evaluated.

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

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

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

12. CULTURAL/HISTORICAL RESOURCES Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. **Destruction or alteration of any site, structure or object of prehistoric historic, or paleontological importance?		X				12a.
b. Physical change that would affect unique cultural values?		X				Please see 12a.
c. Effects on existing religious or sacred uses of a site or area?		X				Please see 12a.
d. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project affect historic or cultural resources? Attach SHPO letter of clearance. (Also see 12.a)		X				
e. Other:		x				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

12a. Cultural and historical resources were evaluated by Montana State Historic Preservation Office. They concluded that "no properties on or eligible for NRHP appear likely to exist within project impact area."

* 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 can not be evaluated.

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

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

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

SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

13. SUMMARY EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE Will the proposed action, considered as a whole:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? (A project or program may result in impacts on two or more separate resources that create a significant effect when considered together or in total.)		X				
b. Involve potential risks or adverse effects which are uncertain but extremely hazardous if they were to occur?		X				
c. Potentially conflict with the substantive requirements of any local, state, or federal law, regulation, standard or formal plan?		X				
d. Establish a precedent or likelihood that future actions with significant environmental impacts will be proposed?		X				
e. Generate substantial debate or controversy about the nature of the impacts that would be created?		X				
f. ***For P-R/D-J, is the project expected to have organized opposition or generate substantial public controversy? (Also see 13e)			X			13f
g. ****For P-R/D-J, list any federal or state permits required.			X			See #9a

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Water Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

13f. The nearby homeowners are concerned with increased traffic on roads and potential trespassing. However, they are eager to allow the Volunteer Fire Department access to the water of the Missouri River. Thus, improvements to this site are to be kept minimal to balance the concerns of the homeowners and to provide access for recreationists and the volunteer fire department. The volunteer fire department may in the future, at their expense, install a dry hydrant to facilitate drawing water. To minimize the number of people who will utilize the site at one time, only one sign will identify the area, only access for non-motorized boats will be available, and limited parking spaces will be provided. A latrine is proposed due to the potential for increased numbers of visitors. The latrine will promote a healthy sanitary site and avert indecent exposure, which was/is another concern of local homeowners.

* 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 can not 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 II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW, CONTINUED

2. Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives (including the no action alternative) to the proposed action whenever alternatives are reasonably available and prudent to consider and a discussion of how the alternatives would be implemented:

Alternative A: No Action
Access to the site is day use and walk in only. Fishing is permitted from the bank, and other recreation activities occur (e.g., picnicking, walking, wildlife viewing). There is a pull off for limited vehicle parking at the site entrance. White Bear FAS provides a unique opportunity for access to the river due to its close proximity to Great Falls, and its location on the west bank of the Missouri River. Currently, the two closest river access sites are both located on the east bank of the Missouri River. Big Bend FAS is located 3.8 river miles upstream from White Bear FAS, and Broadwater Bay boat launch is located 5 river miles downstream. By not improving the site, visitors will not have increased quality and quantity of recreational opportunities.

Alternative B: Proposed Development
The proposed development balances the concerns for the homeowners and provides access for recreationists and the volunteer fire department. To minimize the number of people who will utilize the site at one time, only one sign will identify the area, only access for non-motorized boats will be available, and limited parking spaces will be provided. The road will provide access for recreationists to utilize the site and the proposed non-motorized boat launch. This launch is desirable because the next closest boat launches are located 5 river miles upstream and 3.8 river miles downstream. In addition, both of these sites are on the east side of the river. The road and fire truck pad with a potential dry hydrant will allow the local volunteer fire department to have access to water in an area with numerous housing developments. The latrine will promote a healthy sanitary site and avert indecent exposure, which was/is another concern of local homeowners.

Alternative C: High Level of Development
A high level of development at this site would consist of paving the entrance road, providing 12 vehicle parking spaces, establishing a boat launch ramp, and digging a dry hydrant for the volunteer fire department. A paved road, increased parking, and boat ramp would increase visitation to the site. This would create more opportunity for visitor landowner conflict, increase noise, increase maintenance costs, and increase road traffic. All of which are beyond acceptable limits for landowners in the area. The site is also one of the few remaining cottonwood forest in the area, and increased recreationists at this level would lead to the degradation of the site.

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

Erosion of soil and river bank will be minimal. Fencing the non-motorized boat launch to confine boat launching activities to a particular area will help minimize bank erosion. The volunteer fire department will only utilize the site for emergencies and one to five times a year for training, thus minimizing erosion due to water pumping activities. The road, parking area, and fire truck pad (and potential dry hydrant) will be fenced to avoid vehicle disruption and erosion of soils on the rest of the site.

Air quality will be minimally and temporally affected by improving the site. Dust created during construction of road and parking area will be minor and temporary. Vault latrine odor will be minimized by standard latrine maintenance and periodic pumping.

Vegetation at the site will be minimally impacted. Approximately one acre of cottonwood understory will be converted into the road, parking lot, fire truck pad, and latrine areas. A limited amount of trees along the entry road edge (to accommodate the single lane road with turn outs) will be removed during construction. Confining human activity and minimal development to a small portion of the site will mitigate the deterioration of the site. Fencing around the road and parking lot will limit vehicular access to the area. Fencing the non-motorized boat launch to focus people to one area will minimize vegetation loss. Posted signs will identify permitted activities at the FAS. Posting and enforcing regulations that will restrict fires on the site will mitigate loss of vegetation due to fire.

To decrease the establishment and spread of noxious weeds, maintenance crews will follow Fish Wildlife & Parks Region 4 Weed Management Plan protocol.

Minimal development of the site should minimize the stress to wildlife.

The enhancement of the fishing access site has been kept minimal to avoid any major problems between visitors and homeowners. To minimize the number of people who will utilize the site at one time, only one sign will identify the area, only access for non-motorized boats will be available, and limited parking spaces will be provided. The latrine may create an offensive sight; however it will not be visible by the local landowners.

The potential for the release of hazardous materials will be minimized at the site. Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks will follow the Region 4 Weed Management Plan to minimize chemical spills during weed prevention activities. The vault latrine will be pumped out approximately every 2 years to manage collected human waste.

PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

White Bear FAS provides a unique opportunity for recreationists due to its close proximity to Great Falls and its location on the Missouri River. Utilization of the site will increase with the improvements; however the minimal improvements will limit high use at the site. A moderate increase in visitation is appropriate and will appease the landowner concerns, maintain the integrity of the resource, and minimize maintenance costs.

The proposed development considers public need for access, resource protection, fire department needs, and landowner concerns for trespassing and increased noise. Visitors will have non-motorized boat access to the west bank of the Missouri River near Great Falls. Vehicle use and boat access to the river will be centralized to one area on the site, thus avoiding degradation of the entire site. The volunteer fire department will have access to the Missouri River for emergencies in the surrounding housing developments. Proposed development is minimal to limit conflict between visitors and landowners.

This EA did not reveal any significant negative impacts on the physical and human environment. Most minor impacts could be mitigated. No threatened or endangered species have been located in the area, with the exception White Bear FAS being located in a bald eagle territory. No unique geological or physical features will be affected. The proposed development will increase visitor enjoyment of the site.

PART IV. EA CONCLUSION SECTION

1. Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required? NO. If an EIS is not required, explain <u>why</u> 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 found no significant negative impacts from the proposed action at the White Bear FAS. Thus, an EIS is not necessary and an environmental assessment is the appropriate level of analysis.

2. Describe the level of public involvement for this project if any and, given the complexity and the seriousness of the environmental issues associated with the proposed action, is the level of public involvement appropriate under the circumstances?

Several public meetings were held to listen to and address comments about the proposed improvements.

The public will be notified in the following ways to comment on the EA of the White Bear FAS improvements:

1. Legal notices will be published in the *Great Falls Tribune* and the *Helena Independent Record*.
2. Legal notice and the draft EA will be posted on the Fish, Wildlife, & Parks web page: *http://fwp.state.mt.us*

The neighboring landowners will receive copies of the EA or notice that the EA is available upon request.

This level of public involvement is appropriate since all negative impacts were minor, and most could be mitigated.

3. Duration of comment period, if any.

The public comment period will be no less than 30 days.

4. Name, title, address and phone number of the person(s) responsible for preparing the EA:

Sally Schrank
Independent contractor
112 Riverview C
Great Falls, MT 59404
406-268-0527

Dave Todd
Regional Park Manager
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
4600 Giant Springs Road
Great Falls, MT 59405
406-454-5859

APPENDICES

1. 23-1-110 MCA Project Qualification Checklist
2. Site Location Map
3. Site Plan
4. Tourism Report – Department of Commerce

APPENDIX 1
23-1-110 MCA
PROJECT QUALIFICATION CHECKLIST

Date_ March 28, 2003 **Person Reviewing: Sally Schrank**

Project Location:_ The White Bear Fishing Access Site is located 7.5 miles south of Great Falls off of Fox Farm Road on Fawn Road. The site is located in section 1 of Township 19 North, Range 3 East, Cascade County, Montana.

Description of Proposed Work:

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 MCA rules. (Please check Y all that apply and comment as necessary.) Capital Construction projects - prepared by D & C; Force Account projects - prepared by Region.

[ ] A. New roadway or trail built over undisturbed land?
Comments:

[ ] B. New building construction (buildings <100 sf and vault latrines exempt)?
Comments:

[ ] C. Any excavation of 20 c.y. or greater?
Comments:

[Y] D. New parking lots built over undisturbed land or expansion of existing lot that increases parking capacity by 25% or more?
Comments: Currently, there is no parking at the site. The proposed improvements will create 5 parking spaces.

[ ] E. Any new shoreline alteration that exceeds a double wide boat ramp or handicapped fishing station?
Comments:

[ ] F. Any new construction into lakes, reservoirs, or streams?
Comments:

[ ] G. Any new construction in an area with National Registry quality cultural artifacts (as determined by State Historical Preservation Office)?
Comments:

[ ] H. Any new above ground utility lines?
Comments:

10/99s
ed

[ ] I. Any increase or decrease in campsites of 25% or more of an existing number of campsites?
Comments:

[ ] J. Proposed project significantly changes the existing features or use pattern; including effects of a series of individual projects?
Comments:

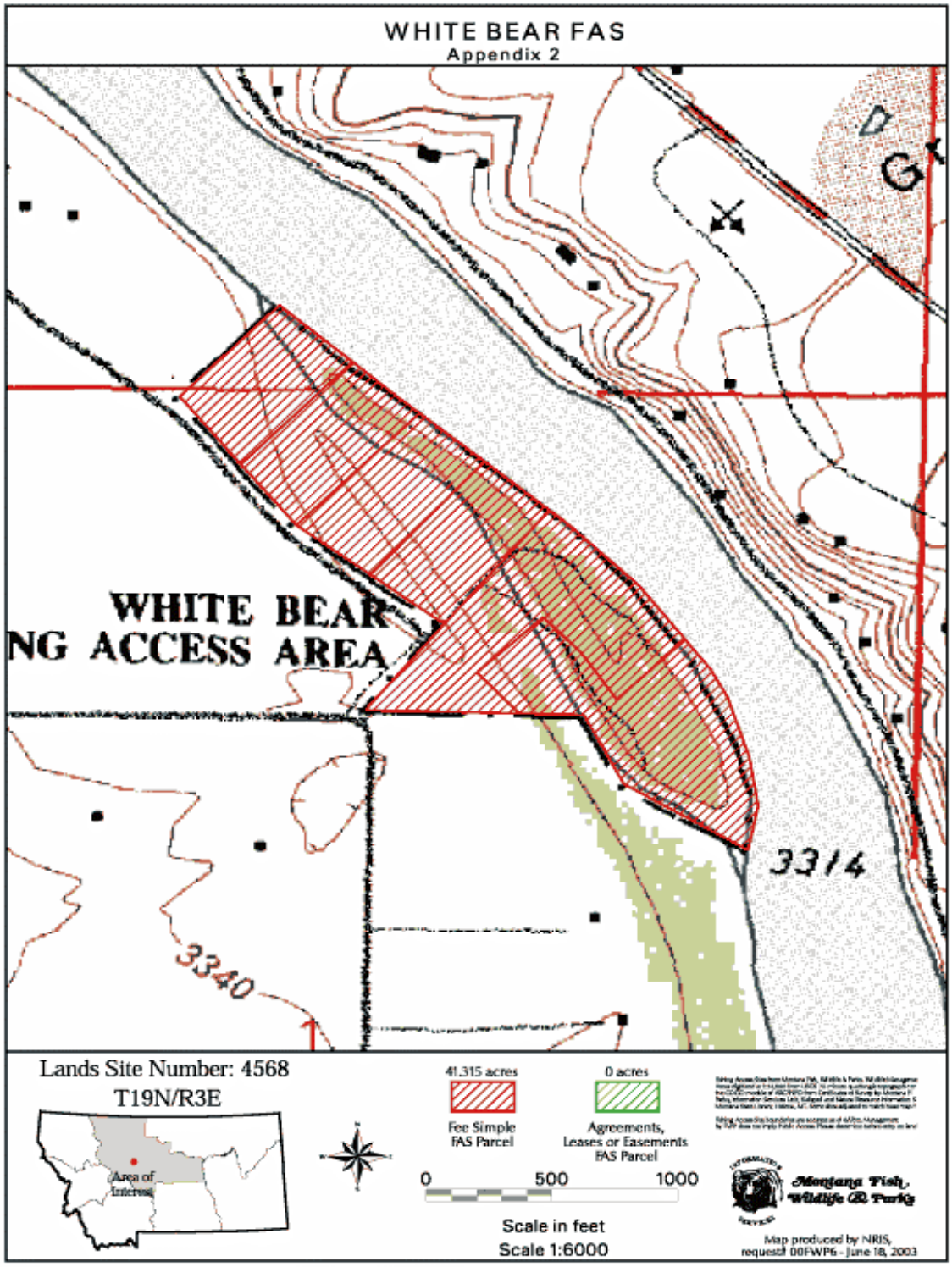
If any of the above are checked, 23-1-110 MCA rules apply to this proposed work and should be documented on the MEPA/23-1-110 MCA CHECKLIST. Refer to MEPA/23-1-110 MCA Cross Reference Summary for further assistance.

Appendix 2
Site Location Maps
White Bear Fishing Access site

Township 19 North, Range 3 East, Section 1 NE ¼; 41.4 acres total

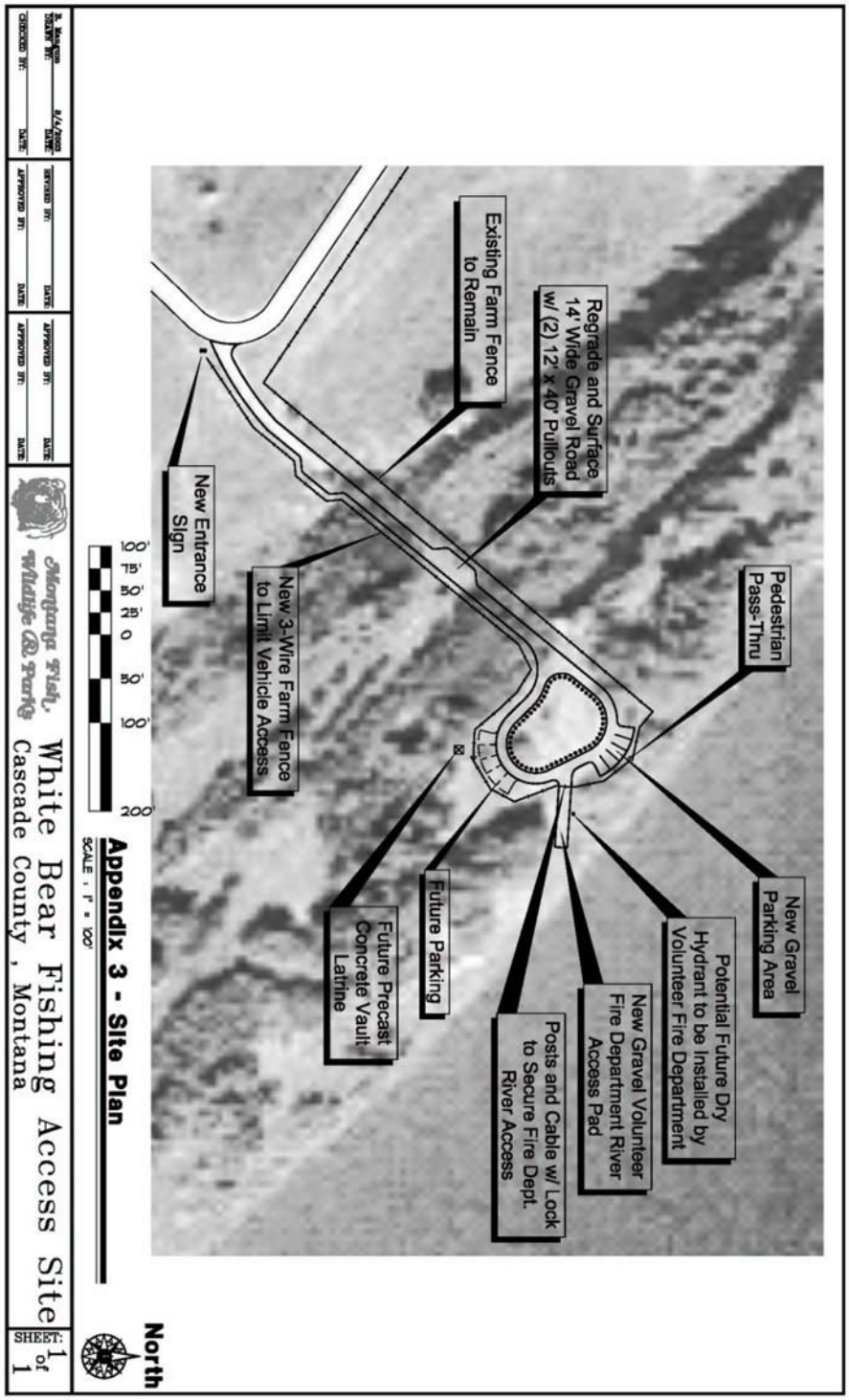
Logo of the fish identifies the location of White Bear Fishing Access Site.

Appendix 2 Continued



Shaded area identifies the location of White Bear Fishing Access Site.

APPENDIX 3
Site Plan



APPENDIX 4
TOURISM REPORT
MONTANA ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT (23-1-110 MCA)

The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks has initiated the review process as mandated by 23-1-110 MCA 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:

Victor Bjornberg, Tourism Development Coordinator
Travel Montana-Department of Commerce
PO Box 200533
1424 9th Ave.
Helena, MT 59620-0533

Project Name: White Bear Fishing Access Site Improvements

Project Description: Enhance the White Bear fishing access site by providing vehicle access, a non-motorized boat launch, and water access for the local fire department. Enhancement will include: constructing entry road, cul-de-sac with parking area, and fire truck access pad; installing a latrine; fencing road and parking area; posting an entrance sign and regulation sign; and securing the fire truck pad with posts, cable, and lock.

1. Would this site development project have an impact on the tourism economy?

NO (circled) YES If YES, briefly describe:

Negative impact. Project Appears to improve access and services for users.

2. Does this impending improvement alter the quality or quantity of recreation/tourism opportunities and settings?

NO YES (circled) If YES, briefly describe:

Project Appears to improve quality of access and quantity of services available at this fishing access site

Signature Victor A Bjornberg Date 4-8-02