



MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS

Draft

Environmental Assessment

Deadman's Basin FAS Road Project



April 9, 2021

Draft Environmental Assessment CHECKLIST

PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

1. Type of proposed state action:

The road along the reservoir at the most western end of the Fishing Access Site (FAS) has been undercut by reservoir erosion and is becoming unusable. FWP proposes to move the road inland to avoid the erosional area.

2. Agency authority for the proposed action:

Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks (FWP) under authority of the Montana Legislature which enacted MCA 87-1-605 directing FWP to acquire, develop and operate a system of fishing access sites (FAS). MCA 23-1-127 defines maintenance with inclusion of new road and camping sites as part of maintenance as guidance of MCA 23-1-126 is implemented. ARM rule 12.8.602 provides rules for actions considered significant including road or trail development over undisturbed lands.

The environmental review process for FWP as established by the legislature is outlined in 12.2.4: Rules Implementing the Montana Environmental Policy Act. 12.2.432 Requires FWP to prepare an EA, regardless of its length or the depth of analysis, in a manner which utilizes an interdisciplinary approach. This approach includes review by other agencies with jurisdiction inclusive of State Historic and Preservation Office, Natural Heritage and others. It also allows for a routine action with limited environmental impact to use a standard checklist format environmental analysis (EA). 12.2.443 provides guidance for review of public comment and decision making. Additionally, MCA 23-1-110 requires public involvement for development or improvements in FAS sites with consideration for capacity, long term maintenance, and plans.

3. Name, address and phone number of project sponsor (if other than the agency)

Ryan Taynton, Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks, 2300 Lake Elmo Drive, Billings, MT 59105. (406) 247-2964. rtaynton@mt.gov

4. Anticipated Schedule:

Estimated Construction Commencement Date: 5/12/2021

Estimated Completion Date: 6/30/2021, it is anticipated the project once started could be completed within 5 days.

Current Status of Project Design (% complete): 75%

5. Location affected by proposed action (county, range and township – included map):

The project is in Wheatland County, Township 7N, Range 8E, section 26. Project coordinate is 46.33417, -109.44317 (Figure 1, 2).

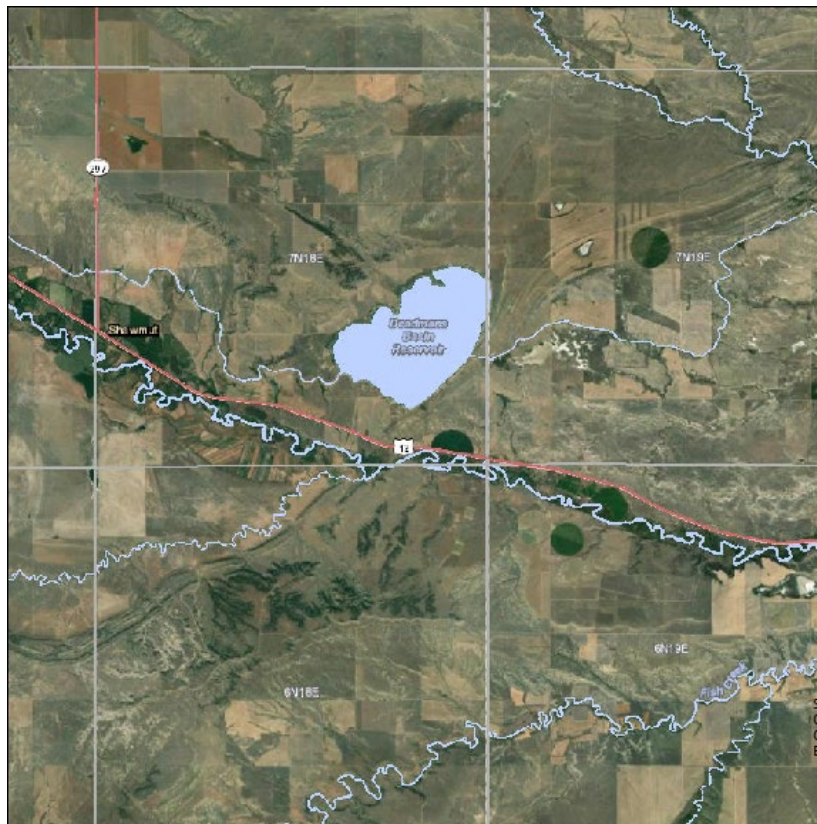


Figure 1. Deadman's Basin Reservoir near Ryegate Montana



Figure 2. Planned Project Area.

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>0</u>	(e) Productive:	
(b) Open Space/	<u>0.5</u>	Irrigated cropland	<u>0</u>
Woodlands/Recreation		Dry cropland	<u>0</u>
(c) Wetlands/Riparian	<u>0</u>	Forestry	<u>0</u>
Areas		Rangeland	<u>0</u>
		Other	<u>0</u>

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

- (a) **Permits:** Necessary permits will be obtained before the project is initiated.
- (b) **Funding:** Agency Name: Montana FWP Funding Amount: \$15,000.00
- (c) **Other Overlapping or Additional Jurisdictional Responsibilities:**
 Agency Name: Montana DNRC
 Type of Responsibility: Approval of proposed work site as part of DNRC Lease.

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

Rebuilding this section of road will maintain the current one-way road system in place at the FAS, provide continued access to two campsites and over 1200 feet of shoreline. FWP proposes relocating a portion of the road along the reservoir at the western part of the FAS due to reservoir erosion undermining the existing road. The erosional rate, based on imagery, since 2005 along the area has been 0 feet to 0.5 feet per year. The new 1,200 feet length of road would be constructed inland by approximately 30 feet to avoid the erosional shoreline (Figure 3). The old road would be decommissioned by shaping with local terrain and seeding (Figure 3).

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

Alternative A: Complete the road reconstruction and maintain current access to all campsites and one-way traffic pattern.

Alternative B: No Action. This alternative would result in closure of a portion of the road to all vehicle use. Traffic into the existing camping area known as “Bluebird” would no longer be able to exit through the western road with Deadman’s Basin Road becoming a 2-way road.

Alternative C: undertake a bank erosion protection project that could include a combination of rock riprap or soft bank treatment.

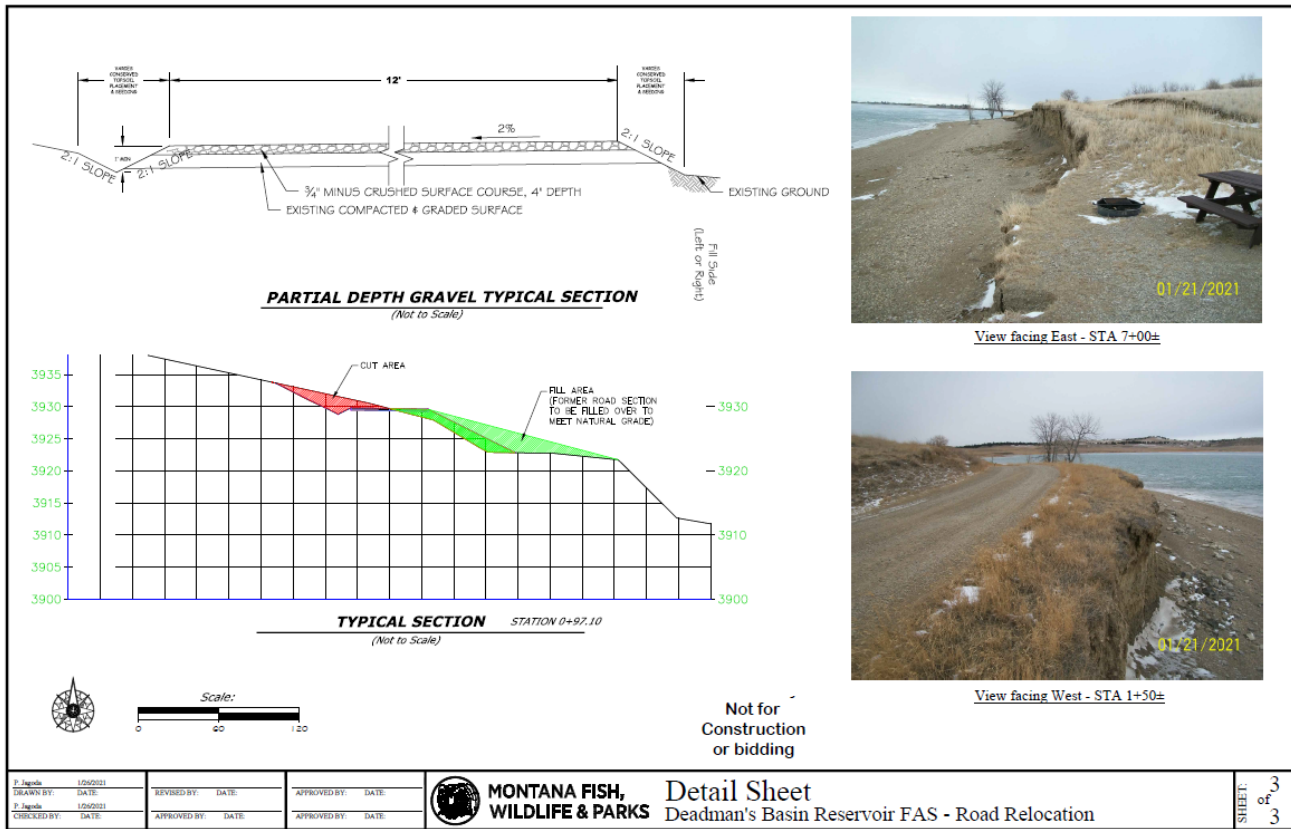


Figure 3. Sectional view of new road and decommissioning of old road.

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

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Provided
1. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture				X		
2. Air quality or objectionable odors				X		
3. Water quality, quantity and distribution (surface or groundwater)				X		
4. Existing water right or reservation				X		
5. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality			X			1
6. Unique, endangered, or fragile vegetative species				X		
6. Terrestrial or aquatic life and/or habitats				X		
7. Unique, endangered, or fragile wildlife or fisheries species			X			2
8. Introduction of new species into an area				X		
9. Changes to abundance or movement of species				X		

1: There will be vegetative cover removed in order to build the replacement road area. This area consists of primarily sage and prairie grasses. The decommissioned road would be reseeded and allowed to return to prairie grass and sage.

2: These species of special concern have been documented in this township with the global and state ranks following each species. Black Tailed Prairie Dog G4 S3, Golden Eagle G5 S3, Greater Sage Grouse G3G4 S2, Pinyon Jay G3 S3, Loggerhead Shrike G4 S3B, Brewers Sparrow G5 S3B. It is anticipated no negative effects from this project will be experienced by these species. The Sage Grouse Initiative System indicated the area was not within the EO area.

B. HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Provided
1. Noise and/or electrical effects			X			3
2. Land use			X			4
3. Risk and/or health hazards				X		
4. Community impact				X		
5. Public services/taxes/utilities				X		
6. Potential revenue and/or project maintenance costs				X		
7. Aesthetics and recreation			X			5
8. Cultural and historic resources				X		
9. Evaluation of significance				X		
10. Generate public controversy				X		

3: There will be minor noise during the excavation process from equipment being used.

4: There will be a change in land use where the new road is installed from grassland and sage to road and the decommissioned road returned to grassland.

5: Visually the old road will be decommissioned and reseed but will be visible as a past road for many years. During the project the road will be closed to through traffic with the current road leading to the site being temporarily opened to two-way traffic. Once the project is completed the road would return to a one-way road loop.

PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

With the reservoirs annual filling combined with typical strong wind and wave activity, the road area in question will continue to erode and reshape the bank. The rate of erosion measured from satellite imaging between 2005 to 2020 appears to be less than six inches per year in active areas most erosion is much slower in the 1,200 feet reach. If the same rate of erosion were to continue future erosion affecting the road again should take over 50 years before reaching the road.

Moving this section of road back inland will allow for safer travel by sportsman and recreationalist along the western portion of the FAS.

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: The Times-Clarion (Harlowton), Billings Gazette, Independent Record (Helena)
- One statewide press release by FWP
- Public notice on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks web page: <http://fwp.mt.gov>.
- Region 5 maintains a list of contacts that desire to be sent EA notices. This list includes partner agencies, counties, Citizen Advisory Council members, news outlets, and other interested individuals. The entities on this list will receive notice. (To be added to this list please contact the Billings regional office)
- 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.

Duration of comment period:

The public comment period will extend for (30) thirty days. Written, emailed and phone comments will be accepted until 8:00 a.m. May 10, 2021 and can be directed to the contact information below:

Mail: Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks, 2300 Lake Elmo Drive, Billings MT 59105.
Attn: Deadmans Basin FAS
Email: fwpregion5pc@mt.gov **please use Subject Line, "Deadmans Basin FAS"**.
Phone: 406-247-2964

For questions about the project please contact Ryan Taynton at 247-2964 or by email at rtaynton@mt.gov

PART V. EA PREPARATION

1. Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required? No

If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action.

This project is a straightforward road building/maintenance project. The new road will be constructed within 30' of the existing road in the same area. No significant impacts on the environment will result from the project with portions of the existing road decommissioned and reseed to grasslands replacing the lost grasslands to the new road.

2. Person(s) responsible for preparing the EA: Ryan Taynton

3. List of agencies or offices consulted during preparation of the EA:

Montana FWP Design and Construction and Fisheries offices, Montana DNRC, Natural Heritage database for Species of Concern plant and animal information, Sage Grouse Initiative Online system.