



MONTANA
**FRESHWATER
PARTNERS**

May 20th, 2026

Montana Fish, Wildlife Commission

Re: Siskin Island FAS

Dear Commissioners,

We write in strong support of the acquisition of Siskin Island as a Fishing Access Site. As an organization working to protect and restore the Yellowstone River for over a decade, we view this as one of the most ecologically significant conservation opportunities on the Upper Yellowstone in recent memory.

Riparian habitat that cannot be recreated: Siskin Island's mature cottonwood gallery forest represents a vegetation community that has declined dramatically across the intermountain West. Old-growth cottonwoods shade stream margins and moderate water temperatures critical to cold-water fish, stabilize banks, filter sediment, and provide nesting habitat for birds. The island's open meadows and riverbanks also provide foraging habitat for birds and wildlife that increasingly using the Paradise Valley corridor as a movement route between the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem and ranges to the north.

Side channels as irreplaceable aquatic habitat: The island's active side channels may be its most ecologically valuable feature. Side channel habitats serve as thermal refugia during summer low flows when mainstem temperatures stress trout, as spawning and rearing habitat for Yellowstone cutthroat, and as invertebrate production zones that subsidize the broader food web. The Yellowstone has lost much of its historic off-channel complexity to channelization and bank armoring – Siskin Island's side channels are intact, functioning remnants of that system.

Permanent protection in a rapidly changing corridor: Private acquisition of riverfront land in Paradise Valley has accelerated in recent years, bringing pressure for development and bank modification. Permanent public ownership places these 82 acres beyond those pressures in perpetuity, preserving both ecological integrity and connectivity to adjacent public lands.

We are grateful for the responsive EA process and strongly endorse MFWP's commitment to float-in access only with minimal development – a management approach that matches the conservation value of the site.

Thank you for your leadership to increase and protect our public lands.

Sincerely,

Wendy Weaver, Executive Director

Montana Freshwater Partners