



Region 2
3201 Spurgin Road
Missoula, MT 59804

March 12, 2021

Dear Interested Citizen:

Thank you for your thoughtful reviews and comments on a proposal by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) to develop a parking area and improve public access to Fort Owen State Park (SP) via a recently acquired 0.9-acre parcel of property located immediately south of the SP (located 1-mile northwest of Stevensville in Ravalli County). The development would address decades-old challenges for management, improve access to this historic site, and reduce trespass for the adjacent landowner.

Enclosed is a decision document in which I explain my rationale for approving the proposed public access improvements at Fort Owen State Park as proposed under the preferred action (Alternative A) in the draft environmental assessment (EA). Upon completion of the public involvement process and by inclusion of information noted in this Decision Notice, FWP accepts the draft EA as final. The decision document also includes all public comments received for the proposed improvements.

Please feel free to contact me at 406-542-5500 with any questions you may have. Thank you for your interest and participation.

Sincerely,

Randy Arnold
Regional Supervisor

RA:sr

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Decision Notice for the Draft Environmental Assessment: Public Access Improvements for Fort Owen State Park

March 2021

PROPOSAL

Type of Proposed State Action

Montana State Parks, a Division of Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (Department or FWP), proposes to develop a parking area and improve public access to Fort Owen State Park (SP) via a recently acquired 0.9-acre parcel of property located immediately south of the SP, which is located 1-mile northwest of Stevensville in Ravalli County. The development would address decades-old challenges for management, improve access to this historic site, and reduce trespass for the adjacent landowner.

NARRATIVE SUMMARY OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

From the time Fort Owen was added to state ownership in the 1950s, the managing agencies, including the Department, have struggled to provide appropriate public access and parking, while also protecting property rights and privacy for the neighboring private landowner. The small (1.0-acre) State Park is surrounded by a private ranch, with ranch traffic and public access along a shared road. (This shared access road leading north from Highway 269 is a private road, but the Department holds an access easement on the road from the highway to the south end of the State Park, to allow the public and Department personnel to access the state park.) Given the current configuration, it is nearly impossible for a member of the public or Department staff to park at the site without trespassing on ranch property. In addition, the proximity of ranch buildings, including residences, to the park creates almost a daily privacy and security concern for the ranch residents and visitors. Conversations with owners of the ranch beginning in the 1980s (perhaps earlier) were never able to gain enough traction to lead to a long-term solution.

In late 2017, MGY Ranch, LLC, purchased the private ranch, and discussions were initiated toward finding a solution that would provide consistent legal access for all members of the public, as well as create appropriate separation of public and private lands. In the fall of 2020, the Department purchased 0.9-acres from MGY Ranch with the stated purpose of working toward developing a parking area, once a cultural resources survey was completed and appropriate protections and mitigation measures were developed and approved to protect any identified historic resources on this new addition. As part of the acquisition, the FWP agreed to close Fort Owen SP to public access until such a time that the parking area was developed to address access and privacy issues outlined above.

Proposed development of the access area (Figure 2) for the SP includes:

- Build parking area (PA), to include single-vehicle parking spaces with overflow parking, a van-accessible parking space, and a bus drop-off and large-vehicle parking area. (See section 3.7 for strategies to protect cultural resources.)
- Improve existing ditch at the north end of the PA, to include replacing an existing road culvert over the swale associated with the ditch.

- Build an ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) accessible pedestrian path along the west side of the PA and connect it with a pedestrian bridge (over the swale) leading the historic site.
- Build partial perimeter fence (along south and west boundaries of the PA) to better delineate public and private land, and realign the ditch along the south boundary of the PA (in consultation with Fort Owen Ranch).
- Install standard state parks kiosk and additional signage as needed for the PA.

ALTERNATIVES

Alternative A--Proposed Action: The Department would construct a parking area to allow for public access.

Under this alternative, FWP would develop the newly acquired 0.9-acre property into a parking area after taking measures to protect cultural resources. The parking area would provide access for the general public, school groups, tour buses and special events. This new parking area would clearly define the park boundaries and reduce conflict between ranch and park operations.

Alternative B--No Action: The Department would not develop the parking area.

If no action is taken, FWP would not develop the recently acquired 0.9-acre property into a parking area. Without the parking area,

the extremely limited access to parking would require alternative management strategies that might include limited public access.

PUBLIC REVIEW PROCESS

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks is required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) to assess potential impacts of its proposed actions to the human and physical environments, evaluate those impacts through an interdisciplinary approach, including public input, and to make a decision based on this information. FWP released a draft environmental assessment (Draft EA) for public review of this proposal (Proposed Public Access Improvements for Fort Owen State Park), and it was available for public review and comment for a 30-day period from January 27 through February 25, 2021. The Draft EA was also posted on FWP's website <http://fwp.mt.gov> from January 27 through February 25, 2021, and comments could be submitted to Region 2 FWP via mail or email.

Legal notices for the availability of the Draft EA were published twice each in the *Bitterroot Star* (Stevensville, Feb 3 & 10), *Independent Record* (Helena, Jan 28 & 29), *Missoulian* (Jan 27 & 28), and *Ravalli Republic* (Hamilton, Jan 29 & 31) newspapers. FWP distributed 11 printed copies of the EA, and 67 email notifications of the EA's availability, to adjacent landowners and interested individuals, groups and agencies. A statewide News Release was distributed February 8, 2021 to a standard list of media outlets interested in FWP issues.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Summary of Public Comment

FWP received 8 emailed and mailed comments related to the proposed access improvement at Fort Owen State Park (see Appendix). Five comments were from individuals, and 3 comments were from groups (Friends of Fort Owen, Historic Saint Mary's Mission, Montana State Parks Association). The comments were submitted from 4 Montana locales: 3 from Stevensville (including 2 groups), and 1 each from Florence, Missoula (1 group), and Huson; 2 commenters did not mention their locale.

Relative to FWP implementing the public access improvements at Fort Owen SP, all 8 comments received were in support of the proposal. Two commenters had questions and/or suggestions for the project.

Comments Supporting the Acquisition

Comments supporting the acquisition included [number in brackets refer to the Commenter # (and paragraph #) in the Appendix]:

Addressing trespass, visitor confusion, safety

- I have visited this historical site several times with my wife and with other visitors. During those visits it felt almost like trespassing with the current configuration forcing the limited parking practically adjacent to the nearby landowners home. Improving access and parking will help to buffer visitors parking further away from that home enhancing their privacy. [2.1]
- The drive through access allows for trailers to visit as is not currently possible and should increase safety. [2.1]
- Your improvements for the Ft. Owen State Park are very welcome and better signage would be wonderful. I have wanted to visit this park for some time but I am confused about driving down the driveway of this ranch. [4]
- The proposed parking lot will mitigate many problems that have existed for many, many years. Fencing and gates will provide privacy for the Fort Owen Ranch. [8.1]

Project partners and appreciation

- [The Friends of Fort Owen] are pleased that Montana State Park Foundation has secured partnership funding to help Montana State Parks (MSP) address the long-standing access and trespass issues that have plagued visitors and the property owner for years and have restricted the park from being used to its fullest potential. [5.2]
- [The Montana State Parks Foundation is] prepared to work directly with Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks to provide funding and project support for the efforts detailed in this Environmental Assessment. [7.2]

Community and State Parks benefits

- Increased visitor use will also benefit the local economy as there are other nearby attractions such as the St Mary Mission, Bitterroot River access, nearby campgrounds, and the Lee Metcalf Wildlife Refuge that already provide reason for visiting the area. [2.1]
- Expanded parking with room for buses and trailers will increase visitation for history buffs and allow school groups to learn about our past. [2.1]
- The proposed weed management plan will help to manage and control the spread of invasive plants here and to other areas. [2.1]
- I believe this park presents a wonderful opportunity for our Grade School for field trips as well as education about our local history. [4]
- We also look forward to the improved future of Fort Owen State Park and a more significant role for the park in the community of Stevensville and the Bitterroot Valley. [7.1]
- Providing parking for the historic site will increase visitor usage. [8.1]
- Retaining and sharing history of this Montana State Park is critical in telling the development of Montana before statehood. [8.2]

Response to Public Comments

The following comments and FWP responses include specific questions, suggestions or comments received during the public comment period. We acknowledge and thank those who provided positive comments, but responses are not given below. *Public comments* below were grouped and paraphrased for FWP Response below. [Numbers in brackets refer to the Commenter # (and paragraph #) in the Appendix.]

1. On site archeological monitoring should be required. We appreciated the opportunity to participate in the Cultural Resource survey work that was done this last fall and look forward to the final report. Considering the fact that the entire area was not exhaustively inventoried, we would anticipate that you would conduct archeological monitoring during any ground disturbing activity outside the "capped" parking area, such as for planting trees and installing the fence and any sign posts needed for the interpretive kiosk or directional signs. [5.4]

FWP Response. Archeological work on the proposed area in the fall of 2020 found evidence that this parcel should be added to Fort Owen's National Register of Historic Places site boundary. Archeological monitoring of any ground disturbance will be overseen by the Montana State Park Heritage Resources Program.

2. Consider moving the irrigation ditch away from the southern border of the historic site. There is concern about the ongoing potential for water damage to any of the facilities installed on the southern side of the park. If, at some point in the future, the bastions are reconstructed, there is the potential for damage from problems with the irrigation ditch that will still flow between the site and the parking area. If the ditch can be re-routed around the southern end of the parking area and still meet the needs of the private landowner, now is the time to do it. [5.5]

FWP Response. While water damage from flood irrigation practices on the neighboring ranch has been a problem in the past, FWP addressed this in cooperation with the former landowner in 2015. Additionally, consultation with FWP Design and Construction and the

Heritage Resources Program about moving this ditch indicate that it would likely lead to putting additional archeological resources at risk.

3. Design Guidelines should be developed: We understand this EA basically addresses the overall general improvements proposed for the park and that detailed design decisions will be made during the final design and contracting phase of the project. We are uncertain, however, whether we will have the opportunity to make comment on specific design decision, therefore, we offer the following suggestions here. Considering the historic significance of the site we expect the design details for the fence, directional signing, the entrance gate and sign, the interpretive kiosk or signing, any benches and picnic tables, or parking barriers be designed to minimize the impact of these modern facilities and to be complementary to or enhance the historic aesthetic of the site. [5.6]

FWP Response. This is outside the scope of this EA. However, we note that Fort Owen is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. In addition, a cultural resource inventory has confirmed that the new 0.9 acres of land that FWP acquired south of the previous boundaries of the park will be recommended for inclusion in the boundaries of the NRHP-listed site, thanks to its archaeological resources.

Thanks to this NRHP listing, any and all elements constructed or placed within Fort Owen State Park, be that fencing, vegetation, or signage, will be formally evaluated according to the Montana Antiquities Act and related FWP administrative rules for their potential to adversely affect any contributing element to Fort Owen's NRHP listing. These contributing elements include all features from Fort Owen's period of significance (1850-1900), including the East Barracks, the foundations of the root cellar and the well, and all the park's historical archaeology. Every element of the proposed parking lot plan (fencing, ditches, pathways, etc.) is going through full consultation with the Montana SHPO to address its potential for adverse effect. Thanks to the archaeological resources on the new 0.9-acre parcel, the parking lot was redesigned to be constructed on top of geotextile fabric and fill, which will avoid disturbing the archaeological deposits and avoid an adverse effect to the site's NRHP-listed features. As part of the consultation process, SHPO also consults on whether new features are in keeping with the Fort's period of significance wherever possible. Any future changes to the site would also go through full consultation with the SHPO.

4. Visual Resources: We are concerned that tree plantings, buses, RVs and cars parked in this new parking area will detract from the visual and historic aesthetic of the site. Some of this concern can be mitigated to some degree by the details in the design of the facility. We request that fine tuning of the design of the parking area, plantings, signs, kiosk, and fencing consider the impact to the historic aesthetic of the site and the visual environment. [5.7]

FWP Response. Visual impacts are of concern at any State Park, especially so at heritage parks. However, space available and cost are also important factors to consider. With the small acreage of public land and limited budget, the proposed development has been determined to be the best use of public resources available. Also, the permanent ranch structures immediately north of the park will likely have a larger visual impact than the temporary parking of vehicles in the parking area.

5. Fencing. Will the interpretive plan address reconstructing the palisade around the fort? If so, will the perimeter fence around the parking area be designed to match or to be complimentary? Or will the fence around the parking lot be the same as the current one around the fort? Or will it be a metal pipe fence like the fence that has been recently installed along the access road? FFO would like MSP to consider options for reconstructing the fence around the fort to be one that is historically consistent with what would have been originally constructed. That would then argue for the fence

around the parking area to be visually compatible to the fort fence. At the very least we expect the new fence to contribute to the historic character of the site. [5.8]

FWP Response. Interpretation is outside the scope of this EA. FWP and other partners (including the Montana State Parks Foundation and the Friends of Fort Owen) are working to develop updated interpretive plans, exhibits and programs. While most interpretive projects do not reach the threshold to undergo a public process as rigorous as an EA, if proposed interpretive elements (either individually or collectively) were to reach such a threshold, then the Department would solicit public comment.

During this process to improve interpretation at Fort Owen State Park, FWP will be engaging stakeholders such as the local community and interested organizations for input on appropriate and relevant stories and delivery methods. We whole heartedly agree that the Native American history and influence at Fort Owen and the surrounding area is underrepresented at Fort Owen and many other sites in the Bitterroot Valley. To that end, we have reached out to tribal entities whose ancestors likely had a presence at Fort Owen or who have a historic connection to the site. To date, three tribes have agreed to consult with FWP on interpretive development and cultural resource management at this park. FWP is fortunate to have strong representation from the Selis/Qlispe Culture Committee on the committee to lead the development of the interpretive plan, and we will use their guidance as we determine the most effective and appropriate manner to tell the stories related to the history of their ancestors at this place.

Any reconstruction of former components at Fort Owen--for example the bastions, the palisade or the West Barracks--would likely have an adverse effect on the NRHP-listed historical archaeology due to the new foundations they would require. Fort Owen's archaeology is, today, one of its most significant components.

6. Entrance Sign/Kiosk: We encourage you to consider something that would be unique to the park. An adobe structure perhaps or one that looks like what the palisades might have looked like or designed as a mini bastion? Plus, the addition of tee-pee poles somewhere in this area would visually tie in a Native American connection that is currently missing from the park. These interpretive elements could be designed together as an entrance "plaza" that could double as a waiting area with benches. [5.9]

FWP Response. Montana State Parks and FWP continue to invest heavily in branding, including entry signs and park kiosks. Signage across the Parks Division (including Fort Owen State Park) will adhere to the guidelines and standards established that are consistent with the Montana State Parks Classification and Investment Policy.

7. If something other than the standard kiosk is a possibility, a visual impact analysis should be done to decide on what approach would be visually enhancing and not detract from the site itself. If a tall structure would be too distracting, then a low-profile adobe wall with low profile interpretive wayside signs and built in sit benches may be a reasonable alternative. [5.10]

FWP Response. This comment is outside the scope of this EA. Please refer to the response in Comment 5, above.

8. Consider 1) using the map that was developed for the Stevensville Main Street kiosk in the design of the entrance kiosk which would help promote Stevensville attractions, 2) relocating the

national historic landmark sign¹ that is currently in the middle of the archway--it obstructs the view into the park and photos of the barracks. [5.11]

FWP Response. These comments are outside the scope of this EA. Please refer to the response in Comment 5, above.

9. Landscaping Plan Requested: We recommend that a landscape plan be completed that considers the potential for trees to block the view into the park and to consider species of trees and shrubs that are historically and ecologically compatible. [5.12]

FWP Response. Please refer to the response to Comment 3, above.

10. There is a need for additional picnic tables and benches for visitors and for special events. Please consider adding a couple of picnic tables and perhaps a shade tree on the west side of the parking area. [5.13]

We suggest that FWP consider adding picnic and day use amenities including a small pavilion for shade and weather shelter in the corner of the new property, southwest of the proposed parking lot. [7.3]

FWP Response. Please refer to the response to Comment 3, above.

11. Considering the fact this site is accessible from the multi-use trail along the Stevi-cutoff road that connects to the 50-mile Bitterroot Trail, a bicycle rack would be desirable. [5.14]

FWP Response. Noted. A bicycle rack will be considered in the final design.

12. Nothing was mentioned in the EA about the need to add a new entrance gate and sign? Perhaps the Fort Owen Ranch owner would be willing to partner with SP on a new entrance gate and sign designed to match the Fort instead of just being a standard brown and white SP sign. [5.15]

FWP Response. Montana State Parks and FWP continue to invest heavily in branding, including entry signs and park kiosks. Standards have been developed and we are making a strong effort to have consistent signage across the Montana State Parks system to help with identity, awareness and to be in alignment with the Montana State Parks Classification and Investment Policy. The signs at Fort Owen will comply with this strategy. Some parks have developed unique entrance gateways and that is a possibility at Fort Owen, but would need to be accomplished in partnership with the neighboring landowner and located on private property. That is outside the scope of this EA.

13. Archway Proposed? We noticed that the cover of the EA does not depict the arch that is currently in place. Is there an intention to replace the existing arch with a new one that looks more consistent with what was historically there depicted by this photo? [5.16]

FWP Response. The archway is not part of this project and is outside the scope of this EA.

14. Recommend FWP consider a dedicated location for recognition of the private groups and donors that will make this project possible. [7.3]

¹ FWP notes that Fort Owen is not a National Historic Landmark. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). The sign mentioned in this comment describes Fort Owen and a State Historic Monument, a designation no longer used by the Montana State Parks system. It will be considered as part of the greater interpretive planning effort at Fort Owen State Park.

FWP Response. We will provide for donor recognition in a manner consistent with the FWP Acceptance of Non-State Funds Policy.

DECISION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based upon the Draft Environmental Assessment and the applicable laws, regulations, and policies, I have determined that the proposed action will not have negative effects on the human and physical environments associated with this project. Therefore, I conclude that the EA is the appropriate level of analysis, and the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is unnecessary.

This proposal is for FWP to develop a parking area and improve public access to Fort Owen SP via a recently acquired 0.9-acre parcel of property located immediately south of the SP. The proposal received overwhelming support during the public review period. The proposal was well publicized. No concerns were raised that would bring the environmental analysis into question. In consideration of these facts and with the addition of this Decision Notice (DN), the draft EA and this DN are hereby made the final EA.

Based on the analysis in the draft EA and the public comment received, I have selected the "Proposed Action" (Alternative A). FWP will develop a parking area and improve public access to Fort Owen SP via a recently acquired 0.9-acre parcel of property as identified in the Draft EA.

In accordance with FWP policy, an appeal may be made by any person who has either commented in writing to the department on the proposed project, or who has registered or commented orally at a public meeting held by the department on the proposed project, or who can provide new evidence that would otherwise change the proposed plan. An appeal must be submitted to the Director of FWP in writing and must be postmarked or received within 30 days of this decision notice. The appeal must describe the basis for the appeal, how the appellant has previously commented to the department or participated in the decision-making process, and how the department can provide relief. The appeal should be mailed to: Director, Fish, Wildlife & Parks, PO Box 200701, 1420 East 6th Avenue, Helena, MT 59620-0701.



Randy Arnold
Region 2 Supervisor
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

3-12-2021
Date

APPENDIX. All comments for the proposed public access improvements for Fort Owen State Park and its Draft EA, received by FWP during the comment period of January 27 through February 25, 2021. (Comments received via: E = email, M = mail.)

Com- men- ter #	Via	Para- graph	Comment
1	E		Thank you for forwarding the draft EA on to my for review. Everything looks good at first glance.
2	E	1	I am writing in support of alternative A for this project. I have visited this historical site several times with my wife and with other visitors. During those visits it felt almost like trespassing with the current configuration forcing the limited parking practically adjacent to the nearby landowners home. Improving access and parking will help to buffer visitors parking further away from that home enhancing their privacy. The expanded parking with room for buses and trailers will increase visitation for history buffs and allow school groups to learn about our past. The drive through access allows for trailers to visit as is not currently possible and should increase safety. Increased visitor use will also benefit the local economy as there are other nearby attractions such as the St Mary Mission, Bitterroot River access, nearby campgrounds, and the Lee Metcalf Wildlife Refuge that already provide reason for visiting the area. I also believe the proposed weed management plan will help to manage and control the spread of invasive plants here and to other areas.
		2	Please move forward with this project to improve access and allow more visitors to learn about our history.
3	E		I support the proposed alternative for improvements at Fort Owen.
4	E		I would like to tell you that your improvements for the Ft. Owen State Park park are very welcome and better signage would be wonderful. I have wanted to visit this park for some time but I am confused about driving down the driveway of this ranch. There is little to define boundaries and I believe this park presents a wonderful opportunity for our Grade School for field trips as well as education about our local history. Thank you for considering these improvements that are long overdue.
5	E	1	Fort Owen is an historically significant site and important for its educational and tourism value to the State of Montana and Stevensville. Friends of Fort Owen is a nonprofit organization that was created by citizens in Ravalli County who have been concerned about the need for enhanced funding and management attention for Fort Owen State Park.
		2	We are pleased that Montana State Park Foundation has secured partnership funding to help Montana State Parks (MSP) address the long-standing access and trespass issues that have plagued visitors and the property owner for years and have restricted the park from being used to its fullest potential.
		3	Overall, Friends of Fort Owen supports the proposed public access improvements for Fort Owen State Park, and we think the EA addresses the key issues. We find a few items, however, that were not sufficiently discussed in the EA that we offer here for your consideration.
		4	<u>Section 3.7 Cultural and Historic Resources:</u> On site archeological monitoring should be required. We appreciated the opportunity to participate in the Cultural Resource survey work that was done this last fall and look forward to the final report. Considering the fact that the entire area was not exhaustively inventoried, we would anticipate that you would conduct archeological monitoring during any ground disturbing activity outside the "capped" parking area, such as for planting trees and installing the fence and any sign posts needed for the interpretive kiosk or directional signs.
		5	<u>Consider moving the irrigation ditch away from the southern border of the historic site.</u> There is concern about the ongoing potential for water damage to any of the facilities installed on the southern side of the park. If, at some point in the future, the bastions are reconstructed, there is the potential for damage from problems with the irrigation ditch that will still flow between the site and the parking area. If the ditch can be re-routed around the southern end of the parking area and still meet the needs of the private landowner, now is the time to do it.

6	<u>Fort Owen Historical Design Guidelines should be developed:</u> We understand this EA basically addresses the overall general improvements proposed for the park and that detailed design decisions will be made during the final design and contracting phase of the project. We are uncertain, however, whether we will have the opportunity to make comment on specific design decision, therefore, we offer the following suggestions here. Considering the historic significance of the site we expect the design details for the fence, directional signing, the entrance gate and sign, the interpretive kiosk or signing, any benches and picnic tables, or parking barriers be designed to minimize the impact of these modern facilities and to be complementary to or enhance the historic aesthetic of the site.	
7	<u>Visual Resources:</u> We are concerned that tree plantings, buses, RVs and cars parked in this new parking area will detract from the visual and historic aesthetic of the site. Some of this concern can be mitigated to some degree by the details in the design of the facility. We request that fine tuning of the design of the parking area, plantings, signs, kiosk, and fencing consider the impact to the historic aesthetic of the site and the visual environment.	
8	<u>Fencing:</u> Will the interpretive plan address reconstructing the palisade around the fort? If so, will the perimeter fence around the parking area be designed to match or to be complimentary? Or will the fence around the parking lot be the same as the current one around the fort? Or will it be a metal pipe fence like the fence that has been recently installed along the access road? FFO would like MSP to consider options for reconstructing the fence around the fort to be one that is historically consistent with what would have been originally constructed. That would then argue for the fence around the parking area to be visually compatible to the fort fence. At the very least we expect the new fence to contribute to the historic character of the site.	
9	<u>Interpretive Entrance Sign/Kiosk:</u> We encourage you to consider something that would be unique to the park. An adobe structure perhaps or one that looks like what the palisades might have looked like or designed as a mini bastion? Plus, the addition of tee-pee poles somewhere in this area would visually tie in a Native American connection that is currently missing from the park. These interpretive elements could be designed together as an entrance "plaza" that could double as a waiting area with benches.	
10	if something other than the standard kiosk is a possibility, a visual impact analysis should be done to decide on what approach would be visually enhancing and not detract from the site itself. If a tall structure would be too distracting, then a low-profile adobe wall with low profile interpretive wayside signs and built in sit benches may be a reasonable alternative.	
11	We also ask that you consider 1) using the map that was developed for the Stevensville Main Street kiosk in the design of the entrance kiosk which would help promote Stevensville attractions and 2) relocating the national historic landmark sign that is currently in the middle of the archway--it obstructs the view into the park and photos of the barracks.	
12	<u>Landscaping Plan Requested:</u> We recommend that a landscape plan be completed that considers the potential for trees to block the view into the park and to consider species of trees and shrubs that are historically and ecologically compatible.	
13	<u>Picnic Tables:</u> There is a need for additional picnic tables and benches for visitors and for special events. Please consider adding a couple of picnic tables and perhaps a shade tree on the west side of the parking area.	
14	<u>Bike Rack Needed:</u> Considering the fact this site is accessible from the multi-use trail along the Stevi-cutoff road that connects to the 50-mile Bitterroot Trail, a bicycle rack would be desirable.	
15	<u>Entrance Gate and Sign:</u> Nothing was mentioned in the EA about the need to add a new entrance gate and sign? Perhaps the Fort Owen Ranch owner would be willing to partner with SP on a new entrance gate and sign designed to match the Fort instead of just being a standard brown and white SP sign.	
16	<u>New Archway Proposed?</u> We noticed that the cover of the EA does not depict the arch that is currently in place. Is there an intention to replace the existing arch with a new one that looks more consistent with what was historically there depicted by this photo?	
17	Thank you for the opportunity to comment and we look forward to working with Montana State Parks during the implementation phase of these exciting improvements to our Park.	
6	E	Thank you for circulating the Fort Owen EA. I am commenting in support of the plan for parking area construction.

7	E	1	The Montana State Parks Foundation would like to express their full support for the work outlined in the Circle R River Ranch Acquisition [Ft Owen State Park Access Improvements] Environmental Assessment. We are excited about the opportunity to play a key role in this major project effort. We also look forward to the improved future of Fort Owen State Park and a more significant role for the park in the community of Stevensville and the Bitterroot Valley.
		2	We are prepared to work directly with Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks to provide funding and project support for the efforts detailed in this Environmental Assessment.
		3	Our only comments on work not proposed here are as follows. We suggest that FWP consider adding picnic and day use amenities including a small pavilion for shade and weather shelter in the corner of the new property, southwest of the proposed parking lot. We also recommend FWP consider a dedicated location for recognition of the private groups and donors that will make this project possible.
8	M	1	The draft Environmental Assessment for the parking lot at Fort Owen State Park appears to provide an attractive addition to the park. The proposed parking lot will mitigate many problems that have existed for many, many years. Providing parking for the historic site will increase visitor usage. Fencing and gates will provide privacy for the Fort Owen Ranch.
		2	Retaining and sharing history of this Montana State Park is critical in telling the development of Montana before statehood. [Comments from Historic St. Mary's Mission, Inc.]