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## **Environmental Assessment Decision Notice**

### **Flathead Lake Islands Proposed Recreation Management**

### **January 5, 2022**

#### **Description of Proposed Project**

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, Wild Horse, 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 the 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 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.

## Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) Process and Public Involvement

FWP released a draft environmental assessment (EA) for a 30-day public review period on October 21, 2021, with comment closing November 22, 2021. The EA was advertised through media releases and 2 legal notices each in the Daily Inter Lake, Flathead Beacon, Missoulian, Valley Journal, Lake County Leader, Helena Independent Record, and on the FWP website and social media (Facebook & Twitter). Copies of the EA were available from the Kalispell FWP office, on the FWP web site, and at the Montana State Library and the Flathead County libraries. Notices were mailed to residents along the coastline of Finley Point with a direct view of Bird Island, as well as residents adjacent to all boat launches and across from Cedar Island. In addition, posters with QR codes linked to the FWP website and public comment page were put up at all boat launches and state parks on Flathead Lake.

The EA evaluated the potential impacts of the following alternatives:

### Alternative A: No Action

If no action is taken, unregulated visitor use would 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 and wildlife 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. Day use and illegal camping would likely result, as well as the creation of social trails, and continued human waste issues. Concerns for health and human safety would continue.

### Summary of Public Comment:

FWP received 29 written submissions via email/mail and 18 comments through the online survey on the proposed project, and FWP staff reviewed the submissions to identify comments. A comment was defined as a specific issue or impact. In many cases, multiple people listed the same or similar comments; these comments are summarized and listed once, and one response is provided.

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

## Comments received related to specific alternatives listed within the Environmental Assessment

### Alternative A (No Action):

- Proposals A and C are either unworkable or fruitless.
- "No action" alternative is off the table
- The alternatives given are not optimal solutions. The best is to do nothing except: If a person is on the islands, they need to have a method to transport the excrement that come as a result of their being there.

### Alternative B (Proposed Action):

- Proposal B has good intentions but may result in more degradation.
- We encourage your selection of the Alternative B proposed action as it protects existing habitats for wildlife while providing recreational opportunities for the public, with an appropriate schedule.
- I am in favor of preferred Alternative B, which is to moderately develop the islands' recreational infrastructure to guide/regulate recreational use.
- I fully support your plan to protect wildlife, environment and restrict recreation on these islands as you propose.
- In relation to this proposal I fully support the proposed actions 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.
- I strongly favor Alternative B and all that it contains. If I have to give up the solitude of night paddles to and from these islands, the pleasure of rising at dawn to watch the sun rise from an island that felt like my own vessel sailing through the stars, I want as much of what I value to be protected as possible. If we cannot inculcate reverence within human beings, your proposal safeguards the conditions on these islands so that such reverence might be awakened.
- The plan as presented has three alternatives. Only one, (Alternative B) offers any potential for a positive outcome.
- I am in favor of preferred Alternative B, which is to moderately develop the islands' recreational infrastructure to guide/regulate recreational use. I also feel strongly that sufficient funding will be needed to maintain the infrastructure and enforce the proposed use guidelines.

### Alternative C: Prohibit Recreational Use

- When I was young, I remember the Bird Islands being posted as "No Trespassing", because they were bird sanctuaries. I grew up believing that those islands were for the birds, and believe that's how it should be now. No people should be able to set foot on those islands.
- Honestly, as much as I would love to use these islands the way you are intending, I feel like we humans have already proven that we can't handle the responsibility of "leave no trace". Though I very much enjoy visiting these islands, particularly Wild Horse and Bird, I'd REALLY like to minimize the impact of humans on these spaces. I think most important to keep in mind is that the stated purpose of these islands is that they be used for wildlife habitat... I'd like to see humans make a few more sacrifices to that end in order to protect these valued treasures.
- I feel like it is in the best interest of the Islands of Flathead Lake is to prohibit camping. Prohibit fires. Put up no trespassing signs and there would be a huge fine to pay if people do not comply by these rules. It should be illegal to be allowed on these Islands, burning them down, killing the animals that live there.
- Please do not develop these islands for public recreation. They should remain in their natural state for future generations.
- It's obvious that people are a hazard to both the flora and fauna of the islands of Flathead. They have no respect for the environment nor the wildlife and should not be permitted to set foot on these protected places ever again. Keep these wild areas wild!
- Please close access completely to public. Please protect these isolated treasures.
- I think that not allowing access to the islands on and around Flathead Lake is a Great idea. Because the islands are very important to Flathead Lake and to the CSKT tribe. Allowing access for camping and what not it costs a lot of money to clean up the islands.
- I am for no permitted use. These islands are too small to adequately manage human traffic.
- As a resident of the Flathead Lake Community, I strongly resent any effort or regulation that would open the Bird Islands on the Lake to Public Camping or physical uses by the general Public. I believe they should be off limits to the Public. There are many adequate campgrounds and other facilities on the Lake that the Public can access and use. Please reserve the Islands, without pollution by the Public.
- The public has proven themselves unworthy of setting foot on any of these islands. The public has fouled these islands with human poop, toilet paper, litter, bottles, cans and other assorted garbage. The public even torched one of these islands.  
I strongly propose that the public be forbidden from setting foot on any of these islands. Close them all to public use. Let them become wildlife and wild vegetation preserves. Sign all of these islands so that those that venture near them in their boats will know to stay off. It is quite obvious that the public cannot police themselves and that the public has absolutely no clue about how to properly recreate. There are plenty of developed shore line recreation sites around the perimeter of Flathead Lake. Please restrict the public to those sites.
- I am against the development of the islands on Flathead Lake. If people are given the opportunity to destroy our beautiful home, they will. Being raised to respect the land, the birds and wildlife, will surely suffer. It was heartbreaking to watch those islands burn. I feel that it would do an incredible amount of damage to the ecosystem. Let the islands recover naturally, as it was humans that started those fires this past summer. Thanks for your moment of time and please deeply consider not doing this. It won't bring more money, just troubles.

The following is a summary of common themes supporting the management of the islands, but do not specify a preferred alternative:

- I am in favor of FWP adopting the proposed management changes to the islands on Flathead Lake, but with an accommodation that prioritizes human-powered access for some of the sites. This recognizes that a kayak or canoe trip to one of the islands is a much more committed endeavor than one by motorized watercraft. It can take several hours and quite a bit of effort to reach a site under human power. (Comment submitted by 2 different people)
- I think this is a well-designed proposal to meet the current needs of boaters and wildlife on Flathead Lake.
- Please take actions that provide safe and controlled use that will enhance and preserve the magic of these special places.
- I am in favor of the FWP proposed rules for Flathead Lake islands. I hope the proposed changes are implemented and help keep these island parks beautiful.
- I am writing to say that I support the regulation of these islands. Although I have never visited them, I have the concern that they will be impacted from overuse and misuse. I may someday paddle to them and would appreciate seeing them managed and intact.

## Opposition voiced against specific alternatives listed within the Environmental Assessment

### Alternative A (No Action):

- No comments received in opposition of Alternative A.

### Alternative B (Proposed Action):

- For all the people who dedicate their time to preserving our beloved Flathead Lake should be appalled by this proposal. Picking up garbage on the lake and on islands has been constant especially last year. To let people have free reign to do whatever they want to is simply wrong. Also, who pays this passing off? Bathrooms' will still be trashed as newcomers have absolutely no regard for any restrictions or law. It's absolutely sick! And let's not even talk about people bringing in mussels! Please do not let camping of any sort be allowed.
- I write to express my opposition to parts of Proposal B to the Flathead Lake Islands Proposed Recreation Management Draft EA. While I support and agree with the majority of Proposal B there's a few things that I disagree with.

### Alternative C: Prohibit Recreational Use:

- Proposal C with its complete closure would be a terrible loss to those of us who visit Flathead or live there. It would likely be ignored by many. Doing nothing will only exacerbate the problems.



## Summary of Public Comments with FWP responses and Project Adjustments

This section of the Decision Notice summarized comments received during the public comment period and FWP's responses, sorted by topic. For some topics, FWP has made adjustments to what was originally proposed, which are reflected in our responses and are also summarized in the Final Decision section at the end of this notice.

### I. Fires

- there is the additional risk of campfires. Other neighbor island owners and shoreline people report regular visible campfires on the island despite its prohibition. This is what likely destroyed 80% of Bird Island a couple of years ago.
- Overnight stays invite campfires which are the biggest threat. (SEE BIRD ISLAND FIRE!!) ABSOLUTELY NO CAMPFIRES or FIREWORKS!!!  
I am absolutely sure that a fire will happen on Cedar Island if fires are not prohibited. The biggest threat is FIRE!! Climate change and campers with poor (or none!) campfire knowledge- this associated with alcohol consumption- combine to make the Cedar Island environment a distant memory. The inner island is a tangle of downed trees and undergrowth that, if ignited, would cause a massive, uncontrollable fire.
- Over the years we have often found the sites of illegal fires, and that is without overnight camping. The lesson of the danger of illegal campfires on an island should not be so quickly forgotten.
- I think prohibiting fires would be prudent, especially in light of the fire at Bird last year.
- The island (Cedar) needs to have extensive thinning done to reduce the likelihood, especially with growing human use, of devastating fire. Probably banning all open fire (except on the open north-west beach?) would be prudent.
- How will following current fire restrictions be monitored?
- On page 19 of 28, it says fire rings are part of ongoing maintenance. If I'm reading correctly, all the plans say no campfires. What are you proposing fire rings to be used for?
- I think the numerous hazard trees will need to be dealt with.

### FWP Response:

Currently, fires are prohibited on all the Flathead Lake Island WHPA's. The proposed actions outlined in the Draft EA would maintain fire restrictions. As stated in the EA, campfires would be prohibited on all the WHPA Islands, but gas or propane fueled camp stoves would be allowed in accordance with prevailing fire restrictions. Since camping would not be allowed on Douglas and Goose Island, we will amend the proposal to restrict any fires, including camp stoves of any kind, on these two islands.

Fire restrictions will be enforced by FWP enforcement staff as with all regulations.

Currently there are fire rings on all the islands that have been created illegally by members of the public. All fire rings will be destroyed as campfires will not be allowed on any of the islands.

As stated in the Draft EA, a hazard tree removal plan is needed for Bird Island but is outside the scope of this project. Forest management on Cedar Island is outside the scope of this EA and future decisions to address forest management would require an additional EA.

## II. Toilets

- “Yes to composting toilets on both”
- With so many people using the Islands now there is no real alternative to not place Compost toilets on each island. It is doubtful people will abide by a sign saying, “pack out your human waste”, especially given the lack of respect for “leave no trace” shockingly displayed by recent visitors and some locals.
- You may recall that Paddlers contacted you at least a decade ago regarding the problem with sanitation on the islands. An outcome was our assistance building a composting toilet housing on Cedar.

The toilet that was installed years ago was apparently a gift or trade from another agency, and was of a poor design. Because of that, you had asked the Paddlers, who had helped in the installation, if we would be willing to help take care of it, essentially showing up often and stirring the contents. You offered us free Hepatitis shots. We declined and then distanced ourselves from what seemed to be a doomed project.

I am in full support of your current project, as long as your planning includes toilets of proven efficacy, and a way to get the funding for such qualified operating units, and maintenance.

I have for these same 20-plus years used the campground on Elk Island and their toilet vaults there. Also, Canadian vaults on Pacific Islands. These seem simpler and possibly less expensive than our wonderful system on Wild Horse Island.

- Over the years I have been witness to the degradation Cedar Island has suffered. Most notably the proliferation of surface defecation with associated toilet paper with NO effort to bury such. So the idea of toilets with minimal trails to them makes sense. But, frankly, I think there are many who would find it distasteful to poop in one of these composting varieties (depending how odor-free they are!) and might just decide to do their business in the open air.
- Toilets with connecting trails are a must
- I am in favor of having some sort of pit toilets installed on Cedar and Bird islands, with minimal trails and signage so folks know that the toilets exist. I don't know a good solution to the trash that we saw last summer on Cedar, but I suspect if the toilets are put in and there isn't a trash collection that the idiots will just fill the toilets with trash. Pretty much a losing battle there.
- Bathrooms' will still be trashed as newcomers have absolutely no regard for any restrictions or law. It's absolutely sick!
- Lastly, if you have hiked the island lately, I'm sure you have encountered numerous sites of poorly buried toilet paper and feces. I don't know what kind of budget FW&P even has for active management of the island, but some signage and pit outhouses are a growing necessity.
- Composting toilets in visible locations would be great additions.
- Is there a plan to put composting toilets on the other islands? Please, if possible, put those in the plan **now**, knowing they may not be possible to operationalize until 2023. Human waste is an issue on all islands. We've got forward motion with this planning phase. Please consider adding composting toilets on all islands.
- Toilets are good, as are some trails.

- The composting toilet idea for Cedar and Bird islands is a great idea. I would suggest that long-term funding be planned for maintenance of the composting toilets before they go into the plan. If FWP is unable to ensure long-term maintenance (cleaning/emptying) of these toilets, it would be better to not install them in the first place. If you have a toilet the public gets used to using and suddenly it's gone...then human waste will become a bigger issue than it already is today.
- I would echo Anne Clark's comments on the Zoom meeting about the design/maintenance of the composting toilet. There are some great designs out there and some poor ones. There is a composting toilet at Indian Creek Campground/airstrip on the Middle Fork of the Salmon river. I'd encourage having Amy contact the staff at the Salmon-Challis NF about their long-term maintenance and impressions of their system.
- Due to the inaccessibility of the of the northern campsites on Bird Island to the composting toilets, please require campers using those sites to have self-contained provisions for packing out solid human waste.
- If vandalism is a problem I question the investment and longevity of composting toilets. Another potential solution is to require campers and other visitors to carry and use WAG bags to store their human waste and then dispose of it when they get back to the mainland.
- Putting in composting toilets is a great idea as well. One comment or question I have relates to the number and location of the toilets and their capacity. It appears from the maps that on Cedar Island it is still a fairly good hike to the toilets. With seven campsites along with some day use is one centrally located toilet enough? Also would it be better to locate the toilet closer to the shoreline somewhere that would provide usage for folks coming off the lake? On Bird Island it did not appear there was a connecting trail from campsites on the north end of the island to the toilets on the south end.
- Support: Construction and "maintenance" of 2 composting toilets on Bird, 1 near the south end and 1 near mid-island
- I would enthusiastically support the placement of composting toilets and I think providing trash receptacles would help.
- Bird and Cedar Islands are long overdue for a composting toilet.
- My only comment with the plan relates to the campsites on Bird Island. Developing two sites away from the pit toilet seems to want to encourage people to camp there, but people will probably be unlikely to properly dispose of their waste if there is no access to a toilet. I understand that people will still camp at those sites even if they aren't designated sites, but by making them available for reservation, I feel like more people would use them and then create a larger human waste issue. Could another pit toilet be placed by these two or a trail connected to the other toilet?
- In fifty years of visiting [Cedar] island we have never seen anyone from FWP on the island. Camping should be restricted to areas that have adequate management.
- If a person is on the islands, they need to have a method to transport the excrement that come as a result of their being there, whether it's theirs, their family's, their pets, these methods include holding tanks on boats or bags or other containers. Fines if you don't.

#### FWP Response:

As detailed in the EA, FWP proposes to install a composting toilet on Cedar and Bird Island. These latrines would be the Phoenix Composting Toilets, like the model currently in use on the Wild Horse Island Unit of Flathead Lake State Park. This system is designed to accommodate the amount of use expected on these islands and has proven very suitable for these types of applications. The locations proposed for these latrines were specifically selected based on the building design and requirements for sun exposure. Since this is a two-story composting unit, with full access needed in the lower composting unit level, there needs to be adequate slope to allow for easy access for visitor use while still providing for basement maintenance access. Additionally, as the unit is solar powered, location selection is very dependent on adequate south exposure. The proposed location of each toilet is a function of requirements for toilet operation as well as proximity to camping and main landing sites on each island. Some proposed campsites on Bird are not connected to the proposed toilet on this island. This is due to the topography of the island and current hazard tree issues in the center of the island. Campsites not connected to the composting toilet by trails will require pack out of human waste. Signs will be posted at central locations on the islands, as well as at these sites, to notify users of regulations regarding human waste.

No composting toilets are proposed for Douglas and Goose Islands. These islands will be restricted to day use only due to their size, and therefore we do not see the need for composting toilets. In addition, limited funding does not allow for additional toilets. As with other remote locations, there will be no trash receptacles on any of these islands. Educational signage will direct people to pack out all waste.

#### III. Trash

- I have been paddling my sea-kayak to these islands for 16 years. During this time I have seen much more human traffic and the terrible impact on the islands of human waste, garbage, and fire. After one trip to Cedar Island I was so appalled by what I saw on the island I returned a few days later armed with gloves, garbage sacks and a pinched nose so that I could remove as much waste as my kayak could hold.
- The public has fouled these islands with human poop, toilet paper, litter, bottles, cans and other assorted garbage.
- As a born and raised Montanan. I post every summer about tourists leaving garbage all over the shores of the lake. As well as pick up and retrieve garbage from the waters.
- Picking up garbage on the lake and on islands has been constant especially last year.
- Pack-it-in-pack-it-out needs to be enforced vigorously.

#### FWP Response:

Trash is a constant problem on the islands, and much of the trash we have observed is toilet paper and human feces. We have proposed composting toilets on the larger of the two islands where we would continue to allow camping. These toilets should help reduce toilet paper and feces on Bird and Cedar Islands. On all islands, signs will inform users of the “pack in-pack out” regulation for trash and human waste. This practice is in accordance with all remote camping and recreational sites. No garbage receptacles will be placed on any of the islands.

## IV. Camping

### Reservation system

- First come, first serve. No reservations.
- Will the campsites be included in the same reservation system as other Montana state parks?
- I like First Come First Served style best, since perhaps we Flathead residents would actually have a chance.
- I appreciate the comment on the Zoom meeting that campsite reservations may be considered in later phases. Possibly consider having a couple campsites first-come, first-served, and a couple sites reservation-only...or open to first-come if not occupied by ~5pm or ~6pm.
- A visitor carrying capacity should be determined for each of these islands and then an FWP operating plan for limited entry of camping through the peak tourist season. A drawing for limited camping permits should be considered as well.
- I now see that the proposal is to NOT use the reservation system for the camping sites on the islands, but rather to use a 'first come' basis. PLEASE RECONSIDER. The reservation system offers a more level playing field. The bigger bullies don't have an advantage over the less aggressive/heavy hitters. Come on, you know what I'm talking about. I've been there, many in Montana have been there. The reservation system offers a much more equal opportunity to reserve a site. I've been at campsites and campgrounds where there were very heated arguments about who had first claim. Please use the reservation system.

### FWP Response:

FWP is currently not proposing a campsite reservation system. The campsite reservation system that is utilized by FWP for mainland state parks has a higher staffing requirement than is intended for the WHPA islands. A reservations system may be considered in the future.

### Stay Limit

- I'd like to limit the number of days from 14 to 4, with the possible exception of Wild Horse because it's larger. Honestly, unless someone is "moving in" there is no need for anyone to spend more than 14 days on any of the smaller islands, especially if Bird doesn't open up until mid-July.
- The 14-day camping limit is not acceptable. **Change it.** Please. Visualize what it will take to manage a 14-day camp on one of the islands. This is not what we want. Given the scarcity of campsites, why should one party be able to monopolize a campsite for 14 days? I kayak regularly, and a 3-day camp would be quite a lot to supply. If you allow longer than 3-days camping, you're going to see motorboat traffic to supply the longer camping, and that's not what we want.
- I realize that the 14-day stay limit is fairly common across FWP sites (and many sites in the adjacent Flathead NF) but 14 days is far too long for this limited number of sites/camping opportunities. People don't need to take up long-term residence at these islands; they should be limited to 2 or 3 nights MAXIMUM to allow others the opportunity to explore these islands AND to give the resource a bit of a break. Long-term visitors are more likely to trample off-trail, carve trees out of boredom, or even make campfires.

- Cedar and Bird islands could be open to overnight camping with the installation of composting toilets. I think it is critical that camping periods be limited to just a few days, maybe a maximum of 3 nights. This limit should be extended to cover live-aboard boats moored just off the islands or beached on the islands. This means users can't extend their stay by claiming they aren't camping "on" the islands because they are sleeping on their boat. Having a length of stay limit will give more people opportunities to enjoy the islands while mitigating some of the impacts.
- The recreation plan allows too many campers and the 2-week stay per campsite is too long not allowing others to enjoy the island because of a very short season of usage during the summer. Three days max, with 6 to 9 campsites so people do not feel like they are in an RV park right next store to other campers. In addition, having a lot less impact on the island. Or just make it day use only with a toilet, some designated picnic areas around the island, NO overnight camping.

#### **FWP Response:**

The proposed stay limit is in accordance with current Montana State Park stay limits; however, based on public comment, we will revise the stay limit to be a maximum of 3 days in a 14-day period. Moored boats are beyond the scope of this EA and beyond the jurisdiction of FWP authority to manage the WHPA islands.

#### **Quantity/Placement of Sites**

- Yes to hardened campsites on Cedar and Bird Islands.
- Your new commitment to include opportunities like a few rustic cabins is appropriate and offers the public a selection of opportunities.
- if FWP allows campsites on such a small space it should be only on the North end and limited to 7 nights with no more than 4 people per site. I noted the FWP 2009 report only mentioned 3 potential sites for Bird Island and 5 for Cedar. What justifies the increase now?
- Designated camp spots, all with appropriate signage, are a must
- I feel that the proposal for seven campsites on Cedar Island will lead to conflict between campers and day use visitors. We have visited the island for 50 years and there are many times that all the places suitable for beaching a power boat are in use. The proposed campsites would use the same beaching places but exclude short day use visits. Cedar Island is one of the few places available for day use. Over the years we have often found the sites of illegal fires, and that is without overnight camping. Camping should be restricted to areas that have adequate management.

#### **FWP Response:**

Based on public comment, we have revised the number of campsites on Cedar and Bird Islands to 6 campsites on Cedar, removing one of the sites on the northeast side of the island, maintaining this landing site for day use only. We also removed the southernmost campsite proposed on Bird Island, restricting designated camping to 3 sites only. This campsite is located at the main landing site and closest to the proposed pit toilet location. By removing this campsite, we feel day use and overnight use will have less conflict on Bird Island. We are not proposing cabin construction on either island.

### Opposed to camping proposal

- Please strongly consider eliminating overnight camping on Bird Island. First, there is simply too little space on the designated access points to accommodate both daytime visitors and up to 6 users for each of the proposed 4 campsites for an astonishing 14-day period. A potential of 12 people at each end of the island for days on end is going to crowd out most day users of the island. The available beaches and shoreline simply won't handle that many people.
- No camping on smaller islands.
- NO overnight camping on shore, some sleep on board their boats.
- Please do not let camping of any sort be allowed.
- we have concerns about opening up any of these islands to overnight camping. Overnight camping is not compatible with the conservation of wildlife habitats and will only increase the impacts of recreation on the WHPAs.
- Oppose: 4 campsites, 14-night occupancy and 6 occupants per site. This part of the FWP proposal has a high probability of conflict between day users and nightly campers and will certainly have a negative consequence on the island environment.
- With regards to Bird Island, I think allowing camping is a big mistake. It's going to turn Bird island into an RV park for boaters. If a decision to allow camping is made then I strongly believe 4 campsites is too many. There's only ever been 2 good places to beach (there used to be an unwritten rule of 1 boat per beach) and I feel like 2 campsites, 6 users each would be a much better fit for the island. Having 4 campsites is going to put at least 2 boats on each beach at all times and make day use uncomfortable or impossible. I think a much better fit for the island would be to restrict any camping on the island but establish better signage, a limited trail system and an outhouse as the plan outlines.  
I have far less time spent at Cedar island but I'm opposed to the 7 campsites there. It's basically the same size as Bird and this feels like way too many campsites.
- My wife and I have lived on or near the Lake for 25 years and have enjoyed the Bird Islands every summer although usually anchored offshore for lunch and swimming. I do have concerns about promoting overnight camping. I think it will increase the risk of fires, increase the problem of human fecal waste and increase the amount of trash left on the islands.
- I think Goose and Douglas islands should be limited to day use only when it is not goose nesting season. No overnight camping!
- It would be a shame to have people camping on the Bird Islands. The islands are a special place where you always see Eagles and other birds. The water is always so clear.  
We both object to any development on any of the Bird islands.

### FWP Response:

The current Wildlife Management Area Public Use Rules allows for camping on Cedar and Bird Islands. This is a use that is currently permitted on these islands, but there has been no recreation management. Our proposal is not to open camping to these islands, it is to manage the current camping on the islands that is already permitted by WMA regulations. Currently, the WMA rules allows for camping on Goose Island, as well, but we are proposing to prohibit camping on Goose and restrict recreation to day use only. To mitigate impacts of all recreational use on nesting bird habitat, recreational use (both day use and overnight camping) will be prohibited during goose nesting season (March 1 – July 15) on Bird,

Goose and Douglas Islands. This restriction will not be applied to Cedar Island since the island is bigger, goose nesting is more dispersed, and there is less overlap with nesting and proposed campsites. By designating campsites and erecting signage concerning camping and day use regulations, we hope to reduce the current impact to the islands and wildlife habitat.

Based on public comments, we propose to restrict each campsite to no more than 4 people per site, instead of 6. This should reduce the overall footprint of camping at each site. Most proposed sites only accommodate 2 tent pads, comfortably allowing for 4 visitors per site. Some of the campsites proposed are most suitable to kayak access and do not provide landing sites for larger boats. Based on comments received we also are adjusting to limit the number of camping days to 3 days in a 14-day period instead of a 14-day limit within a 30-day period. This should reduce the ability of any one party to monopolize a campsite for a long period of time and would be in keeping with the intent of the proposal to offer limited camping opportunities.

### General Camping Comments

- I think the proposal to have officially designated camping spots and composting toilets on Cedar and Bird Islands will significantly reduce the amount of trash, waste and other environmental damage that has been occurring through increased unregulated visitation to these islands.
- I and fellow kayakers, have fondly referred to the bay on the Southeast end of the island as “Kayak bay.” I have arrived there to spend the night to find huge pontoon boat rammed up on the tiny beach and large wall tent erected above. Some part of the island, and that bay would be a natural, should be reserved for non-motorized beaching only.
- I see no choice but for selected areas to be utilized for overnight camping only. I say that with regret for the past I got to experience, but that is no longer the reality for this delicate island. If there is to be overnight camping allowed, it now needs to be limited, perhaps by reservation, and in designated prepared sites only. Probably no fires...
- An Island trail system for self-powered vessels would offer a great way for the public to assist in in stopping miss use. Given the displacement of travelers due to reservation system in Glacier having a first come first served system like the backcountry permits would allow locals an even opportunity to use the campsites.
- How will any of these camping regulations be enforced?
- What is the proposed plan for group access? I can make assumptions, but it needs to be clear that the islands are not intended for group use.
- I noticed that, at least on Cedar Island, all **the spots** you have chosen are **very nice sites, but have no beaches adjacent**. That will be a problem for boaters, other than small kayakers. On the island’s north end, near the old boat house, are two (I have actually done 3) **safe moorage sites**. Could they be identified and reserved for overnight campers? Near the SW beach, perhaps **Permanent Mooring Buoys** could be installed.
- Providing designated campsites and limiting access for camping will hopefully go a long way to addressing some of the use issues.
- I am in favor of limited camping on those islands. I think since they are primitive sites they should be free. Our \$5 state park donation should help.



**FWP Response:**

Currently, we are not proposing to restrict use to access by non-motorized vessels only; however, some of the designated campsites on Cedar and Bird Islands are not easily accessible by motorized boats and have historically been used primarily by kayakers. We are not proposing to establish mooring sites anywhere, and so these sites will most likely be continued to be used primarily by kayakers who can access the island via the rocky shoreline.

Creating an island trail system for self-powered vessels is outside the scope of the EA. Under the current proposal, campsites would be available on a first come-first serve basis. Currently, we are not proposing to make this part of the state parks reservation system, as we do not have the current staffing required. There will be a fee associated with camping and designated fee collection sites. These fees will help offset maintenance costs of campsites and composting latrines.

We have modified the proposed action to accommodate up to 4 visitors per campsite instead of 6. To maintain the remote feel of the islands and reduce overall impact to the islands from large recreational groups, no groups sites are proposed.

Camping regulations will be enforced by FWP Park Rangers and Game Wardens and the additional presence of FWP staff for maintaining the composting toilets and camp sites and collecting fees will help to reduce abuse.

- V.     **Camping- specific comments pertaining to smaller islands in comparison to Wild Horse Island**
- Wildhorse Island whose size is multiple times greater than Bird Island imposes a “daytime use” only. Why would another island less than 30 acres in size with only two useable access points for all visitors allow overnight camping for up to 12 people at each end? Daytime use should be the standard here.
  - We feel that regulated day use of these islands, as it is regulated on Wild Horse Island, may be the best solution to these continuing problems.

**FWP Response:**

Wild Horse Island State Park is managed as a state park, has different management goals, and its management is outside the scope of the proposed actions of this EA. The current WMA Public Use rules already allow for camping on Bird, Cedar, and Goose Islands and camping already occurs on all these islands. Prohibiting camping on the larger islands would be difficult to enforce. Regulated camping will reduce the impact of camping to the island habitat and will improve our ability to enforce camping regulations as it would only occur at designated sites, so we have chosen to manage the current recreation in a way to best mitigate impacts to the island and conflicts with users.

VI.     **Marine Trail users**

- Will the islands that are part of the Flathead Lake marine trail have any ‘saved’ campsites for folks on the marine trail? If this proposed development is included in the existing reservation system, there might not be a need to ‘save’ sites for the marine trail. How does this plan coordinate with the marine trail?

- An Island trail system for self-powered vessels would offer a great way for the public to assist in in stopping miss use. Given the displacement of travelers due to reservation system in Glacier having a first come first served system like the backcountry permits would allow locals an even opportunity to use the campsites.
- Is there a preference for non-motorized travelers VS motorized travelers?
- I am in favor of FWP adopting the proposed management changes to the islands on Flathead Lake, but with an accommodation that prioritizes human-powered access for some of the sites. This recognizes that a kayak or canoe trip to one of the islands is a much more committed endeavor than one by motorized watercraft. It can take several hours and quite a bit of effort to reach a site under human power.

#### **FWP Response:**

Currently, we are not proposing to restrict use to access by non-motorized vessels only; however, some of the designated campsites on Cedar and Bird Islands are not easily accessible by motorized boats and historical use has been primarily kayakers. We are not proposing to establish mooring sites anywhere. More rugged landing sites will likely continue to be used primarily by kayakers who can access the island via the rocky shoreline.

Creating an island trail system for self-powered vessels is outside the scope of the EA; however, kayakers are welcome at any of the sites on a first come- first serve basis.

#### **VII. Day use**

- If any FWP personnel monitored the island, they would see lately, on a nice day, two or three boats with an average of 4-6 people in them try to use the shore on an hourly basis. Adding campsites with people expecting and believing exclusive use of that area is a receipt for serious social conflict.
- I feel that the proposal for seven campsites on Cedar Island will lead to conflict between campers and day use visitors. We have visited the island for 50 years and there are many times that all the places suitable for beaching a power boat are in use. The proposed campsites would use the same beaching places but exclude short day use visits. Cedar Island is one of the few places available for day use.
- Flathead Paddlers- we use the islands as destinations and turn around points throughout the boating season.
- We feel that regulated day use of these islands, as it is regulated on Wild Horse Island, may be the best solution to these continuing problems.
- The plan goes to length to detail regulations/expectations of overnight campers, but should consider the impacts and education of day users; it is possible and likely that some of the worst offenders are day users and not prepared overnight campers.
- Support: Day use, first come, beginning March 1 thru late September.
- Perhaps a few picnic tables but with clear signage about NO fires and picking up after yourself.
- I think Goose and Douglas islands should be limited to day use only when it is not goose nesting season. They need to be closed completely, no stopping even for a short rest or lunch, while the geese are nesting.

#### FWP Response:

Day use will be permitted on all the islands; however, all recreational use will be prohibited on Goose, Douglas, and Bird Islands during the waterfowl nesting season (March 1 – July 15). The WHPA islands were purchased to protect wildlife habitat, primarily Canada geese nesting habitat, and FWP is committed to managing these islands primarily for nesting waterfowl. Due to the dispersed nature of nesting on Cedar Island and the location of proposed campsites, we are not proposing a seasonal closure on that island.

Although the WHPA islands are managed primarily as wildlife habitat, allowing recreational use of these lands can be a compatible goal when managed accordingly. Public comment supports maintaining the remote and natural feel of the island as a unique experience. Therefore, we are not proposing to construct picnic tables for day use. Informational signs will help visitors understand the history, management goals, and natural history of the islands, as well as public use regulations.

#### VIII. Signage

- The Islands need big informational signs with a cellphone Q-R symbol to scan for further information about regulations/fines and recreational etiquette. Such scans are commonplace and will allow the elimination of brochures or paper and allow the sign to display the most important rules. Only “Day Use” signs are effective as shown on Wild Horse.
- I'd like to request no/very limited informational kiosks.
- I like the informational kiosks about the islands.
- I ask that coordination is made with CSKT and our culture committees to include information on signage to include information about the local tribes.
  - Install appropriate signage and informational kiosks on all four islands to inform recreationists of the islands' history and regulations.
- In establishing rules for use please consider how information is given out. The bird sanctuary at the North end of Flathead lake has only minimal signage that is often overlooked. In this day of educating leave no footprint more seems to be better than less.
- Thank you for including informational kiosks.
- I appreciate the need for informational kiosks and signage. Consider placing the largest/most informative signage at the composting toilet area. It would be centrally-located and also least obtrusive on the shore of the islands. Place smaller signage near likely beach/landing sites and campsites directing users up to the large signage at the toilet.
- Education - education is far more impactful than threat of fines/etc. Consider replicating the educational signage information on the FWP website where people pay online for campsites.
- Support: Installation of informational kiosks, posting signs with regulations and general beach etiquette.

#### FWP Response:

FWP is planning on installing at least one informational kiosk on both Cedar and Bird Islands. These kiosks will be centrally located at the primary landing sites. Additional signage will be located at other landing sites around all the WHPA islands. The current layout of signs and kiosks has not yet been determined but will include information on the history of the islands, the wildlife, and cultural values of the islands, as well as public use regulations. The inclusion of QR-codes is likely.

## IX. Ban until July 15

### Support ban until July 15

- I also think that keeping all four of the islands closed to visitation during bird breeding season is in line with the original mission.
- All islands should be closed to human recreation when wildlife could be disturbed and displaced during mating, nesting and fledging of young birds. Wildlife should take precedence over recreation.
- My twin brother and I studied the reproductive performance and feeding habits of Ospreys at Flathead Lake throughout the 1960's and 1970's. In 2018 (44 years later), we returned to do a follow-up Osprey study at the lake.

At one time, the Bird Islands were a sanctuary for nesting Ospreys, Blue Herons, and Bald Eagles. Right now there are no recently active Ospreys nests on the islands. However, there is one active Bald Eagle nest located on one of small islands which is alongside Big Bird Island.

My brother has passed away; however, his wife Jane MacCarter and I would like to propose keeping Big Bird Island as a true bird sanctuary without human disturbance. Erecting new Osprey platforms on those islands will hopefully entice Ospreys to again utilize the Bird Islands for nesting. It might also be feasible to establish nesting boxes there for Canada Geese, as well. Jane and I believe that, in order for the Bird Islands to be successful as a bird refuge, hiking and camping need to be prohibited there. Human intervention with nesting raptors has always been a problem at Flathead Lake, especially at the Bird Islands. In the past, Ospreys would arrive for nesting in early Spring and, during this time, human activity was usually minimal. However, with Flathead being primarily a summer resort, human activity definitely increased there in Summer.

- I think Goose and Douglas islands should be limited to day use only when it is not goose nesting season. They need to be closed completely, no stopping even for a short rest or lunch, while the geese are nesting.

### FWP Response:

To mitigate potential disturbance to nesting geese, recreational use on Bird, Douglas, and Goose Islands will be prohibited within the nesting season (March 1-July 15). There has been concern that human presence will impact nesting raptors, primarily osprey on Bird Island. The seasonal closure on Bird, Douglas, and Goose Islands will cover the critical nesting season for most raptors, including osprey, which tend to fledge in mid-July to early August. Research has shown that ospreys are very tolerant of human disturbance and often nest on platforms in busy residential areas or adjacent to highways and boat launches.

### Oppose ban until July 15

- The proposal to only allow use of Bird Island after July 15 each year is based on a false supposition. That the population of the Canada Goose was in dire straits in the 50's (when the island was purchased) and 60s is without doubt. That was one of the primary reasons for wanting to protect nesting sites like on Bird and other islands in the flyway. However, the population has more than rebounded and now boasts in the millions and growing. According to

a Duck's Unlimited article and data from the US FWP's, (Graber and Colucey) there are "...more Canada Geese in North America today than any time in history." They go on to state soaring populations since the 60s have "increased exponentially in recent decades" so that now they reach almost nuisance levels as many Flathead shoreline people will attest. The Pacific and Central flyway which covers Montana reportedly have over 1 million geese alone. According to FWP's 2009 report ( pg 26), during [goose] breeding season there was no evidence that human disturbance was at unacceptable levels. Cutting off use of Bird Island before July 15 takes away much of the recreational season. This is especially true given that with our climate crisis at full bore, recreating on the Lake in late July with smoke-filled air is simply not that much fun. Visits in June and early July to Bird Island has been customary. Without any real evidence of human disturbance of Goose nesting sites and large increases in population numbers why the change?

- As for the Island Closures during waterfowl nesting, I am against that all together. I think you and I both know that there are now way too many Geese Nesting on Flathead Lake, for the food available. Anyone with lawns near the beach can attest to that. Also, that time frame is too long. All the goslings we see are quite large by June 10th.  
Those islands are not a good place to raise young anyway, since, as I have witnessed, most of the goslings are eaten by eagles and fish. It is a rather long swim from Goose Is to Goose Bay, the only place they find food. Cedar Island is not as bad, since there is food on the island.
- Oppose: Use of the Island only after July 15. While my family has for many summer seasons enjoyed (up until the fire) the shoreline of Bird, we have never noticed an abundance of bird habitat, (especially geese) which would suggest a negative environmental impact.
- I am also opposed to limiting access to the island before July 15. I see the number of people on the lake in May-July is far less than July-September. The times before July are some of the only times when locals can use the island without the major crowds. Better signage, a trail system and an outhouse would certainly mitigate impact to the nesting birds.

#### **FWP Response:**

The WHPA islands were purchased with federal Pittman Roberts funds to protect nesting waterfowl habitat. A requirement of that purchase is that the islands be managed primarily as waterfowl habitat and a benefit to other wildlife. July surveys of the islands have documented extensive nesting on Goose, Douglas, and Bird Islands, with more dispersed nesting on Cedar Island. Unfortunately, most of the nesting is near landing sites where people have historically camped and recreated, making human disturbance a significant threat to nest success. To maintain the integrity of nesting habitat and support the primary management goal of the island, we propose seasonal closures.

#### **X. Access/Public launches**

- Access to the islands includes boats or other water conveyances of some type. This requires access to the lake and places a larger burden upon existing state and local access sites. A plan to help mitigate or address those issues in the present and foreseeable future would be helpful. This may include joint labor on or funding of sites or contributions of monies needed to provide lake access for watercraft.

## FWP Response:

This proposal is not expected to significantly increase use of the islands but is intended to manage existing use. We do agree with the need to address public access to Flathead Lake in general and have recently added two additional public access points near Dayton and Somers.

### XI. Enforcement

- Vandalism to the historic structure on Cedar Island is also increasing but I do not see any reasonable way to prevent it without a pretty continual presence of someone on the island to monitor the problem.
- STIFF FINES FOR RULE BREAKERS!!
- The only problem I see with the above suggestions is ENFORCEMENT!
- Unless, there is a designated, uniformed and “badged” ranger to regularly monitor the island I don’t see how a “NO FIRE” rule can be enforced. Most fires are at night when most personnel, I assume, are not on the clock and so how could enforcement happen? I have cruised the island in my boat during “No fire” periods in the summer asking people to douse their fires and been greeted by “our taxes pay for my right to recreate as I want” or, commonly, “F\*\*\* you.”
- Is it possible that a night shift could be assigned to a ranger or a “quick-response” be set up to field calls from concerned citizens who witness fire activity? There is a public boat beach launch on the shore immediately north west of the island- could a boat be stored there for a ranger to access and confront campers breaking the rules upon receiving a phone alert from citizens?
- In fifty years of visiting the island we have never seen anyone from FWP on the island.
- I also feel strongly that sufficient funding will be needed to maintain the infrastructure and enforce the proposed use guidelines. Without funding and sufficient enforcement presences, I think that unfettered use will continue. If we invest in the upgrades, then we also need to invest in maintenance and enforcement. Flathead Lake State Park is already struggling to keep up with the increase in visitors, so adding more responsibilities without commensurate increases in capacity will not lead to long-term success of this project.
- It is apparent that the vandalism and fire damage have degraded these islands.
- Will there be a routine FWP presence on these islands to ensure that only designated campsites are used or even if the reservation system is being used?
- How will following current fire restrictions be monitored?
- Enforcement. I realize that the promulgation is not detailed in the plan, but ensure that there is adequate enforcement allotted in the budget. Having rules is great, but only if they're enforced. It only takes a few bad seeds to ruin things for everyone else (see the fire on Bird Island in 2020). You could have thousands of ethical users willingly following the rules and less than a dozen who need some LEO presence or threat of LEO presence who will otherwise willingly ignore the rules.
- As a lifelong educator, first and foremost there should be an increased presence of rangers visiting each of these islands daily during peak visitor use season to educate visitors, monitor conditions, and issue citations if necessary. If vandalism is a problem I question the investment and longevity of composting toilets.

- It's been our past experience—at the Bird Islands and also at Wildhorse Island where we have family property—that regulations protecting nesting birds there are extremely difficult to enforce. Typically, visitors to the Bird Islands usually pay little-to-no attention to rules posted. I'm concerned who is going to take the time (and funding) to monitor posted regulations. With effective enforcement, regulations can help protect and conserve our wildlife. Bottom line, however, is there absolutely must be 'eyes-on and hands-on' monitoring and enforcement, especially when the area is as large as Flathead Lake, with its many islands to protect.
- Support: A plan to enforce any action approved and implemented.
- I think FWP needs to study the manpower requirements of managing the human impact (park manager, island ranger, lake county sheriff, CSKT, etc.,)
- Finally, new rules can't be effective without enforcement. I am glad to get a visit from FWP on the water because I know they are there for emergencies and educating boaters on the rules that make us safe and protect our wonderful lake. Unfortunately, those visits happen only once every several years even though I live on the lake and spend much of my summer sailing. We need to fund more enforcement so people learn they need to respect the boating laws and rules because there is a real chance they will see an officer several times a summer.
- Without funding and sufficient enforcement presences, I think that unfettered use will continue. If we invest in the upgrades, then we also need to invest in maintenance and enforcement. Flathead Lake State Park is already struggling to keep up with the increase in visitors, so adding more responsibilities without commensurate increases in capacity will not lead to long-term success of this project.

#### **FWP Response:**

FWP enforcement staff routinely patrol Flathead Lake during the summer months; however, we recognize the challenge our enforcement staff faces with increased recreation on Flathead Lake. We believe that the proposed signage concerning use regulations on the WHPA islands, along with increased staffing from the Parks and Outdoor Recreation Division will help inform users about the regulations and avoid unintended violations. With the new recreation plan, enforcement staff will actively patrol the WHPA islands. In addition, monitoring and maintenance of campsites and latrines, as well as collection of fees will increase overall FWP presence on the islands.

#### **XII. Commercial Use**

- There should be a complete ban on any commercial use of the Islands period. Some of the jewels of Flathead Lake should simply not be up for sale no matter what the dollar payments. The Islands are some of them.

#### **FWP Response:**

Commercial use of all FWP administered lands is governed under the FWP Commercial Use Administrative Rule Making (ARM 12.14.101-170) rules and requires a permit. This policy recognizes the economic values that FWP lands provide, while charging FWP with the responsibility of balancing these values with resource protection and public recreation. Commercial use of these islands is not prohibited by ARM, and the department carefully evaluates all applications for commercial use permits.

### **XIII. Positive and Negative Impacts to Vegetation and Habitat from the Proposed Action**

- I do not feel that allowing camping is appropriate on the island. I fear that the vegetation on the island will be destroyed.
- I think the numerous hazard trees will need to be dealt with.

#### **FWP Response:**

The proposed campsites are in areas with historic camping use and should not impact additional vegetation. Hardening these sites and directing tent placement will keep users from damaging additional vegetation. Providing a designated trail system to latrine sites and access points, will also reduce social trails and cumulative vegetation damage.

### **XIV. Planning/Communication/Outreach**

- Your planning committee included “stakeholders,” and I, for one, have no idea who that might be. I have no problem with your plan, and consider it a “go,” but I’m a little unnerved that you have not identified those people or agencies.
- Please schedule another virtual meeting so to allow recent “stakeholders “ to participate in the proposals. I would like to be a part. The prior meeting didn’t have many participants or any questions
- I was bummed that I missed the formal zoom presentation, so thanks for linking the recording onto your site.
- Education - education is far more impactful than threat of fines/etc. Consider replicating the educational signage information on the FWP website where people pay online for campsites.

#### **FWP Response:**

The 2009 planning committee for the Flathead Lake Island Management Plan included: Lester Bigcrane (Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes), Bobbie Gilmore (Glacier Sea Kayaking/Flathead Paddlers), Laney Hanzel (Flathead Lakers), Hank Harrington (Wild Horse Island Property Owners Association), Mike Hutchin (Lake County Commissioners), Sandy Maki (Polson Chamber of Commerce/Glacier Country Tourism Commission), Brent Mitchell (Flathead Chapter of Audubon Society/Flathead Wildlife), Bill Myers (Pointer Scenic Cruises), Greg Poncin (Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation). Representatives from FWP included: Tom Litchfield (District Wildlife Biologist), Sue Dalbey and Kirsten Shelton (Parks Division Statewide Planners), and Jerry Sawyer (Park Manager, Flathead Lake State Park).

FWP acknowledges that education is key to mitigating negative impacts to the islands, as well as to inform people of use regulations. There will be educational signs on each of the islands concerning wildlife and cultural values, as well as public use regulations. We are not proposing a reservation system for people to pay for campsites online. Instead, we are proposing camping on a first come-first served basis, with self-pay fee stations at the campsites.



XV. Comments received outside the scope of this Environmental Assessment.

- I'd be more than happy to have a weekend set aside during the summer and help with cleanup if you could get me out there and provide a way to haul trash away. Maybe organize a couple of cleanup days and just ask for volunteers?
- What other types of public education and marketing is planned? I would love to see some type of "friendly" ambassador program to compliment the proposed action. The boat rental companies, other recreational groups (like Anne's paddle group), the FLBS, and the Flathead Lakers would be important assets in potentially taking care of the problem BEFORE it hits the island.
- Would any of the islands be appropriate for 2-3 sailboat tie offs?
- What are the thoughts or plans for the additional islands surrounding the main Bird? Some are not much more than rock archipelagos, but a few are large enough to beach on and camp on. Repeating my thoughts, we have forward motion with this plan. This is an opportunity. I would like to see them included. One of those much smaller islands could be a fun kayak/non-motorized stop. We've beached on two of them. The 'beach' is so rocky it's hard to go ashore, but they're fun.
- Most overnight visitors on Flathead Lake **now and in the future, stay in their boats**. As far as impact on the land is concerned, this is a much **better way to go**. Most boaters on Flathead, don't trust their anchors for an overnight stay on Flathead. So, I think a good investment in our islands, would be **to install Permanent Mooring Buoys here and there on the lake**. Boating families could then enjoy the islands during the day, while coming back to their boats to Cook, Sleep and use the bathroom. Areas for this would be: Cedar Is, South Wildhorse bays, Big Arm, The Bird Is group, The south bay on Bull Is, and the Flathead River south of Polson.
- answering the yet unanswered question "what progress has been made in determining who (specifically) was responsible for starting the fire which resulted in 80% loss of perhaps the most iconic island on the southern end of Flathead Lake"? Is there a person, or persons of-interest?
- This rule making to manage recreational use of these islands is an opportunity to finally make some rules for limiting length of stay for live-aboard vessels across the entire state managed portion of the lake. FWP should collaborate with CSKT to institute consistent rules for the entire lake. To mitigate impacts to popular bays and coves along with protecting the values lakeshore landowners have invested in, the length of time a vessel is allowed to moor in one location must be limited. There are exceptions, of course, for boats at a private dock or on a mooring buoy permitted through the Lakeshore Protection Regulations of Lake or Flathead Counties or the CSKT Shoreline Protection Regulations. It is critical that we develop rules on the use of live-aboard vessels before the commercial operators on Colorado River reservoirs move out of the extreme drought effected recreation areas where they are now.
- As island use creates a bigger demand for EMT and fire protection, a commitment by MDFWP to help local entities like Polson Rural Fire provide those services would be helpful. This is an acknowledgement of the actual cost of recreational opportunities. This is important for the long-term opportunities for recreation on the lake and improved use of the state's island assets.

## FWP Recommended Alternative and Final Decision

Based on an extensive review of public comments and best management practices, FWP recommends Alternative B; however, we have revised some actions from what was originally proposed in response to public comments. The following is a summary of the actions that will be completed as an outcome of this environmental assessment:

- Establish hardened, designated campsites for overnight stays on Bird and Cedar Islands. These campsites would be located in traditional use areas to limit proliferation of additional sites and overall impacts to the island's wildlife habitat. Total number of campsites will include 3 sites on Bird Island and 6 sites on Cedar Island. Individual campsites will be restricted to 4 people per site, and visits will be limited to 3 overnights within a 14-day period.
- 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. Campsites that are not connected to the trail system will require packing out of all human waste, including human feces.
- Install appropriate signage and informational kiosks on all four islands to inform recreationists of the islands' history, management goals, seasonal closures and public use regulations.
- Implement a fee for camping utilizing the Montana State Parks fee schedule. Self-serve fee stations will be located at each campsite.
- Campsites on Bird and Cedar Islands would be offered on a first come, first served basis.
- The Parks and Outdoor Recreation Division will maintain the campsites and composting toilets.
- Camping will not be permitted on Douglas and Goose Islands to conserve wildlife habitat, and to conform with existing WHPA management.
- All recreational use (day use and camping) would be prohibited during the waterfowl nesting season (March 1-July 15) on Bird, Douglas, and Goose Islands.
- Prohibit campfires but allow gas or propane fueled camp stoves in accordance with prevailing fire restrictions on Bird and Cedar Islands. Prohibit campfires and all camp stoves on Douglas and Goose Islands.

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

The final EA may be viewed at or obtained from Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Region One, 490 N. Meridian Road, Kalispell, MT 59901.

Please direct requests and questions to:

Dillon Tabish

Region 1 Information and Education Program Manager

490 N. Meridian Rd, Kalispell, MT 59901

(406) 751-4564 or [Dillon.Tabish@mt.gov](mailto:Dillon.Tabish@mt.gov)

  
Jim Williams  
Region 1 Supervisor

1/15/2022  
Date