



DRAFT

**Flathead Lake Islands Proposed
Recreation Management
Draft Environmental Assessment**



IMAGE: Bird Island, June 2021

**Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
490 N. Meridian Road
Kalispell, MT 59901**

October 21, 2021

**Draft Environmental Assessment
MEPA, NEPA, MCA 23-1-110 CHECKLIST**

PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

1. Type of proposed state action:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes to restrict and improve management of public recreation on the Flathead Lake Island Wildlife Habitat Protection Areas (WHPAs), to include actions on Bird, Cedar, Douglas, and Goose Islands. The intent of the proposed actions is to reduce impacts of recreation on the islands and to help ensure the management goal of WHPAs to conserve wildlife habitat is retained.

2. Agency authority for the proposed action:

Montana State Parks has the authority to develop outdoor recreational resources in the state per 23-2-101 Montana Code Annotated (MCA) “for the purposes of conserving the scenic, historic, archaeological, scientific, and recreational resources of the state and providing their use and enjoyment, thereby contributing to the cultural, recreational and economic life of the people and their health.”

3. Anticipated Schedule:

Estimated Commencement Date: May 2022

Estimated Completion Date: October 2022

Current Status of Project Design (% complete): 10%

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

This proposed action will impact Bird Island (24N, 19W, Section 21,) Cedar Island (25N, 20W section 27), and Goose and Douglas Islands (25N, 20W, Section 28) located in Lake County, Montana within Flathead Lake.



5. 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:	
(Existing shop area)		Irrigated cropland	<u>0</u>
(b) Open Space/ Woodlands/Recreation	<u><10</u>	Dry cropland	<u>0</u>
(c) Wetlands/Riparian Areas	<u>0</u>	Forestry	<u>0</u>
		Rangeland	<u>0</u>
		Other	<u>0</u>

6. Permits, Funding & Overlapping Jurisdiction.

- (a) **Permits:** permits will be filed at least two weeks prior to project start.

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Permits</u>
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- (b) **Funding:**

Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks	\$200,000.00
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- (c) **Other Overlapping or Additional Jurisdictional Responsibilities:**

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Type of Responsibility</u>
Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes	Wildlife Management

7. Narrative summary of the proposed action:

In 2009, FWP issued the Flathead Lake Islands Management Plan. This plan sought to address ways to balance recreational opportunities with resource conservation of the agency-owned islands on Flathead Lake, including Cedar, Bird, Douglas and Goose Islands. FWP staff worked with a planning committee comprised of a wide diversity of stakeholders to develop a framework for recreation management on Bird, Cedar, Douglas, and Wild Horse Islands. Although these strategies have been implemented to a large degree on Wild Horse Island, which is a unit of Flathead Lake State Park, implementation has been delayed on the remaining islands, which are designated as Wildlife Habitat Protection Areas (WHPAs).

In 2009, estimated visitation to the state park units on Flathead Lake, including Wild Horse Island, was 233,224 visits. Since then, estimated annual visitation to Flathead Lake State Park has more than doubled -- the estimated visitation in 2020 was over 470,000 visits. (State park visitation data

can be found here: <https://fwp.mt.gov/aboutfwp/about-state-parks>) Although visitation data is not recorded on the Flathead Lake WHPA islands, anecdotally, recreational use appears to be increasing at roughly the same rate. Observations from a diverse set of FWP staff (enforcement, parks, and wildlife) have affirmed the increased use of the islands for day-use and overnight stays.

As recreational use of the WHPA islands is anticipated to continue to grow over time, impacts to wildlife habitat on the islands will as well. The most frequently observed impact is associated with the lack of restroom facilities. During peak summer months, heavy day use and overnight visitation has been documented on Cedar and Bird Islands and has resulted in large amounts of human feces and waste. With growing use, litter is also persistent, and vandalism has been extreme, particularly and at the Cedar Island homestead site.

In 2020, a wildfire occurred on Bird Island. Although no definitive cause was clearly identified, FWP staff have documented and cleaned up numerous fire rings and associated burn-pile debris on both Bird and Cedar Islands. Further, FWP enforcement staff have occasionally observed campfires that have not been properly extinguished. Increasing human use has also resulted in extensive social trail development and soil compaction at high use locations, particularly on Cedar Island. Due to the wildfire on Bird Island, FWP staff members have identified the need to develop a hazard tree removal plan aimed at reducing vegetative debris and to address visitor safety measures.

In order to minimize recreational impacts to wildlife habitat on the WHPAs, FWP proposes the following:

- Establish designated campsites for overnight stays on Bird and Cedar Islands (**Figures 1 and 2**). These campsites would be located in traditional use areas to limit proliferation of additional sites and overall impacts to the island's wildlife habitat.
- Install a centrally located composting toilet on both Bird and Cedar Islands to address human waste concerns and visitor health and safety issues.
- Construct a minimal trail system to connect campsites and the composting toilet on Cedar Island.
- Install appropriate signage and informational kiosks on all four islands to inform recreationists of the islands' history and regulations.
- Implement a fee for camping utilizing the Montana State Parks fee schedule, with revenues contributing toward island operations and maintenance. (Information

about state park fees and regulations can be found here:
<https://fwp.mt.gov/stateparks/fees-and-general-information.>)

- Campsites would be offered on a first come, first served basis. Mainland state park campgrounds on Flathead Lake utilize a campsites reservation system, and the WHPA campsites could be added to the reservation system at a future date.
- The Parks and Recreation Division would maintain the campsites and composting toilets.
- Camping would not be permitted on Douglas and Goose Islands to conserve wildlife habitat, and to conform with existing WHPA management.

Cedar Island:

- Establish up to seven campsites with tent pads to accommodate no more than six users per site (Figure 1).
- Prohibit camping at one or more campsites for a period longer than fourteen nights during any 30-day period, unless otherwise posted.
- Install a centrally located composting toilet.
- Establish a limited trail system connecting campsites to each other and to the composting toilet.
- Install informational kiosks and signs in appropriate locations on the island to inform visitors of the islands' unique history and user regulations.
- Prohibit campfires but allow gas or propane fueled camp stoves in accordance with prevailing fire restrictions.
- All human waste not deposited in the composting toilets must be packed off the islands.

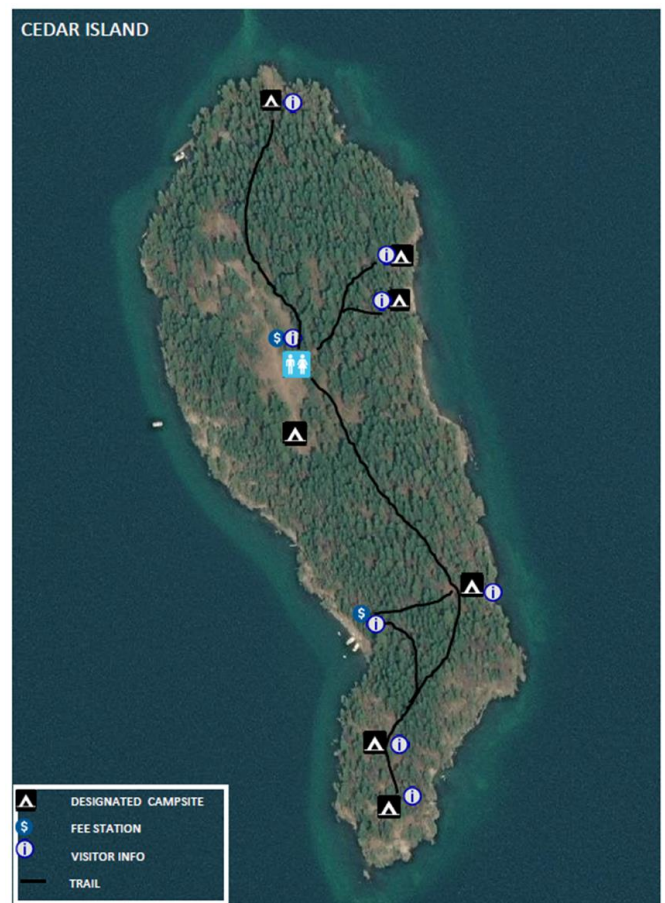


Figure 1. Proposed campsites, trails, and composting toilet on Cedar Island.

Bird Island:

- Prohibit use during the waterfowl-nesting season (March 1-July 15) which would also support other nesting bird species using the island.
- Establish up to four campsites with tent pads to accommodate no more than six users per site (Figure 2).
- Prohibit camping at one or more campsites for a period longer than fourteen nights during any 30-day period, unless otherwise posted.
- Install a composting toilet at the main landing site on the east side of the island and reduce vegetative debris.
- All human waste not deposited in the composting toilets must be packed off the islands.
- Develop a hazard tree removal plan to address impacts of the 2020 wildfire and reduce vegetative debris.
- Create a limited trail system connecting the main landing campsites to each other and to the composting toilet.
- Install informational kiosks and signs in appropriate locations on the island to inform visitors of the islands' unique history and user regulations.
- Prohibit campfires but allow gas or propane fueled camp stoves in accordance with prevailing fire restrictions.

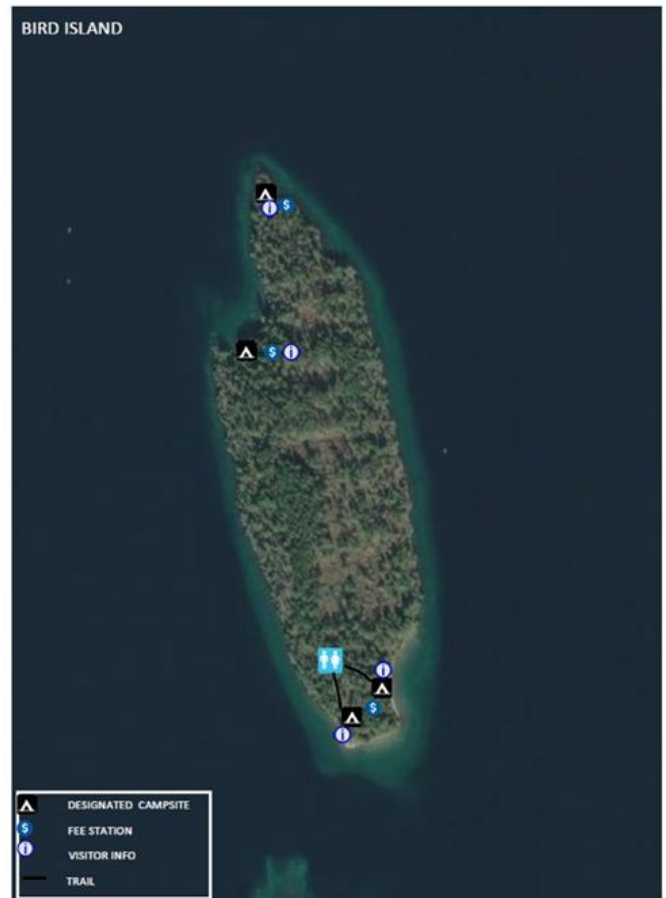


Figure 2. Proposed campsites, trails, and composting toilet on Bird Island.

Douglas and Goose Islands:

- Prohibit use during the waterfowl-nesting season (March 1 – July 15) which will also support other nesting bird species using the island.
- Outside of seasonal closures, allow for day-use only.
- Prohibit campfires but allow gas or propane fueled camp stoves in accordance with prevailing fire restrictions.

- Install informational kiosks and signs in appropriate locations on the island to inform visitors of the islands' unique history and user regulations.

8. Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives:

Alternative A: No Action

If no action is taken, unregulated visitor use will continue to diminish the primary function of the WHPA islands as bird nesting habitat. No designated campsites would be established and no composting toilets would be installed on Bird and Cedar Islands. No additional signage would be installed on any of the WHPA islands. Trash, vandalism and human waste would continue to be a problem as well as the potential for social conflict. Unregulated camping would likely result in additional informal campsite developments and additional social trails. Without informational signage, users would not be aware of regulations, the management approach, and unique history of the islands.

Alternative B: Proposed Action

The proposed actions would help manage visitor impacts and preserve important wildlife habitat while upholding the agency's commitment to do so. Establishing designated campsites on Bird and Cedar islands is important in helping mitigate negative habitat impacts, reduce the potential for social conflicts, and reduce the overall impacts to existing vegetation. Installing composting toilets on Bird and Cedar Islands would help manage human waste on the islands. The addition of signage would provide users with a better understanding about the history of the islands, FWP's regulations, and information about the islands' wildlife habitat.

Alternative C: Prohibit Recreational Use

As an alternative to the proposed actions (Alternative B), FWP has considered prohibiting recreational use of any kind on the WHPAs to maintain the islands as goose nesting habitat, the primary management goal of these islands. This alternative would make it illegal for the public to recreate on the islands in any capacity (day use or for overnight stays), reducing overall public recreation opportunities within Flathead Lake. No campsites would be designated and no composting toilets would be installed on Bird and Cedar Islands. Illegal camping would likely result, as well as the creation social trails, and continued human waste issues. Concerns for health and human safety would continue.

9. Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency: N/A

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

1. <u>LAND RESOURCES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Soil instability or changes in geologic substructure?		X				
b. Disruption, displacement, erosion, compaction, moisture loss, or over-covering of soil, which would reduce productivity or fertility?			X			1b
c. Destruction, covering or modification of any unique geologic or physical features?		X				
d. Changes in siltation, deposition or erosion patterns that may modify the channel of a river or stream or the bed or shore of a lake?			X		Yes	1d
e. Exposure of people or property to earthquakes, landslides, ground failure, or other natural hazard?		X				

1b. There will be minor soil disruption resulting from the construction of tent pads and a limited trail system on Cedar and Bird Islands; however, the impact from these actions are anticipated to be less than the current level of soil disruption from the creation of social trails, fire pits, and unregulated campsites.

1d. There will be minor changes in erosion patterns to the lake shore around the islands at landing sites; however, these changes may be positive as FWP designates campsites and formalizes landing locations. Staff members have selected campsite locations to help mitigate lakeshore erosion.

2. <u>AIR</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Emission of air pollutants or deterioration of ambient air quality? (Also see 13 (c).)		X				
b. Creation of objectionable odors?			X		yes	2b
c. Alteration of air movement, moisture, or temperature patterns or any change in climate, either locally or regionally?		X				
d. Adverse effects on vegetation, including crops, due to increased emissions of pollutants?		X				
e. <u>For P-R/D-J projects</u> , will the project result in any discharge, which will conflict with federal or state air quality regulations? (Also see 2a.)		X				

2b. The composting toilets may produce odors found objectional to some people; however, these odors can be mitigated with signage reminding visitors of the proper use of the toilets and regular maintenance. Instructional signs will be placed inside the toilets to educate users of proper use. FWP's Parks and Recreation Division will handle routine maintenance to these toilets to ensure proper function and reduced odor. Establishing the composting toilets will reduce the current level of dispersed human waste on the islands.

3. <u>WATER</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Discharge into surface water or any alteration of surface water quality including but not limited to temperature, dissolved oxygen or turbidity?		X				
b. Changes in drainage patterns or the rate and amount of surface runoff?			X		X	3b
c. Alteration of the course or magnitude of floodwater or other flows?		X				
d. Changes in the amount of surface water in any water body or creation of a new water body?		X				
e. Exposure of people or property to water related hazards such as flooding?		X				
f. Changes in the quality of groundwater?		X				
g. Changes in the quantity of groundwater?		X				
h. Increase in risk of contamination of surface or groundwater?		X				3h.
i. Effects on any existing water right or reservation?		X				
j. Effects on other water users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quality?		X				
k. Effects on other users as a result of any alteration in surface or		X				

groundwater quantity?						
l. For P-R/D-J, will the project affect a designated floodplain? (Also see 3c.)		X				
m. For P-R/D-J, will the project result in any discharge that will affect federal or state water quality regulations? (Also see 3a.)		X				

3b. Minimal changes in drainage patterns may occur due to tent site and trail development. These impacts can be mitigated by proper design and construction.

3h. The actions of installing composting toilets on Bird and Cedar Islands will result in a positive impact on contaminated runoff. Currently, human waste contaminates these islands, polluting runoff into Flathead Lake. The availability of composting toilets will decrease the amount of human waste contaminating the surface water.

4. <u>VEGETATION</u> Will the proposed action result in?	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Changes in the diversity, productivity or abundance of plant species (including trees, shrubs, grass, crops, and aquatic plants)?		X				
b. Alteration of a plant community?		X				
c. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				
d. Reduction in acreage or productivity of any agricultural land?		X				
e. Establishment or spread of noxious weeds?			X		X	
f. For P-R/D-J, will the project affect wetlands, or prime and unique farmland?		X				
g. Other:		X				

4e. Increased visitor use in natural areas can result in the spread of noxious weeds. Currently, Canada thistle and spotted knapweed are common on Cedar Island, particularly in the former orchard location in the central region of the island. Directing and regulating recreational use will help isolate weed establishment and potential spread to developed trail and camping areas, which can be routinely treated in minimize weed presence.

5. <u>FISH/WILDLIFE</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Deterioration of critical fish or wildlife habitat?		X				
b. Changes in the diversity or abundance of game animals or bird species?			X positive			5b
c. Changes in the diversity or abundance of nongame species?			X positive			5c
d. Introduction of new species into an area?		X				
e. Creation of a barrier to the migration or movement of animals?		X				
f. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				
g. Increase in conditions that stress wildlife populations or limit abundance (including harassment, legal or illegal harvest or other human activity)?		X				
h. For P-R/D-J, will the project be performed in any area in which T&E species are present, and will the project affect any T&E species or their habitat? (Also see 5f.)		X				
i. For P-R/D-J, will the project introduce or export any species not presently or historically occurring in the receiving location? (Also see 5d.)		X				

5b and 5c. The proposed actions should have a positive impact on both nongame and game species. By better managing recreation and visitor use on the WHPA islands, FWP can mitigate impacts to wildlife using the islands, in particular nesting Canada geese. Restricting camping to designated areas will reduce impacts to all nesting bird species across Cedar and Bird Islands. Informational signs concerning seasonal closures should also help reduce unauthorized recreation during nesting season.

B. HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

6. <u>NOISE/ELECTRICAL EFFECTS</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Increases in existing noise levels?		X				
b. Exposure of people to serve or nuisance noise levels?		X				
c. Creation of electrostatic or electromagnetic effects that could be detrimental to human health or property?		X				
d. Interference with radio or television reception and operation?		X				

7. <u>LAND USE</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Alteration of or interference with the productivity or profitability of the existing land use of an area?		X				
b. Conflicted with a designated natural area or area of unusual scientific or educational importance?		X				
c. Conflict with any existing land use whose presence would constrain or potentially prohibit the proposed action?		X				
d. Adverse effects on or relocation of residences?		X				

8. <u>RISK/HEALTH HAZARDS</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Risk of an explosion or release of hazardous substances (including, but not limited to oil, pesticides, chemicals, or radiation) in the event of an accident or other forms of disruption?		X				
b. Affect an existing emergency response or emergency evacuations plans, or create a need for a new plan?		X				
c. Creation of any human health hazard or potential hazard?			X positive			8c
d. For P-R/D-J, will any chemical toxicants be used? (Also see 8a)		X				

8c. The installation and use of composting toilets will have a positive impact on human health by reducing the prevalence of untreated human waste on the islands.

9. COMMUNITY IMPACT Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Alteration of the location, distribution, density, or growth rate of the human population of an area?		X				
b. Alteration of the social structure of a community?		X				
c. Alteration of the level or distribution of employment or community or personal income?		X				
d. Changes in industrial or commercial activity?		X				
e. Increased traffic hazards or effects on existing transportation facilities or patterns of movement of people and goods?		X				

10. <u>PUBLIC SERVICES/TAXES/UTILITIES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Will the proposed action have an effect upon or result in a need for new or altered governmental services in any of the following areas: fire or police protection, schools, parks/recreational facilities, roads or other public maintenance, water supply, sewer or septic systems, solid waste disposal, health, or other governmental services? If any, specify:			X		Yes	10a
b. Will the proposed action have an effect upon the local or state tax base and revenues?		X				
c. Will the proposed action result in a need for new facilities or substantial alterations of any of the following utilities: electric power, natural gas, other fuel supply or distribution systems, or communications?		X				
d. Will the proposed action result in increased use of any energy source?		X				
e. Define projected revenue sources						10e
f. Define projected maintenance costs.						10f

10a. The proposed action will create additional park infrastructure, including informational signage, campsites and composting toilets on two of the WHPA islands. New infrastructure would result in additional maintenance costs and staff time.

10e. During the 2021 legislative session a total of \$200,000 in spending authority from the general license account was authorized.

10f. Projected maintenance costs are as follows:

- Informational kiosks
- Fee signs for campsites
- Tent pads
- Fire rings
- Hazard tree removal on Bird Island
- Noxious weed removal

11. <u>AESTHETICS/RECREATION</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Alteration of any scenic vista or creation of an aesthetically offensive site or effect that is open to public view?		X				
b. Alteration of the aesthetic character of a community or neighborhood?		X				
c. Alteration of the quality or quantity of recreational/tourism opportunities and settings? (Attach Tourism Report.)			X positive			11c.
d. <u>For P-R/D-J</u> , will any designated or proposed wild or scenic rivers, trails or wilderness areas be impacted? (Also see 11a, 11c.)		X				

11c. By creating designated camping areas, composting toilets, and a small trail network on Bird and Cedar Islands, FWP anticipates offering an enhanced user experience over what is currently available. Limiting the number of people at each campsite and managing site selection should ensure that visits to the island provide for a remote and peaceful experience. Composting toilets would mitigate human waste concerns. Establishing educational signage would enrich the visitor experience.

12. <u>CULTURAL/HISTORICAL RESOURCES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Destruction or alteration of any site, structure or object of prehistoric historic, or paleontological importance?		X				12a
b. Physical change that would affect unique cultural values?		X				
c. Effects on existing religious or sacred uses of a site or area?		X				
d. For P-R/D-J, will the project affect historic or cultural resources? Attach SHPO letter of clearance. (Also see 12.a.)		X				

12a. FWP staff members are assessing management options for the Cedar Island House and homestead in conjunction with the agency's Heritage and Program Manager and other experts. A heritage overview was completed in July 2021. Further assessment work will continue contingent on the outcome of this EA.

C. SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

13. <u>SUMMARY EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE</u> Will the proposed action, considered as a whole:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? (A project or program may result in impacts on two or more separate resources that create a significant effect when considered together or in total.)		X				

b. Involve potential risks or adverse effects, which are uncertain but extremely hazardous if they were to occur?		X				
c. Potentially conflict with the substantive requirements of any local, state, or federal law, regulation, standard or formal plan?		X				
d. Establish a precedent or likelihood that future actions with significant environmental impacts will be proposed?		X				
e. Generate substantial debate or controversy about the nature of the impacts that would be created?		X				
f. <u>For P-R/D-J</u> , is the project expected to have organized opposition or generate substantial public controversy? (Also see 13e.)		X				
g. <u>For P-R/D-J</u> , list any federal or state permits required.		X				

PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

FWP finds that the proposed actions outlined in Alternative B would positively impact the wildlife, vegetation, and water quality of the WHPA islands. Importantly, the proposed actions would also enhance the recreational experience of visitors to the islands now and for years to come. The construction of the trails and camping platforms, and installation of the composting toilets and signage would have some short-term, minor impacts, but these are outweighed by the long-term benefits that these improvements will bring.

As recreational use continues to dramatically increase on and around Flathead Lake, it is imperative that popular areas such as the WHPA islands are managed with resource protection and sustainable recreation in mind. The proposed actions would help protect the valuable aesthetic, vegetative, and wildlife resources on the WHPA islands by limiting the number of people at each campsite; defining appropriate campsites, trails, and boat landings; and by providing composting toilets. The recreational experience of visitors is also expected to improve as a result of these proposed changes, as crowding, litter, and unsanitary conditions would be reduced.

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: Flathead Beacon, Daily Inter Lake, the Missoulian, the Polson Valley Journal, Lake County Leader, and the Independent Record
- One statewide press release
- Public notice on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks web page: <https://fwp.mt.gov/public-notices>.

Notices of the release of this environmental assessment will be sent to area landowners with a particular emphasis on those near likely boat launch areas, staff from the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribal Wildlife Management Program, local county commissioners, and other interested parties to ensure their knowledge of the proposed project.

Extensive public outreach was also conducted in the creation of the 2009 Flathead Lake Island Management Plan, which this proposal builds upon.

This level of public notice and participation is appropriate for a project of this scope having limited impacts, many of which can be mitigated.

2. Duration of comment period:

The public comment period will extend for (30) thirty days. Written comments will be accepted until 5:00 p.m. on Monday, November 22, 2021 and can be mailed or emailed to the addresses below:

By mail:

FHL Islands EA
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
490 N. Meridian Road
Kalispell, MT 59901

Or email: Jessy Coltrane at JColtrane@mt.gov

PART V. EA PREPARATION

- 1. Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required? (YES/NO)?**

No

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

Based on an evaluation of impacts to the physical and human environment under MEPA, this environmental review revealed no significant negative impacts from the proposed action; therefore, an EIS is not necessary and an environmental assessment is the appropriate level of analysis. In determining the significance of the impacts, FWP assessed the severity, duration, geographic extent, and frequency of the impact; the probability that the impact would occur; or reasonable assurance that the impact would not occur. FWP assessed the growth-inducing or growth-inhibiting aspects of the impact; the importance to the state and to society of the environmental resource or value affected; any precedent that would be set as a result of an impact of the proposed action that would commit FWP to future actions; and potential conflicts with local, federal, or state laws. As this EA revealed no significant impacts from the proposed actions, an EA is the appropriate level of review and an EIS is not required.

- 2. Person(s) responsible for preparing the EA:**

Jessy Coltrane

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

Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribal Wildlife Management Program staff

APPENDIX A

23-1-110 MCA

PROJECT QUALIFICATION CHECKLIST

Date: August 20, 2021

Person Reviewing: Jessy Coltrane

Project Location: Flathead Lake Island Wildlife Habitat Protection Areas (Bird, Cedar, Douglas and Goose Islands)

Description of Proposed Work:

The following checklist is intended to be a guide for determining whether a proposed development or improvement is of enough significance to fall under 23-1-110 rules. (Please check for all that apply and comment as necessary.)

A. **New roadway or trail built over undisturbed land?**

Comments: Limited trail systems would be built on Bird and Cedar Islands. The ground on Bird Island is currently disturbed from a recent fire in 2020, and should not result in disturbing land that has not been previously disturbed. On Cedar Island, there is currently a network of social trails. The construction of a designated trail system would utilize some of the existing trail but would also create additional linkages to designated campsites. Creation of an established trail and informational signage should help reduce impacts from establishment and use of social trails. Disturbance to land should therefore be minimal.

B. **New building construction (buildings <100 sf and vault latrines exempt)?**

Comments:

C. **Any excavation of 20 c.y. or greater?**

Comments:

D. **New parking lots built over undisturbed land or expansion of existing lot that increases parking capacity by 25% or more?**

Comments:

E. **Any new shoreline alteration that exceeds a doublewide boat ramp or handicapped fishing station?**

Comments:

- F. **Any new construction into lakes, reservoirs, or streams?**

Comments:

- G. **Any new construction in an area with National Registry quality cultural artifacts (as determined by State Historical Preservation Office)?**

Comments:

- H. **Any new above ground utility lines?**

Comments:

- I. **Any increase or decrease in campsites of 25% or more of an existing number of campsites?**

Comments: Currently, there are no designated campsites on Bird and Cedar Islands. The proposed actions would create up to four campsites on Bird Island and up to seven campsites on Cedar Island.

- J. **Proposed project significantly changes the existing features or use pattern; including effects of a series of individual projects?**

Comments:

If any of the above is checked, 23-1-110 MCA rules apply to this proposed work and should be documented on the MEPA/HB495 CHECKLIST. Refer to MEPA/HB495 Cross Reference Summary for further assistance.

APPENDIX B

TOURISM REPORT MONTANA ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT (MEPA) & MCA 23-1-110

The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks has initiated the review process as mandated by MCA 23-1-110 and the Montana Environmental Policy Act in its consideration of the project described below. As part of the review process, input and comments are being solicited. Please complete the project name and project description portions and submit this form to:

Jan Stoddard
Montana Office of Tourism
301 S. Park Ave.
Helena, MT 59601

Project Name: Flathead Lake WHPA Islands Recreation Improvement

Project Description: FWP proposes to improve recreation management on the Flathead Lake Island Wildlife Habitat Protection Areas (WHPAs), to include actions on Bird, Cedar, Douglas, and Goose Islands. FWP proposes to restrict camping to improved designated camp sites on Bird and Cedar Islands located in Flathead Lake. These campsites will be in traditional use areas to limit proliferation of additional sites and overall impacts to the island habitat. In conjunction with these campsites, FWP proposes to install a composting toilet on Bird and Cedar Islands. In addition, we propose to construct a minimal trail system to connect campsites and the composting toilet on Cedar Island. Appropriate signage and informational kiosks will be installed on all four islands to inform recreationalists of island history and regulations. Overall, these actions should improve the recreational experience in Flathead Lake, by providing designated camping and toilet facility on Bird and Cedar Islands.

Would this site development project have an impact on the tourism economy?

NO **YES** If YES, briefly describe:

As described, this project has the potential to positively impact the tourism and recreation industry economy if properly maintained. This project is in alignment with what the Office of Tourism is doing to encourage responsible recreation behavior in Montana. In 2019, Montana's 12.6 million non-resident visitors spent over \$3.8 billion in the state according to a 2020 report from the University of Montana's Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research.

Additionally, recreation access and activities are in high demand for visitors. This intent to visit has dramatically increased this year due to the pandemic and a desire for safe outdoor recreation experiences.

2. Does this impending improvement alter the quality or quantity of recreation/tourism opportunities and settings?

NO **YES** If YES, briefly describe:

This project has the potential to improve quality and quantity of tourism and recreational opportunities. This project develops a better defined and safe camping experience. These improvements are critical to the usability and long-term sustainability of visitor assets for outdoor recreation, including non-resident visitors. With these improvements,

we are assuming the agency has determined it has necessary funding for the on-going operations and maintenance once this project is complete.

Signature Jan Stoddard Date 8/11/21