

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, Bureau Chief, Montana Office of Tourism
MOTBD, Montana -Department of Commerce
301 S. Park Ave.
Helena, MT 59601

Project Name: Lewis & Clark Caverns State Park Replacement/Upgrade of Comfort Station Wastewater Treatment System

Project Description: The current comfort station facility at Lewis & Clark Caverns State Park was erected in the mid-1970s for the visitors who use the 42 sites in the campground. The comfort station consists of restrooms, showers and electric services. The RV dump station was also built in the 1970's to specifically to serve RV users with dump service and freshwater for filling tanks. With the use of a reservation system starting in 2011, campground use has increased each year. In 2019, the occupancy rates were: June 73%, July 94%, August 89% and September 75%. Both the comfort and dump stations are unable to adequately function with this increase in use. The proposed new septic drain field will be large enough to address the current use and can accommodate a new comfort station in the future.

1. Would this site development project have an impact on the tourism economy?
NO YES If YES, briefly describe:

Yes, as described, the project has the potential to positively impact the tourism and recreation industry economy if properly maintained. Designated in 1908 as a national monument by Theodore Roosevelt, Lewis & Clark Caverns became Montana's first state park in 1937. With its extensive facilities – two visitor centers, campground, hiking trails, picnic areas, and guided tours through the Caverns - the park is a very popular attraction for Montana residents as well as out-of-state and international visitors. The park has great economic impact for the surrounding area of Whitehall, Cardwell, and Three Forks in attracting visitors who purchase fuel, food, and supplies during their trip to Lewis & Clark Caverns.

Montana's 12.6 million non-resident visitors spent over \$3.8 billion in the state in 2019 (University of Montana's Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research

ITRR, 2020). Recreation activities and camping in state parks are in high demand for visitors. This intent to visit has dramatically increased as a result of the pandemic and a desire for safe outdoor recreation experiences.

Montana residents use and value state parks. A 2018 ITRR study confirmed that over half of Montana residents 18 and older use Montana State Parks at least once a year and that the importance of having state parks is agreed upon by all residents. In 2020, there was a record 3.4 million Montana resident and non-resident visitors to Montana state parks, an increase of 30% over 2019. In 2019, over 85,000 visitors came to Lewis & Clark Caverns State Park.

Additionally, in 2015 Montana State Parks issued its strategic plan "Charting a New Tomorrow" identifying expanding facilities and amenities to deepen the relevance of our services and experiences as a top priority. As discussed in the 2015 Plan, MT State Parks must evaluate visitor expectations and be proactive in meeting those expectations; a key expectation rests in the quality of the amenities offered. This project replaces the antiquated waste system and outdoor plumbing to the comfort and RV Dump stations, critical needs for a visitor to the park use.

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

NO

YES

If YES, briefly describe:

Yes, as described, the project has the potential to improve quality and quantity of tourism and recreational opportunities. These improvements are critical to the safety, 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: 6/21/2021