

Draft Environmental Assessment



Lake Mary Ronan State Park Non-Motorized Trail Construction

July 2022



**MONTANA FISH,
WILDLIFE & PARKS**

**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 add a .3 mile section of trail on the northwestern portion of Lake Mary Ronan State Park to complete a loop.
2. **Agency authority for the proposed action:** The 1977 Montana Legislature enacted statute 87-1-209, provides authority for MFWP to acquire, develop, operate, and maintain lands or waters for state parks and outdoor recreation.
3. **Name of project:** Lake Mary Ronan State Park Non-Motorized Trail Construction.
4. **Name, address and phone number of project sponsor (if other than the agency):** Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks is the project sponsor.
5. **If applicable:**
Estimated Acquisition Date: NA
Current Status of Project Design (% complete): 50%
6. **Location affected by proposed action (county, range and township):**
Section 13, Township 25 N, Range 22W

Figure 1: General Project Location

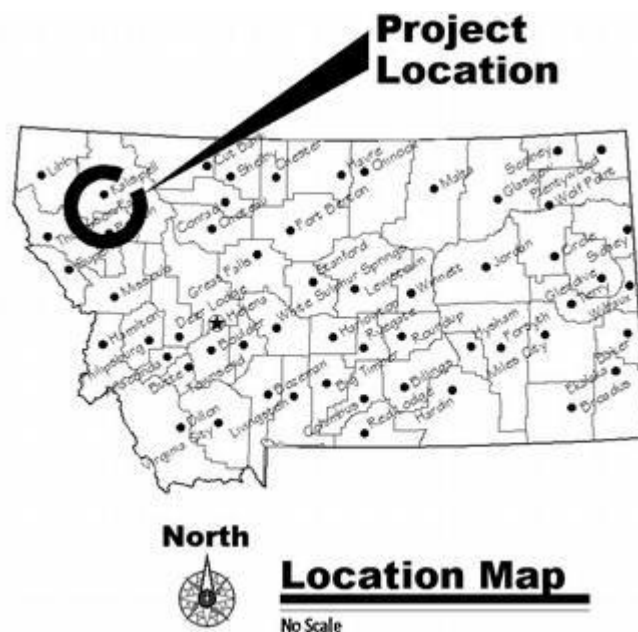


Figure 2: Vicinity map of proposed project



7. **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>25</u>
Residential	<u>0</u>		
Industrial	<u>0</u>	(e) Productive:
			Irrigated cropland
<u>0</u>			
(b) Open Space/Woodlands/Recreation	<u>0</u>		Dry cropland
<u>20</u>			
			Forestry
<u>0</u>			Rangeland
(c) Wetlands/Riparian Areas	<u>.1</u>		
<u>0</u>			Other
			<u>0</u>

8. **Permits, Funding & Overlapping Jurisdiction.**

(a) **Permits:** NA

Agency Name: NA Permits

(b) **Funding:**

Agency Name: Trail Stewardship/ Youth in MT State Parks Funding Amount \$3,500.00

(c) **Other Overlapping or Additional Jurisdictional Responsibilities:**

Agency Name: NA Type of Responsibility

9. **Narrative summary of the proposed action or project including the purpose and benefits of the proposed action:**

This proposal is for the construction of a new .3-mile, non-motorized walking trail at Lake Mary Ronan State Park. This trail would connect to existing park trails, thus creating a loop around the entire park. FWP staff intend for this project to enhance the park experience by providing an opportunity for exercise and wildlife viewing.

The project area is relatively flat, typified by second-growth Douglas fir stands and associated understory plant communities. Tread work would entail clearing downfall and debris along the proposed route and removal of vegetation to mineral soil within the specified trail width of 18" to 24". Sections of the trail would utilize existing skid trails associated with a past thinning project. Water bars would be added where necessary to prevent erosion. The project would be accomplished by an 8- to 10-person Montana Conservation Corps crew (MCC) in approximately one week. The anticipated cost is \$3,500.

PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

1. Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives:

Alternative A: No Action – The no-action alternative will maintain the status quo, and hiking opportunities will remain on the current trail system. Although the area would remain in its current natural state, this section of the park does not welcome less adventurous visitors who don't venture off trail.

Alternative B: Proposed Action - Build .3 miles of new trail in the northwest region of Lake Mary Ronan State Park, thus creating a non-motorized trail that would allow visitors the opportunity to hike the circumference of the park. This would give hikers more opportunity to exercise, observe flora and fauna or even experience solitude within the park. A designated trail would welcome park users to an underutilized area of the park.

PART VI. 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		yes	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				
e. Exposure of people or property to earthquakes, landslides, ground failure, or other natural hazard?		x				

1b. There would be removal vegetation for the trail surface, 18-24 inches wide for the .3-mile section.

2. <u>AIR</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. **Emission of air pollutants or deterioration of ambient air quality? (Also see 13 (c).)		x				
b. Creation of objectionable odors?		x				

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. ***For P-R/D-J projects, will the project result in any discharge, which will conflict with federal or state air quality regs? (Also see 2a.)		X				
f. Other:		X				

FWP does not anticipate any impact to air quality as a result of this proposal.

3. <u>WATER</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
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				
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				
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 groundwater quantity?		X				
l. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project affect a designated floodplain? (Also see 3c.)						

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.)						
n. Other:		X				

The project footprint would be in a region of the park that has very little elevation change, and adjacent to dense vegetation. There is no anticipated impact to surface water drainage.

4. <u>VEGETATION</u>	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
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		x	4b.
c. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				4c.
d. Reduction in acreage or productivity of any agricultural land?		X				
e. Establishment or spread of noxious weeds?		x				
f. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project affect wetlands, or prime and unique farmland?						
g. Other:		X				

4b. Park vegetation will be removed to create the trail surface tread. The trail will be 18-24 inches wide for the .3-mile section.

4c. Review of the Montana Natural Heritage program revealed no "Species of Concern."

** 5. <u>FISH/WILDLIFE</u>	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Deterioration of critical fish or wildlife habitat?		X				
b. Changes in the diversity or abundance of game animals or bird species?		x				
c. Changes in the diversity or abundance of nongame species?		x				
d. Introduction of new species into an area?		X				
e. Creation of a barrier to the migration or movement of animals?		X				
		X				5f.

f. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?						
g. Increase in conditions that stress wildlife populations or limit abundance (including harassment, legal or illegal harvest or other human activity)?			X			5g
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.)						
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.)						
j. Other:		X				

- 5f. On review of the Montana Natural Heritage website, there are seven species listed as Species of Concern in the area: hoary bat, little brown myotis, fisher, great blue heron, common loon, great grey owl, and westslope cutthroat trout. Two species of millipede are on the Potential Species of Concern, and bald eagles are also listed as a Special Status Species. Although some of the species have been observed outside of the project area in similar habitats, the proposed project will have little to no impact on habitat associated with these species.
- 5g. The development of this trail would increase the presence of people and pets in this region of the state park, which could temporarily displace wildlife. FWP anticipates the bulk of use would occur during the less critical summer months, and current pet rules, such as the requirement that pets be on leash, would be enforced.

B. HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

6. <u>NOISE/ELECTRICAL EFFECTS</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Increases in existing noise levels?		X				
b. Exposure of people to severe 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				
e. Other:		X				

FWP staff do not anticipate any negative impacts to the human environment as result of this proposal

7. <u>LAND USE</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
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			7d.
e. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Use (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

7d. The proposed action may increase pedestrian traffic on an existing park trail in view of the neighboring residences. This addition may also be seen as a benefit to park neighbors who use the current trail system.

8. <u>RISK/HEALTH HAZARDS</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
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 evacuation plan, or create a need for a new plan?		X				
c. Creation of any human health hazard or potential hazard?		x				
d. ***For P-R/D-J, will any chemical toxicants be used? (Also see 8a)						
e. Other:		X				

FWP staff does not anticipate any risks or health hazards as a result of this proposal.

9. <u>COMMUNITY IMPACT</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
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				
f. Other:		X				

FWP staff does not anticipate any negative community impacts as a result of this proposal.

10. <u>PUBLIC SERVICES/TAXES/UTILITIES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
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				
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						
f. **Define projected maintenance costs.						

g. Other:		X				
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FWP staff does not anticipate any impacts to public services as a result of this proposal.

Maintenance costs to this new section of trail would be minimal. Park staff hike all trails monthly, identify concerns, and take appropriate action. Examples of this are removing downed trees or digging a water drainage. There are no foreseen expenses beyond staff time for maintenance of this trail section and some corrective actions may be completed by volunteer staff as well. Expense for staff time estimated \$90 annually (\$30/hr X.25* X12 months). *.25 equals 15 minutes of time to walk the section of trail.

** 11. <u>AESTHETICS/RECREATION</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
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?			X		yes	11c.
d. ***For P-R/D-J, will any designated or proposed wild or scenic rivers, trails or wilderness areas be impacted? (Also see 11a, 11c.)						
e. Other:		X				

11c. The construction of this trail would complement the park's existing non-motorized trail system by extending connecting existing trails to create a circuit trail.

12. <u>CULTURAL/HISTORICAL RESOURCES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
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.)						
e. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Cultural/Historical Resources (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

- 12a. The proposed action would not destroy or alter any site, structure or object of historic importance. Please see the attached review form from the Montana State Historic Preservation Office.

SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

13. <u>SUMMARY EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE</u> Will the proposed action, considered as a whole:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Un- known *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
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. ***For P-R/D-J, is the project expected to have organized opposition or generate substantial public controversy? (Also see 13e.)						
g. ****For P-R/D-J, list any federal or state permits required.						

Overall, FWP staff feel that construction of .3 miles of non-motorized trail in the northwest corner of Lake Mary Ronan State Park will improve the park's trail system by closing the loop, and thus creating a hiking circuit within the park.

PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

Overall, this EA found that the proposed action the construction of a connecting trail at Lake Mary Ronan would provide a wide range of recreational and conservation benefits for residents of Montana and visitors to the state with few negative impacts.

While there could be some negative impacts to neighboring landowners seeing an increase of park visitors using an existing trail, which has historically been dead end. The connection route would allow for park users, including neighbors, to hike a loop in the park. The proposed connection route would decrease the number of users seen, by neighbors, who need to walk back on the same route when they reach the dead end.

This EA found no significant impacts to the human or physical environment from the Proposed Action.

PART IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

- 1. Describe the level of public involvement for this project if any, and, given the complexity and the seriousness of the environmental issues associated with the proposed action, is the level of public involvement appropriate under the circumstances?**

The public will be notified by way of a statewide press releases in the *Helena Independent Record* and *The Daily Interlake*, *Lake County Leader*, the *Flathead Beacon*, and by public notice on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks web page: <https://fwp.mt.gov/news/public-notices>. Individual notices will be sent to those who have requested one.

- 2. Duration of comment period, if any.**

A 10-day comment period is proposed. This level of public involvement is appropriate for this scale of project.

The public comment period will run from July 26, 2022, until 5:00 pm on August 4, 2022.

Comments should be sent to:

Brian Schwartz, Lake Mary Ronan Trail Connection; Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks; 490 N. Meridian Road; Kalispell, MT 59901 or sent by e-mail to: Brian Schwartz at BSchwartz2@mt.gov

PART V. EA PREPARATION

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

Based on the criteria provided by MEPA Rule III to assess if an EIS is required, this environmental review revealed no significant negative impacts would be created from the proposed action. Therefore, an EIS is not necessary, and the EA is the appropriate level of analysis.

- 2. Name, title, address and phone number of the person(s) responsible for preparing the EA:**

Brian Schwartz, Park Manager
490 North Meridian Road
Kalispell, MT 59901
406-755-2706 ext. 3
Bschwartz2@mt.gov

- 3. List of agencies and organizations consulted during preparation of the EA:**

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Parks Division
Wildlife Division
Fisheries Division
Heritage Program Management

Appendices

Appendix A: Project Qualification Checklist
Appendix B: Montana Heritage Program Compliance
Appendix C: Montana Natural Heritage Species of Concern Report
Appendix D: Montana Tourism Report

APPENDIX A
23-1-110 MCA
PROJECT QUALIFICATION CHECKLIST

Date: 07/22/2022

Person Reviewing: Brian Schwartz

Project Location: Lake Mary Ronan State Park

Description of Proposed Work: Construction of a .3-mile section of trail to connect existing designated routes.

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 ☐ all that apply and comment as necessary.)

- ☒ A. New roadway or trail built over undisturbed land?
Comments: *A portion of the new trail route will create a loop trail inside the boundary of the park.*
- ☐ 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:
- ☐ 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 are 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



*Historic Preservation
Museum
Outreach & Interpretation
Publications
Research Center*

August 5, 2021

Rachel Reckin, Ph.D.
Heritage Program Manager
Montana State Parks
P.O. Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620-0701

Re: New Trail Lake Mary Ronan State Park, Lake County, MT

Dear Dr. Reckin:

Thank you for your letter (received August 4, 2021) regarding the new trail at Lake Mark Ronan State Park. We concur on your determination of No Historic Properties Affected.

If you have any questions or concerns, do not hesitate to contact me at (406) 444-7719 or Laura.Evilsizer@MT.gov. Thank you for consulting with us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Laura Evilsizer".

Laura Evilsizer, M.A.
Review and Compliance Officer
Montana State Historic Preservation Office

FILE: FWP/Parks – 2021 -- 2021080407

225 North Roberts Street
P.O. Box 201201
Helena, MT 59620-1201
(406) 444-2694
(406) 444-2696 FAX
montanahistoricalsociety.org

APPENDIX C

Montana Natural Heritage - SOC Report

State Park ▼ All Plants ▼ All Status ▼

Glossary ▼

Plant Species of Concern

[\(switch to Animals report\)](#)

Species List Last Updated 02/19/2021

0 Species

Filtered by the following criteria:

FWP State Park = Lake Mary Ronan (based on mapped [Species Occurrences](#))

Montana Natural Heritage - SOC Report

State Park ▼ All Animals ▼ All Status ▼

Glossary ▼

Animal Species of Concern

[\(switch to Plants report\)](#)

Species List Last Updated 02/19/2021

7 Species of Concern

2 Potential Species of Concern - Species Occurrences are not maintained for Animal PSOC, therefore we cannot filter these species geographically

1 Special Status Species

Filtered by the following criteria:

FWP State Park = Lake Mary Ronan (based on mapped [Species Occurrences](#))

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
Office of Tourism | Brand MT
MT Department of Commerce
JStoddard@mt.gov

Project Name: Lake Mary Ronan State Park, Trail Connection Construction

Project Description:

The proposal to contract the Montana Conservation Corps (MCC) to construct .3-mile connection trail. The trail will connect a dead-end trail social trail which was a former skid road. The trail will head east towards the park entrance, cross the entrance road, and connect to existing trails. This trail would be the last section creating a loop around the entire park and connecting to trails which were constructed in 2009. This will enhance the park experience for both day use and overnight camp visitors. It also could be further expanded in the future to include self-guided interpretation amenities.

1. 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. The opportunity to recreate in Montana is marketed to destination visitors from around the world. This includes emphasizing recreational opportunities (floating, fishing, camping, hiking, and sightseeing) in accessible locations. Lake Mary Ronan State Park is an essential asset for Montana's outdoor recreation industry.

In 2021, Montana's 12.5 million non-resident visitors spent over \$5 billion in the state according to a 2022 report from the University of Montana's Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research. 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.

Additionally, recreation access and activities are in high demand for visitors and Montana State Parks are seeing record numbers in visitation. The intent to visit has dramatically increased 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 the quality and quantity of tourism and recreational opportunities. 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 7/26/22