

# **Draft Environmental Assessment**

## **Chief Plenty Coups State Park Maintenance Area & Host Site Improvement Project**



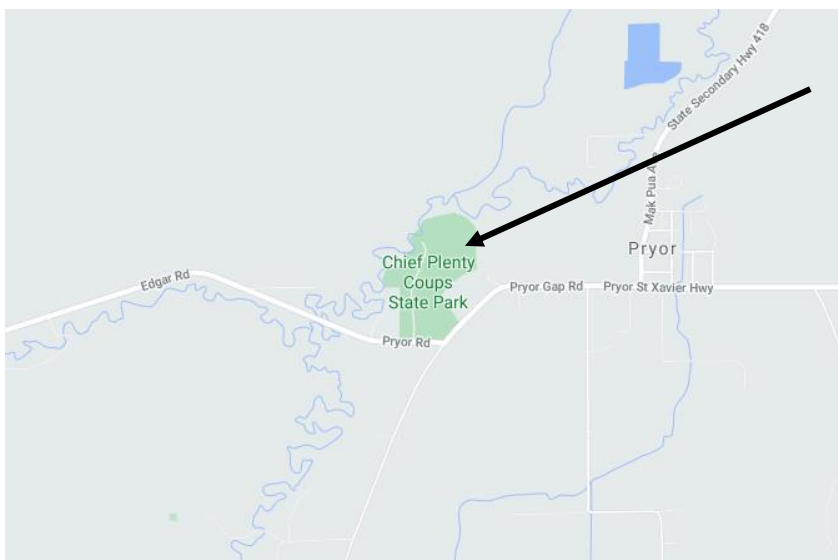
**February 19, 2021**



# Draft Environmental Assessment MEPA, NEPA, MCA 23-1-110 CHECKLIST

## PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

1. **Type of proposed state action:** Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks proposes to initiate an improvement project to the current Host/Maintenance Site located at Chief Plenty Coups State Park.
2. **Agency authority for the proposed action:** Montana state statute 23-1-102 authorizes the department to make a study to determine the scenic, historic, archeological, scientific, and recreational resources of the state. The department may purchase, lease, agreement, or acceptance of donations acquire for the state any areas, sites, or objects that in its opinion should be held, improved, and maintained as state parks, state recreation areas, state monuments, or state historic sites.
4. **Anticipated Schedule:**  
Estimated Commencement Date: Spring 2021  
Estimated Completion Date: Fall 2021  
Current Status of Project Design (% complete): 90%
5. **Location:**  
Chief Plenty Coups State Park is located in Bighorn County, Sec 5-6, T5S, R26E



Area map showing location of Chief Plenty Coups State Park near Billings, MT

6. **Project size -- estimate the number of acres that would be directly affected that are currently:**

	<u>Acres</u>		<u>Acres</u>
(a) Developed:		(d) Floodplain	<u>0</u>
Residential	<u>0</u>		
Industrial	<u>1</u>	(e) Productive:	
(Existing Maintenance area)		Irrigated cropland	<u>0</u>
(b) Open Space/	<u>0</u>	Dry cropland	<u>0</u>
Woodlands/Recreation		Forestry	<u>0</u>
(c) Wetlands/Riparian	<u>0</u>	Rangeland	<u>0</u>
Areas		Other	<u>0</u>

7. **Permits, Funding & Overlapping Jurisdiction.**

- (a) **Permits:** permits will be filed at least 2 weeks prior to project start.  
Agency Name: Montana Department of Environmental Quality  
Permits: Sanitation Permit

(Billings West High School has filed for a Factory Built Building Permit from the Montana Department of Labor and Industry. The prefabricated building will arrive on site with this permit in place.)

- (b) **Funding:**  
Agency Name: Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks  
Amount: \$13,400.00

(Funding to construct the prefabricated building will come from Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks, the Montana State Parks Foundation, Billings West High School, the Billings Home Builders Association and other donors supplying in-kind donations to the Building Trades Program at Billings West High School. The investment of materials to build the prefabricated building is valued at \$33,630.16.)

- (c) **Other Overlapping or Additional Jurisdictional Responsibilities:**  
Agency Name: State Historic Preservation Office  
Type of Responsibility: Cultural and Historic Resources

8. **Narrative summary of the proposed action:**

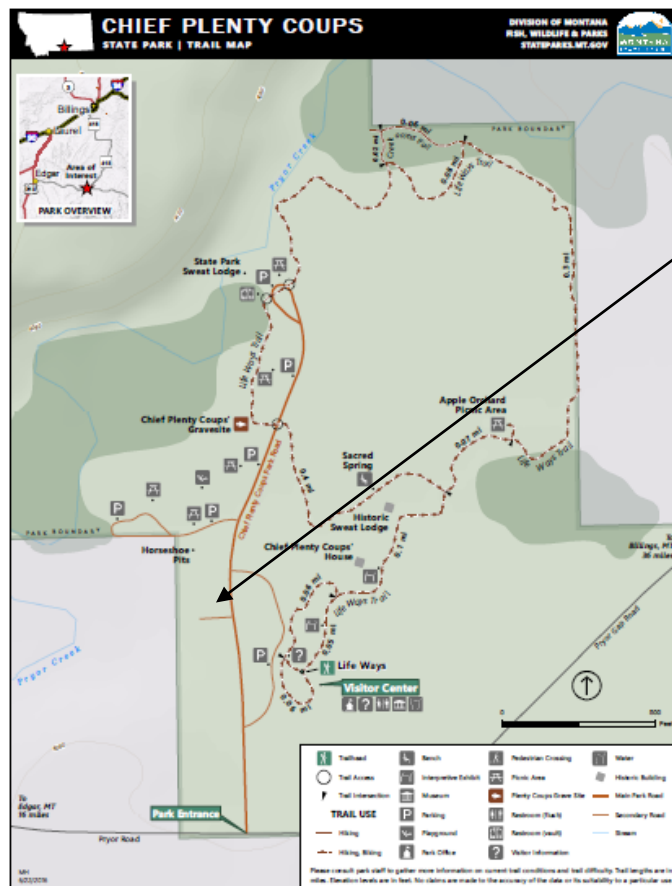
Chief Plenty Coups State Park is a 195-acre park located approximately 35 miles south of Billings, Montana. It was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1999 because of its historic and archeological significance. The park includes a ¾ mile interpretive looping trail, picnic grounds, latrine, and visitor center (see map below). The park is open year-round.

The site for this project is occupied by a RV trailer used for housing. The pad is well maintained and needs minimal work to replace the trailer with a small housing unit. MTFWP will retrofit the existing pad to the specification requirements laid out in the Factory Built Building Permit that will come along with the prefabricated building from Billing West High School. Steps will be taken to repair any damage to the surrounding areas impacted by machinery or movement of soils.

There are two utility hookups by the pad and the location has been the AmeriCorps member housing unit since 2012. This 14-year-old RV trailer is well maintained by park staff but is showing its age and will need to be phased out of use in the coming years due to its aging electrical and heating utilities.

### Our preferred alternative would be:

Our preferred alternative would be to correct these safety and security issues while being sensitive to the nature of the park's cultural resources. The proposed improvements would provide a maintenance and host area that complements the visitor center while not detracting from the parks natural view shed.



Proposed  
project  
location

**9. Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives:**

**Alternative A: No Action.**

If no action is taken the RV trailer that is the current AmeriCorps Member housing will continue to age. While park staff do everything they can to maintain and improve the trailer, the cost of repairing or replacing aging electrical systems and furnace repairs exceed the value of the trailer. The trailer will have to be retired, leaving the park with no alternative AmeriCorps Member housing on-site. As housing is the primary reason AmeriCorps Members can afford to volunteer in the AmeriCorps program at this location, the park will most likely lose it's AmeriCorps Member. Without an AmeriCorps Member, the park will have to cut back on the amount of educational field trips it offers to the surrounding school districts (Chief Plenty Coups State Park taught almost 2,000 school children in 2019 and is a source of Indian Education For All curriculum for the Billings, Pryor, Hardin, and Lockwood school districts). Also, AmeriCorps members volunteer at the Pryor Food Bank, the member provides valuable assistance to the local Crow community.

**Alternative B: Improvement of Host Site & Maintenance Area Proposed Action.**

The proposed action is to remove the RV trailer and replace it with a housing unit constructed by Billings West High School students in the Building Trades Program. This preferred alternative would provide a safer, more functional, and secure housing for the AmeriCorps Member and improve the aesthetic value of the Administrative Area.

The site will be minimally renovated to connect utilities to the new housing unit. These renovations will not disturb any area of archeological significance and will take place on a location already prepared for a housing unit of this size. Along with the Manager's housing unit, the presence of AmeriCorps Members on park grounds acts as a deterrent to anyone who may try to vandalize or disturb Chief Plenty Coups State Park's important archeological resources.

The on-ground work at Chief Plenty Coups State Park will be paid for by Montana State Parks with Capitol Project funds. \$5,000 in funds will be allocated to Billings West High School by the Montana State Parks Foundation along with \$5,000 from the Billings Home Builders Association. Other in-kind donations have been donated to Billings West High School by various other donors. The housing unit is to be built at Billings West High School by students in the Building Trades Program under a Factory Built Building Permit issued by

Montana Department of Labor and Industry. The project is consistent with the purpose and intent of the Community Service Act as defined in MCA 90-14-105. Costs paid by the Department associated with the project for materials and services provided by the Billings School District may not exceed amounts established under the Montana Procurement Act 18-4-132(3)(k).

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

As a National Historic Landmark Chief Plenty Coups State Park requires the appropriate a high level of sensitivity toward cultural resources. Montana State Parks will work closely with the State Historic Preservation Office to appropriately inventory and protect any cultural resources affected by this project.

## **PART II. 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. <b><u>LAND RESOURCES</u></b> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Soil instability or changes in geologic substructure?		X				
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				
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				

- 1b. The installation of the housing unit would not impact the proposed area. Burial of utility lines to the host pad pedestals would require the movement of a small amount of soils. During the construction period the adjacent area may be impacted by the use of construction equipment. These areas will be reclaimed through soil loosening and reseeded with native vegetation.

2. <b><u>AIR</u></b> 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				
b. Creation of objectionable odors?		X				
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 regulations? (Also see 2a.)		X				

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				
b. Changes in drainage patterns or the rate and amount of surface runoff?		X				
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				

There are no natural water resources within or near the project area. One potable freeze-proof water hydrant is already at the host pad and would provide water for the unit.



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				
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				

4c. A search of the Montana Natural Heritage database revealed no occurrences of plant life that is designated a species of concern, threatened, or endangered within the project area.

4e. The proposed improvements may increase the potential of noxious weeds becoming established in disturbed areas. Mitigating actions will include reseeding with native species and monitoring of growth of noxious weeds at disturbed areas. Any noxious weeds discovered would be controlled by using Integrated Weed Management (IWM) methods identified in the Region 5 Noxious Weed Management Plan. This typically involves chemical and mechanical control efforts.

5. <u>FISH/WILDLIFE</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	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				
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				
g. Increase in conditions that stress wildlife populations or limit abundance (including harassment, legal or illegal harvest or other human activity)?		X				
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				
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				

No impacts are anticipated to local wildlife since the project area is already used by park staff and hosts.

## 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				
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				

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. Conflicted with a designated natural area or area of unusual scientific or educational importance?		X				7b
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				

7b. Although the proposed improvements are within a state park designated a National Historic Landmark, the location of the improvements would not impact the Chief's House or any area with archeological significance. The project area would not detract the educational and historic values of the park.

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

<b>9. <u>COMMUNITY IMPACT</u></b>  <b>Will the proposed action result in:</b>	<b>IMPACT</b>					
	<b>Unknown</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>Minor</b>	<b>Potentially Significant</b>	<b>Can Impact Be Mitigated</b>	<b>Comment Index</b>
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				

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				
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			10c
d. Will the proposed action result in increased use of any energy source?		X				
e. Define projected revenue sources		X				
f. Define projected maintenance costs.			X			10f

- 10c. Electric power, septic hook-up and water are already provided in the designated project area. Some minor alteration may be necessary.
- 10f. Maintenance costs for the new housing unit are expected to be minimal and any maintenance costs would be absorbed into the existing park maintenance budget.

11. <b><u>AESTHETICS/RECREATION</u></b>  Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Alteration of any scenic vista or creation of an aesthetically offensive site or effect that is open to public view?		X				
b. Alteration of the aesthetic character of a community or neighborhood?		X				11b
c. Alteration of the quality or quantity of recreational/tourism opportunities and settings? (Attach Tourism Report.)		X				
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				

11b. The new housing unit will be an aesthetic improvement.

12. <b><u>CULTURAL/HISTORICAL RESOURCES</u></b>  Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
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				
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.)		X				

12a. There is the very low possibility of cultural materials being disturbed due to the fact that the designated project area has been excavated previously for septic tank and septic field replacement (Permit RP#5 2002, photos available by request) If significant archaeological materials are found, a data recovery plan involving further excavations will be developed to mitigate impacts from project construction in accordance with MCA 22-3-430 of the Montana Antiquities Act.

## SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

13. <u>SUMMARY EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE</u>  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.)		X				
g. For P-R/D-J, list any federal or state permits required.			X			

The proposed improvements of the unit on the host pad area are not expected to generate substantial public controversy.

13g. Agency Name: Montana Department of Environmental Quality

Permits: Sanitation Permit

(The provided prefabricated building to be placed on site at Chief Plenty Coups State Park will be built in accordance with specifications laid out in a Factory Built Building Permit secured by Billings West High School through Montana Department of Labor and Industry.)

### **PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT**

The Chief Plenty Coups State Park administrative area is the location of the housing unit for the Park Manager, the shop, the equipment lockup yard, and the housing for the AmeriCorps Member. This proposal will create a more aesthetically pleasing cap on the north end of the administrative area as well as making the housing unit for the AmeriCorps Member more secure and functional.

The proposed action is to remove the RV trailer from the host site pad and replace it with a housing unit that was constructed by students in the Building Trades Program at Billings West High School. The unit was designed in coordination with Billings West High School, Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks Design and Construction and other mentors. The new housing unit will occupy a slightly larger footprint (12Wx40L) than the existing RV trailer. This preferred alternative would provide a better appearance to park visitors as well as a safer, more functional, and secure building for the AmeriCorps Member. The presence of hosts on park grounds acts a deterrent to anyone that may vandalize or disturb Chief Plenty Coups State Park's significant archeological resources.

### **PART IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

#### **1. Public involvement:**

The public will be notified in the following manners to comment on this current EA, the proposed action, and alternatives:

- Two public notices in each of these papers: Billings Gazette and Helena Independent Record
- One statewide press release
- Public notice on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks web page: <http://fwp.mt.gov>.

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.

#### **2. Duration of comment period:**

The public comment period will extend for (30) thirty days. Written comments will be accepted until 5:00 p.m., March 14th, 2021 and can be mailed or emailed to the addresses below:

FWP Region 5 Office  
2300 Lake Elmo Drive,  
Billings, MT 59105 or email: [robert.seykora@mt.gov](mailto:robert.seykora@mt.gov)



## **PART V. EA PREPARATION**

1. **Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required? (YES/NO)?** No, EA is the proper level of review

**If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action.** This project has very minimal impacts that can be mitigated below significance, while providing good benefit to the park and its visitors.

2. **Person(s) responsible for preparing the EA:**  
Emily Tyler, Park Ranger

3. **List of agencies or offices consulted during preparation of the EA:**  
Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks,  
MTFWP Design and Construction  
Montana State Historic Preservation Office

**APPENDIX A**  
23-1-110 MCA  
PROJECT QUALIFICATION CHECKLIST

**Date:** 02/11/2021

**Person Reviewing:** Aaron S. Kind

**Project Location:** Chief Plenty Coups State Park

**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 rules. (Please check ☐ all that apply and comment as necessary.)

- ☐ A. New roadway or trail built over undisturbed land?  
Comments:
- ☒ B. New building construction (buildings <100 sf and vault latrines exempt)?  
Comments: *12 x 40 foot unit*
- ☐ C. Any excavation of 20 c.y. or greater?  
Comments:
- ☐ D. New parking lots built over undisturbed land or expansion of existing lot that increases parking capacity by 25% or more?  
Comments:
- ☐ E. Any new shoreline alteration that exceeds a doublewide 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: *Appropriate cultural resource surveys and consultation with SHPO will take place prior to any disturbance of soil. Montana State Parks Cultural Program Lead will assist in ensuring proper review and action if needed.*

- ☐ H. Any new above ground utility lines?  
Comments:
- ☐ 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/HB495 CHECKLIST. Refer to MEPA/HB495 Cross Reference Summary for further assistance.