



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Region 4
4600 Giant Springs Road
Great Falls, MT 59405

April 28, 2021

Dear Interested Party:

Thank you for your input and feedback on the environmental assessment (EA) for the Craig Campground Host Pad/Site Improvements project. The goal of the proposed action is to construct a paved, pull through campground host pad that includes hookup for electric, water and sewer, pave a single vehicle camp space, develop two tent camp sites and accompanying vehicle parking spaces, and develop and pave additional parking spaces in the day use area.

Enclosed is a decision notice document in which Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) explains its rationale for proceeding with the proposed action and responds to public comments received during the public comment period.

Please feel free to contact Vicki Robinson, Fishing Access Site Program Manager, at 406-454-5854 or email at vrobinson@mt.gov with any questions. Thank you for your interest and participation.

Sincerely,

Region Supervisor
FWP Region 4

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT DECISION NOTICE****ON****CRAIG FAS CAMPGROUND HOST PAD and SITE IMPROVEMENTS****Proposed Action**

Craig Fishing Access Site (FAS) is located just outside of Craig Montana on the Missouri River. Craig FAS is one of the most heavily used FAS sites in Region 4. Craig FAS receives extensive use because of high angling pressure associated with that section of the Missouri River. Day use and overnight camping at this FAS are very popular and as such places high maintenance demand on FWP staff and the high level of use has also resulted in occasional noncompliance with site rules. Montana FWP proposes to construct a paved, pull through campground host pad that includes hookup for electric, water and sewer, pave a single vehicle camp space, develop two tent camp sites and accompanying vehicle parking spaces, and develop and pave additional parking spaces in the day use area.

Montana Environmental Policy Act

FWP is required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) to assess potential impacts of its proposed actions to the human and physical environments. In compliance with FWP's MEPA Public Involvement Policy, an Environmental Assessment was prepared by FWP for the proposed project and released on January 19, 2021 for public comment. The EA was titled "Craig Campground Host Pad and Site Improvements". The EA was the subject of an FWP press release and was posted on the FWP webpage. The EA evaluated the potential impacts of the following alternatives in addition to the proposed action:

Alternative A: No action Alternative

No action would be to not develop the campground host pad, not pave the single vehicle campsite, don't develop tent campsites and accompanying tent camping parking spaces, and not develop single vehicle spaces in the day use area. With no action it is anticipated that the site will continue to have issues with rule compliance, including registration compliance and will not alleviate high site maintenance demands on staff. In addition, no action will not increase parking spaces or camping opportunity.

Alternative B: Proposed Action

The proposed action at Craig FAS is to construct a paved, pull through campground host pad that includes hookup for electric, water and sewer, pave a single vehicle camp space, develop two tent camp sites and accompanying vehicle parking spaces, and develop and pave additional parking spaces in the day use area.

Summary of Public Comment and FWP Response

There were 13 comments (12 comments via email and 1 via telephone) submitted during the open comment period for this project. Five of the commenters supported the entire proposal, 2 commenters supported the expanded camping proposal but opposed the campground host component, four commenters were opposed to the proposal, and two commenters didn't indicate support or opposition to the proposal.

Summary and Responses to Comments in Support

Comment Summary 1

The site is a popular location and support the development of a campground host pad, additional single vehicle parking spaces and the development of 2 tent campsites with accompanying parking next to the sites.

Response: Thank you for your comments.

Summary and Response to Comments in Opposition

Comment Summary 2

A campground host is not needed and will not be beneficial and the host will sell goods such as firewood.

Response: Intent of the Craig FAS campground host is not to supply goods. Furthermore, the host will not be permitted to sell firewood or any other goods at the Craig FAS.

Comment Summary 3

The project is not a wise use of funding and the FAS funds should be used elsewhere.

Response: Craig FAS is a very popular access location within the region and within the state. Department staff recognized the need for site improvements as did members of the public who have commented suggesting such improvements are necessary at the popular site. FWP was awarded a grant of \$52,314 which is estimated to cover most of the project costs. If costs are greater than the estimated total cost, the additional financial contributions will come from the Fishing Access Site state program budget and the regional Fishing Access Site program budget.

Comment Summary 4

The problem at the site isn't rule compliance, the real problem is lack of camping and parking and the funds should be used for expansion to benefit the site.

Response: Non-compliance at the Craig Fishing Access Site has been documented and some of the common non-compliance issues have included: staying beyond the 7 day stay limit, not registering and/or paying the camping fee, and campers overcrowding campsites.

Lack of camping and specifically lack of parking at this FAS and in this area is and has been recognized and warrant future consideration, however Craig FAS is limited in capacity of both camping and parking by the size of the parcel. Design staff have strategically attempted to fully

utilize the site to the greatest capacity within the limits of the parcel size. Furthermore, it is recognized that parking capacity is limited at this location and as such FWP will investigate potential additional parking opportunities as they arise in the future.

Comment Summary 5

The current limited parking serves to limit pressure and development of additional parking spaces will increase pressure, thereby increasing overcrowding, decreasing angler satisfaction, increase commercial/recreation conflict, degrade the fishery and the draft EA fails to recognize these impacts.

Response: Observations during periods of high use suggest that when all parking spots at the Craig FAS are full and the site is at capacity, the site is still utilized for access to the Missouri River but users park outside the boundary of the FAS. This action has created conflicts in the area. Comments received both formally and informally support the observation and has raised concern regarding this parking issue. Intent of a portion of this action is to help mitigate conflicts of parking in un-approved locations throughout the local area. However, because only a few parking spots are being added it should be noted that adding only a few parking spots may not noticeably reduce the parking conflicts in the area.

Recent angler pressure surveys conducted on a statewide scale have this section of water as the most visited waterbody in the region and this section ranks 2nd on the statewide scale for pressure. Angler pressure does fluctuate and has steadily increased to a peak in 2015 and 2017 and slightly declined in 2019. As mentioned above, Craig FAS is used to access the Missouri River even when parking at the site is full. When at capacity, parking occurs in unapproved locations outside the boundary of the FAS. It is anticipated that the addition of a few parking spots will have little to no noticeable impact on the angling pressure in this popular section of the Missouri River. For these reasons it is anticipated that the few additional parking spots will have little to no impact on overcrowding, angler satisfaction, increasing commercial/recreation conflict or degrade the fishery.

Summary and Response to Other Comments

Comment Summary 6

The new lateral sewer line is shown going across what appears to be railroad right-of-way instead of the 30' recorded access easement on the western edge of the Long Property.

Response: FWP design staff are aware of the easement and all necessary permits will be obtained prior to beginning the project and stay within the perimeters of project boundary.

Comment Summary 7

Request to provide a dumpster and develop a source of potable water

Response: FWP fishing access sites have a pack-in-pack out policy and FWP does not provide trash receptacles of any kind at any of our regional FAS's. No FAS's within region 4 have potable water and the concept is outside the scope of this EA.

Comment Summary 8

BNSF should maintain the railroad property for weeds

Response: FWP does not regulate BNSF railroad properties.

Decision

Based on the Environmental Assessment, public comment, and FWP evaluation, it is my decision to proceed with the project to construct a paved, pull through campground host pad that includes hookup for electric, water and sewer, pave a single vehicle camp space, develop two tent camp sites and accompanying vehicle parking spaces, and develop and pave additional parking spaces in the day use area.

I find there to be no significant impacts to human and physical environments associated with this project. Public comments received during the comment period showed general support for the proposed action. Therefore, I conclude that the Environmental Assessment is the appropriate level of analysis, and that the Environmental Impact Statement is not required.



drh 4/28/2021

Gary Bertellotti

Regional Supervisor

FWP Region 4