



PARK COUNTY
ENVIRONMENTAL
— COUNCIL —

May 20, 2026

Montana Fish and Wildlife Commission
c/o FWP Liaison – Director's Office
PO Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620-0701

**RE: Response to Decision Notice – Siskin Island FAS Acquisition Project
(FWP-CEA-POR-R3-26-004)**

Dear Commissioners,

On behalf of the Park County Environmental Council (PCEC), I am writing to express our support for the final Decision Notice issued by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) on April 24, 2026, regarding the Siskin Island Fishing Access Site Acquisition Project. We support FWP's final decision to approve Alternative 2. This action officially secures the donation of the 82-acre island complex from the Trust for Public Land, ensuring the permanent protection of this property on the Upper Yellowstone River.

PCEC serves as a local grassroots environmental group with more than 500 members and 2,300 supporters. We appreciate your time and consideration on this important matter. PCEC has worked to protect and preserve the vast natural resources of Park County, Montana, since 1989. We are a county-wide environmental group focusing on issues affecting Park County. PCEC works with residents to safeguard and advocate for the county's world-class rivers, diverse wildlife, landscapes, and outstanding natural beauty, while protecting the health and wellbeing of people who live and work here.

Initially formed by a small group of community members to advocate for wild places, wilderness and quality-of-life issues in Park County, PCEC has grown to cover numerous issues related to the Yellowstone River and its tributaries, public land management, land use and threats from development, while encouraging community engagement on these issues.

We want to ensure that the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem continues to maintain its vital importance for wildlife, intact habitat, and ecological diversity for generations to come. We encourage the FWP to manage Siskin Island in a manner that preserves its inherent natural qualities.

We appreciate that FWP carefully analyzed substantive public feedback to refine a management framework capable of balancing public access with resource protection. We would like to take the opportunity to share our response to the finalized management rules established in the Decision Notice.

PCEC applauds the permanent conservation of these 82 acres of mature cottonwood forests, wetlands, and critical trout spawning side channels from the threat of private development. Bringing this island complex into public ownership is a benefit to all Yellowstone River users, while allowing for proactive, site-specific management tools that will maintain the relatively wild nature of the islands.

We are pleased to see that FWP adopted a structured, low-impact approach to overnight use, drawing on successful models like the Smith River:

- **Permits and Capacity Caps:** Implementing a mandatory reservation system and camping fees aligns with our vision to minimize user impacts. Capping capacity at a maximum of three designated campsites and limiting group sizes to 10 people will successfully protect understory vegetation and preserve the island's quiet, wild character.
- **Stay Limits:** PCEC fully supports FWP restricting stays to **1 night within a 30-day period**. Given the high reach-use pressures on this section of the river, this rule is a necessary and commendable safeguard against site overuse and degradation.

Protecting the water quality of the Yellowstone River and its adjacent trout spawning channels is paramount.

- **Sanitation:** We strongly endorse the final rule requiring all overnight campers to pack out human waste using an **FWP-approved portable toilet system**, as well as the requirement to pack out pet waste.
- **Litter:** FWP's addition of a rule **prohibiting glass on the site** for both day-use and overnight visitors is an excellent step forward for safety and quality of experience.

While FWP's final regulations differ slightly from our initial safety recommendations, we acknowledge these rules as reasonable, adaptive management compromises:

- **Campfire Restrictions:** PCEC initially advocated for a strict "no open fire" policy due to wildlife and wildfire risks. However, we accept FWP's compromise to allow fires **on a trial basis only**, provided they are confined to designated campsites, utilize mandatory **fire pans**, and require all ash to be packed out. We appreciate FWP's commitment to monitoring this closely and potentially banning fires entirely in the future if compliance is poor.
- **Hunting Safety Buffers:** To protect nearby residents and river users, PCEC recommended an archery-only designation for big game and a shot-only restriction for waterfowl. FWP's final geographic restriction—**limiting hunting exclusively to areas west of the main river channel** and **prohibiting rifles**—successfully establishes a meaningful safety separation for the adjacent Paradise Valley neighborhood. This restriction should be reevaluated on a regular basis with feedback from adjacent neighbors to measure its effectiveness, and allow for changes as needed if safety becomes a concern.

- **Signage:** We look forward to seeing clear signage deployed to alert users to trout spawning redds and to distinguish camping and day-use boundaries.

All of these measures bring a significant benefit to the public in Park County with the Siskin Island acquisition. We would like to see additional agreements and assurances by FWP that this island and the recreational use it will create be more closely monitored, and that the proposed rules and regulations for the use of the island will be enforced. The hiring of a seasonal staff, or more personnel within Region 3 being made available to assist with the growing recreational use that will occur on Siskin Island (and on the Yellowstone River in general) will go a long way in making this acquisition a success.

PCEC believes that this finalized management framework sets a good example of how public recreation and ecosystem integrity can coexist on the Yellowstone River.

Thank you for your public process allowing local input, your collaboration with area neighbors, and your dedicated work to keep this special place intact for future generations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Max Hjortsberg". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Max" being more prominent.

Max Hjortsberg
Managing Director