



Region One 490 North Meridian Road Kalispell, MT 59901

DECISION NOTICE

And

Finding of No Significant Impact

for the

Flathead Lake State Park – Big Arm Archery Range Development

Thank you for your review and comments regarding the Draft Flathead Lake State Park -Big Arm Archery Range Development Environmental Assessment (EA). This project is intended to provide a public archery range within Flathead Lake State Park. Enclosed is a decision notice (DN) in which FWP responds to comments submitted during the public comment period. Upon completion of the public involvement process and by including this DN, FWP accepts the draft EA as final.

Sincerely,

 **ACTING**

James Williams

Region 1 Supervisor

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Description of Proposed Project

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes to develop a public archery range at the Big Arm Unit of Flathead Lake State Park. The archery range would be located on a parcel of Big Arm that is located on the west side of US Highway 93 directly across from the Park's main entrance. This parcel is currently utilized for dispersed hiking. This proposal would take advantage of a Pittman Robertson Act grant, administered by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, that is aimed at increasing public shooting sport opportunities.

The archery range would include an asphalt parking lot, an entry kiosk with informational and regulatory signage, a precast vault latrine, a 30' x 15' covered shooting line, and lockable storage for archer lessons and practice. An archery range trail with up to twelve shooting stations would also be developed within the project area. One shooting station would include an elevated shooting platform. Shooting stations would be located to ensure safe backdrops and distances from park boundaries.

This public archery range would be a valuable amenity in Lake County and the Polson area, as there are currently no public archery ranges in that area. The nearest public range is located 41 miles north at Lone Pine State Park.

FWP has park staff who are certified National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP) instructors. Thus, the archery range would provide an excellent opportunity for archery programs for children and adults.

Montana has a growing number of schools participating in the National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP). More than 70 schools are enrolled in the program, and northwest Montana is rapidly growing its enrollment with 18 schools/programs enrolled. Since 2019, five new schools in northwest Montana have enrolled in the program due to resources and opportunities provided by FWP and its sites, such as the archery range at Lone Pine State Park. The NASP program can be taught indoors using the school's gymnasium or outdoors. Ranges such as the one in this proposal provide opportunities for NASP programs, trainings, and public education events that promote NASP and bowhunter education.

Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) Process and Public Involvement

FWP released a draft environmental assessment (EA) for public review on November 10th, 2021 and asked for public comment through 5:00 p.m. on December 10th, 2021. FWP held a virtual public informational meeting on November 30, 2021, at 6:00 p.m. FWP ran legal ads describing the proposed project, the availability of the draft EA, and the public informational meeting in the Lake County Leader, Daily Inter Lake, and Helena Independent Record. FWP also mailed postcards to neighboring landowners. The draft EA was posted on FWP's official website and was also available at the Region One headquarters in Kalispell and online for people with internet access or through internet service at public libraries.

The EA evaluated the potential impacts of the following alternatives:

Alternative A: No Action

Under alternative A, no action, FWP would not develop a public archery range at the Big Arm Unit of Flathead Lake State Park. This property would be used primarily for dispersed public recreation as it currently is. The opportunity to provide a public archery range would not be pursued at this location.

Alternative B (Preferred Alternative): Archery Range Development with Parking West of US Hwy 93 Across from Main Park Entrance

Under alternative B, the agency's preferred alternative, FWP would develop a public archery range in the southwest corner of the Big Arm Unit of Flathead Lake State Park. Development would include a 30' x 15' covered shooting line and lockable storage for archer lessons and practice, an entry kiosk with informational and regulatory signage and a precast vault latrine.

An archery range trail with up to twelve shooting stations would be developed and each shooting station would include up to two targets located to maximize safety. One shooting station would include an elevated shooting platform. A 12-car asphalt parking lot and asphalt access road would also be developed on the west side of US Highway 93 across from the main park entrance to provide public and administrative access. This alternative would be contingent upon access approval by the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT).

Alternative C: Archery Range Development with Parking West of US Hwy 93 South of Main Park Entrance

Alternative C is the same as Alternative B except that the access point from US Highway 93 to the 12-car parking lot would be developed further south of the main park entrance, as depicted in Figure 1, along with an asphalt access road. This alternative also would be contingent upon access approval by MDT.

Alternative D: Archery Range Development with Parking East of US Hwy 93

Alternative D is the same as Alternative B except that the 12-car asphalt parking lot and an additional asphalt access road to it would be developed on the east side of US Highway 93, north of the park's entrance station. No parking would be provided on the west side of US Highway 93. Archers would utilize the existing trail system and walking tunnel under US Highway 93 to access the archery range. The asphalt access road detailed in Alternative C would still be developed under Alternative D to provide administrative access for archery range and vault latrine maintenance, contingent upon MDT approval.

Summary of Public Comment

FWP received 7 comments via email, and FWP staff reviewed the submissions to identify comments. A comment was defined as a specific issue or impact.

The following is a synopsis of public input received during the comment period and FWP's response to those comments organized by subject matter:

I. Support voiced for specific alternatives listed within the Environmental Assessment

Alternative A (No Action): no comments received in support of Alternative A (No Action)

Preferred Alternative B (Proposed Action):

- Lake County Commissioners appreciate the meeting with your local supervisor, Amy Grout, this past week. We appreciate and support your new concept of providing diversified or varietal camping opportunities for recreationists. Your rustic cabin concept, tent spaces, and yurts are providing the public with opportunities not previously available and may help accommodate the increased demand we are all seeing for recreational opportunities.
Your archer opportunities course near Big Arm State Park is providing the public with something not otherwise available, and we hope it is successful. We may have materials that would be helpful if needed and would be willing to work with you as we have on some of the other projects in the County.
It is our hope that you will work with us to help facilitate better access to the lake using all avenues available, and the provision of services to accommodate island use should be achievable with the help of our local emergency service providers.
- Flathead Wildlife, Inc. strongly endorses Alternative B in the Big Arm Archery Range EA to develop an archery range with parking west of US Hwy. 93 across from the Big Arm State Park entrance. One of the main tenets in the FWP Bowhunter Education Program is to practice frequently under natural conditions to learn your personal range and to become proficient in making humane kills. Archery can also be a sport in itself, teaching concentration, relaxation and providing outdoor exercise.
Unfortunately, many people do not have a safe and suitable location for archery practice. The proposed archery range appears to be a great use of a section of Big Arm State Park that gets low levels of use now. Also, there aren't any comparable facilities in Lake County. Flathead Wildlife thanks FWP for taking the initiative to provide a needed safe archery range and for expanding public recreation opportunities at Big Arm State Park.
- The Montana Chapter of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers represents roughly 3,000 dues-paying sportsmen and women in Montana who value quality recreational opportunities and ethical conduct in the outdoors. Our Montana Chapter includes many members who hunt and recreate in the Flathead Valley.
Montana BHA fully supports the proposal to build an archery range in the Big Arm Unit of Flathead State Park. Montana has seen an incredible response to the National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP) and we support expanding regional opportunities for archers to practice and hone their skills. Increasing available target ranges and access to public education events are critical to creating new, ethical hunters and to retaining hunters in the long term. Young or novice archers and seasoned hunters alike will all benefit from increased opportunities

to learn, practice and improve their archery skills.

Furthermore, we applaud your proposed use of Pittman Robertson Act dollars to fund this project. As sportsmen and women, we have a vested interest in seeing the wise and beneficial uses of our excise tax dollars. We look forward to the success of this range and are ready to assist promoting this excellent opportunity for Montana bowhunters.

- The Traditional Bowhunters of Montana represents roughly 250 dues-paying traditional bowhunters in Montana who value quality recreational opportunities and ethical conduct in the outdoors. TBM has many members who hunt and recreate in the Flathead Valley. The Traditional Bowhunters of Montana support the proposal to build an archery range in the Big Arm Unit of Flathead State Park. Montana has seen an incredible response to the National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP), and we support expanding regional opportunities for archers to practice and hone their skills. Increasing available target ranges and access to public education events are critical to creating new, ethical bowhunters and retaining hunters in the long term. Novice archers and seasoned hunters alike will benefit from increased opportunities to learn, practice, and improve their archery skills, especially with traditional tackle. We applaud your proposed use of Pittman Robertson Act dollars to fund this project. As bowhunters, we have a vested interest in seeing the wise and beneficial use of our excise tax dollars. We look forward to the success of this range and are ready to assist in promoting this excellent opportunity for Montana bowhunters.

Alternative C (no acquisition, redesign existing range):

- no comments received in support of Alternative C

II. Opposition voiced against the preferred alternative within the Environmental Assessment

- This archery range is not compatible with visitors' preferred activities in this particular state park; many locals and campers in this park are dedicated hikers who return to this beloved state park year after year and savor the place just the way it is; PLEASE leave this "parcel" alone, so that hikers may continue to enjoy it.
- We who enjoy this wonderful Big Arm state property feel that the park is perfect just the way it is. Please, please leave it alone.
- This location is too close to a major highway and residential areas to be safe; why not find a more remote/isolated place for something like this?

FWP Response: Montana's state parks are intended to offer a variety of recreational opportunities. We believe that the Big Arm Unit of Flathead Lake can offer a public archery range as well as the opportunity for dispersed recreation such as hiking. In addition to hiking trails located throughout the park's 239-acre footprint, the archery range trail will remain available for hiking. FWP evaluated each proposed target location to provide safe backdrops and sight distances to neighboring properties and to US Highway 93. Target locations were specifically chosen to minimize visual impacts to neighboring properties and to ensure safe locations.

III. Concerns raised about design concepts

- Just expressing a concern for those living on the southside of Highway 93 about the proposed Big Arm State Park Archery Range. Wondering if there is a plan in place to reduce the fuel because of the potential added usage? I live in the Early Dawn sub division, so if a fire jumped the highway, it would most likely result in a fire sweeping uphill through the area depending on the weather conditions. So, hopefully, there is a plan in place to reduce the fuel load and even a fire line.

FWP Response: Fuels loading, and associated fire danger do not appear to be significant within the proposed archery range footprint, and fires and smoking would be prohibited at all times. Fireworks are prohibited in all state parks. Park staff are aware of forestry management needs elsewhere with the park, and plan to conduct a park-wide forest condition and fire danger analysis in the near future.

IV. Comments received that are outside the scope of this proposal

- One commentor stated that they believed this proposal was a manifestation of the administration's attempt to escalate the hunting and killing of wildlife, and that they regarded bow hunting as a less effective means than a high-powered rifle to achieve good, ethical shooting that does not cause animal suffering.

FWP Response: FWP is directed by state law to promote and regulate hunting with archery equipment as a legal and ethical means of hunting. The proposed archery range would provide opportunity for all forms of archery, from target shooting to hunting preparation. Practicing technique with and the sighting-in of all weapons prior to the season is a tenet of ethical hunting. The construction of an additional archery range for practice promotes ethical hunting by encouraging and enabling this practice.

DECISION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based upon the Draft EA 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.

By notification of this Decision Notice (DN), the draft EA is hereby made the final EA. FWP will proceed with the development of an archery range at the Big Arm Unit of Flathead Lake State Park, with work expected to begin in 2022.

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, MT Fish, Wildlife & Parks, PO Box 200701, (1420 East 6th Avenue,) Helena, MT 59620-0701.

for M. Abbrescia / ACTING
James Williams
Region 1 Supervisor
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

12/21/21
Date