



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

SUBJECT: Access & Habitat Improvements at Big Casino Creek Reservoir

DATE: May 19, 2021

Dear Interested Party:

Thank you for your input and feedback on the draft environmental assessment (EA) for the proposed action of performing access and habitat improvements at Big Casino Creek Reservoir. The proposed action would be to reconstruct a more stable, accessible shoreline, install a seasonal dock, and place artificial habitat structures in the reservoir with the goal of improving recreational access and aquatic habitat.

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 the local management biologist, Clint Smith, at (406) 538-2445 *227 or clsmith@mt.gov with any questions you may have.

Thanks for your interest and participation.

Sincerely,

Gary Bertellotti
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Region 4 Supervisor

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT DECISION NOTICE**

on

ACCESS & HABITAT IMPROVEMENTS AT BIG CASINO CREEK RESERVOIR**Proposed Action**

Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks (FWP) proposes to reconstruct a portion of shoreline on Big Casino Creek Reservoir by installing stone-framed deflectors which would be meant to reduce erosion and improve angler access to the reservoir. Additionally, a seasonal dock would be installed, and artificial habitat structures would be placed with the intention of making fish more susceptible to angling.

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, a draft Environmental Assessment was prepared by FWP for the proposed project and released on March 12, 2021 for public comment. The draft EA was titled *Access & Habitat Improvements at Big Casino Creek Reservoir*. The draft EA was the subject of an FWP press release, was circulated to local sporting groups and sporting goods stores, and was posted and remains available for viewing on the FWP webpage <https://fwp.mt.gov/public-notice/news/2021/mar/0316-big-casino-creek-reservoir-draft-ea>. The draft EA evaluated the potential impacts of the following alternatives in addition to the proposed action:

Alternative A: No Action Alternative

If the No Action Alternative was adopted, the status quo would continue, and no access or habitat improvements would occur.



Summary of Public Comment and FWP Response

Three commenters provided input during the public comment period, which ended on April 11, 2021. Two comments were made via email and one was received verbally. All comments were generally supportive of the proposed action. Among the comments within the scope of the EA, no new information, concerns, or objections arose that were not evaluated. Comment summaries and FWP's response are as follows:

Comment Summary 1

Commenters expressed support for the project.

"I support the proposed action to make the improvements as described. This project would achieve the major issues of safety, water turbidity, and lack of adequate fish habitat to make it a safer FAS to access and hopefully a more self-sustaining fishery."

"The Big Spring Creek Watershed Council strongly supports the FWP proposal for Access and Habitat Improvements at Big Casino Creek Reservoir...work to protect this section of bank at the Casino Creek FAS is long overdue. Erosion has been an issue in that area for decades. The bank hardening as pictured should benefit all anglers. A dock would also be a great addition...Your plan will also provide semi-mobile anglers better fishing opportunities at Casino Creek Reservoir. At our April 5 meeting the Big Spring Creek Watershed Council voted, and unanimously supported the proposed action describe in the Draft EA, "Access and Habitat Improvements at Big Casino Creek Reservoir..."

A direct quote from the verbal commenter expressing support is not available. The comment was received by Clint Smith, FWP Lewistown Area Fisheries Biologist, while onsite explaining the project to a neighboring landowner on April 1, 2021.

Response: Thank you for your comments.

FWP Recommended Alternative & Final Decision

In reviewing all the public comment and other relevant information, and evaluating the environmental impacts, I recommend that FWP proceed with the proposed access and habitat improvements at Big Casino Creek Reservoir as described in the draft EA. These actions will recreate a stable, more accessible shoreline, improve recreational access, and attract game fish species to near shore areas where they may be more accessible to anglers. Combined, these actions are expected to improve the public's recreational use and enjoyment of the waterbody.



FWP finds there to be no significant impacts to the human and physical environments associated with this project. Public comments received during the comment period showed general support for the proposed action. No new concerns previously unevaluated in the EA arose through the public comment process. Therefore, I conclude that the Environmental Assessment is the appropriate level of analysis, and that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

Noting and including the responses to public comments found in this document, the draft EA will become the final EA and together with this decision notice will serve as the final documents for this proposal.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Gary Bertellotti". The signature is written over a horizontal line.

Gary Bertellotti
Regional Supervisor
FWP Region 4