



## DECISION NOTICE

### Hilleman FAS Easement Acquisition & Development

FWP-DN-POR-R7-25-006

November 13, 2025

#### **ACTION**

Decision Notice (DN). Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) shall prepare a DN for the proposed action. The DN must identify the agency decision, the reasons for the decision, and any special conditions surrounding the decision or its implementation.

With this action, FWP hereby adopts the Draft Environmental Assessment or Draft EA as final, without modification, and approves Alternative 2, the proposed action.

#### **AUTHORITY: MONTANA ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT**

According to the applicable requirements of the Montana Environmental Policy Act or MEPA and its implementing rules and regulations, before a proposed action may be approved, environmental review must be conducted to identify, consider, and disclose any potential impacts of the proposed action on the affected human environment. The level of environmental review will vary with the complexity and seriousness of environmental issues associated with a proposed action. The level of public interest will also vary. The agency is responsible for adjusting public review to match these factors. *Title 75, Chapter 1, Parts 1 through 3, Montana Code Annotated (MCA)*.

Based on these factors, FWP determined a checklist EA (Draft EA) constitutes the appropriate level of review for the proposed action. Therefore, to assess and disclose potential impacts of the proposed action, FWP prepared a Draft EA for public review and comment. See *Public Participation Process* below.

Further, FWP must consider any substantive comments received in response to an EA and proceed in accordance with one of the following steps: determine the EA did not adequately reflect the issues raised by the proposed action and issue an Environmental Impact Statement or EIS; determine the EA did not adequately reflect the issues raised by the proposed action and issue a supplemental EA; or determine the Draft EA adequately addressed the issues raised by the proposed action and make a final decision, with appropriate modification resulting from the analysis provided in the Draft EA and the analysis of any substantive public comments received. See *Public Comment and FWP Response* below.

#### **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCESS**

The Draft EA was made available for public review and comment from 10/23/2025 to 11/07/2025. The Draft EA was posted on FWP's Public Notice webpage: <https://fwp.mt.gov/news/public-notice>. The

Draft EA was also made available for public review on the Environmental Quality Council or EQC website: <https://leg.mt.gov/mepa/search/>, by individual request, and through notice to identified interested parties. FWP received 11 comments during the public comment period.

### **DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION**

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) proposes to acquire an easement on waterfront property and design, construct and manage a Fishing Access Site (FAS) along the Lower Yellowstone River (LYR) immediately upriver of Miles City. The proposed project site is on undeveloped public property owned by Miles City. No private property is included in any part of the proposed project. The project is proposed as a partnership effort between Walleyes Unlimited, Miles City and FWP.

The proposed Hilleman FAS is situated along the Yellowstone River in Custer County, less than a ½ mile upriver from the western edge of Miles City. The project would include a parking area, boat ramp and appropriate signage. The project would also include perimeter fencing and an extension of the existing riverbank armoring. Visitors to the FAS could utilize amenities at the adjacent Hilliman Complex, including restrooms, a picnic area, horseshoe pits, athletic fields, trails and shoreline fishing. The proposed project represents a rare opportunity for FWP to acquire interest in a property in a good location for a high-quality boat ramp and sought after recreational opportunities along the LYR. The new FAS would be managed under and incorporated into FWP's Administrative Region 7 FAS Management Plan.

### **PURPOSE AND NEED**

The purpose of the proposed easement acquisition and the improvement project would be to manage the property as a public FAS with a boat ramp. The FAS would provide a needed motorboat launch on the LYR in an area where formal access is limited. Upstream motorboat launch access is over 40 river miles away and the closest downstream boat launch from the proposed project is 11 miles. There is a FAS that provides a canoe and kayak launch nearby (Roche Jaune FAS), however motorized boats can utilize that site only during spring runoff when the water is deeper (about 4 weeks each year).

The needs that will be met by the proposed easement acquisition and the improvement project include:

- Provide public access to the LYR for motorized and nonmotorized boats in an area lacking reliable developed access.
- Efficient use of limited acquisition and development funding by partnering with WU and Miles City, and by proposing to build in an area with existing infrastructure.
- The proposed location is considered a long-term solution for motorized boat access in the area.
- The project will help alleviate congestion at upstream and downstream boat ramps while providing safe access to the LYR.

### **ALTERNATIVES ANALYZED**

#### **Alternative 1: No Action**

In addition to the proposed action, and as required by MEPA, FWP analyzes the "No-Action" alternative in the EA. Under the No-Action alternative, the proposed action would not occur. Therefore, no additional impacts to the human environment would occur. The No Action alternative forms the baseline from which the potential impacts of the proposed action may be measured.

Under the No Action alternative FWP would not accept a no cost perpetual easement from Miles City and would not partner with WU for the construction of Hilleman FAS. The proposed improvement project would not proceed, and the proposed project site would remain undeveloped, and the property

would not offer a public boat ramp to accommodate motorboats. Existing boat ramps on the LYR would remain congested.

### **Alternative 2: Proposed Action**

Under the Proposed Action, FWP would acquire an easement on waterfront property from Miles City and design and construct a FAS in partnership with WU along the Lower Yellowstone River. The FAS would include a boat ramp, parking area, signage and other needed amenities. The project would provide a developed boat ramp to accommodate motorboats within an access gap where the closest motorboat ramp is 40 miles upriver and 11 miles downriver. This project would also reduce congestion at the upriver and downriver boat ramps.

### **Alternative 3: Remove gravel that blocks use of the existing boat launch at Roche Jaune FAS in Miles City.**

The main channel of the LYR moved to the north at Roche Jaune FAS in 2011, and the boat ramp now functions only for canoes and kayaks and for boats during high flow / deep water in the spring. During the remainder of the year the boat ramp can be 400' or more from the water depth needed to launch a motorboat. Clearing a path through 400'+ of gravel could yield over 9,000 cubic yards. Such a project would face significant permitting challenges and would be cost prohibitive. Due to the high level of bedload transport in the LYR, any path cleared from the boat ramp to the river channel would be filled in during spring run-off the following year.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT AND FWP RESPONSE**

FWP received substantive public comment on the Draft EA. A substantive public comment was defined as the identification of a specific issue or impact. In some cases, multiple individuals provided the same or similar comment; these comments were summarized, categorized, listed once, and a single FWP response is provided below. The following constitutes a synopsis of public input received and FWP's response to those comments.

No comments were received expressing concerns about the project or requesting significant changes. Eleven comments were received in favor of the project, and they are summarized below.

Comment Summary: Eleven supportive comments were received, including six stating the project would provide important benefits for sportsmen and women as well as recreationalist. Two commenters stated that Miles City, Custer County and Eastern Montana will benefit from the project. Two individuals stated the project will provide important natural resource benefits by concentrating public use at a developed site. One commenter cited multiple reasons for support, including 'long-season boat access, minimal environmental impact, good location, strong community support and that the project is cost effective with funding / management partnerships.' In addition, WU's letter of support identified the importance of expanded river access and that their community fund-raising efforts "have raised well over \$150,000 to help fund the project" to date.

FWP Response: FWP agrees that the project will benefit Eastern Montana sportsmen and women; visitors and residents alike. The project will protect natural resources by focusing visitor use and removing the need for random ad hoc boat launching. FWP agrees the site is stable, has good access and will be cost effective. FWP is grateful for the community involvement and support, management partnerships and for the successful fund-raising campaign organized by Walleyes Unlimited.

**DECISION**

Based on cost estimates and permitting requirements, removing 9,000+ cubic yards of gravel that blocks use of the existing boat launch at Roche Jaune FAS in Miles City (Alternative 3) is not feasible.

Based on the environmental review provided in the Draft EA, and in accordance with all applicable laws, rules, regulations, and policies, FWP determined the proposed action (Alternative 2), will not have significant adverse impacts on the human environment associated with the proposed action and constitutes a reasonable and appropriate strategy to achieve identified objectives. Therefore, preparation of an EIS is unnecessary. FWP hereby adopts the Draft EA as final and approves the Alternative 2, the proposed action.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brad A. Hoff". The signature is stylized with a large initial "B" and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Regional Supervisor, Region 7  
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks