



Environmental Assessment Decision Notice

Lone Pine State Park Grassland Prescribed Burn

March 29, 2022

Description of Proposed Project

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks proposes to conduct a prescribed grassland burn at Lone Pine State Park, working in cooperation with Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC). The prescribed burn will cover between 10-13 acres of the native grassland in the archery range area. The purpose of the project is to improve the plant vitality of fire dependent species located in the archery range portion of the park.

This project was awarded funding as part of a Montana Forest Action Plan grant. The prescribed burn is the first phase of the project. The second phase will be a forest thinning project which will be a separate Environmental Assessment and comment period later this year.

Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) Process and Public Involvement

FWP released a draft environmental assessment (EA) for 14-day public review period on March 11, 2022, with comment closing March 27, 2022. Press releases were posted at the Lone Pine State Park Visitor Center and at all trailheads. The EA was advertised through media releases and legal notices in the Daily Inter Lake, Helena Independent Record, Flathead Beacon and on the FWP website and social media (Facebook & Twitter). An informational ZOOM public meeting was held on March 22nd lead by FWP and DNRC staff. This meeting can be viewed at:

<https://fwp.mt.gov/public-notices/news/2022/mar/lp-forestry-burn-ea> .

The EA evaluated the potential impacts of the following alternatives:

1. Alternative A: No Action

The grassland will continue to gradually become more susceptible to invasive species. Native bunchgrasses will continue to decay and rot from the inside resulting in thick thatch. This condition, if exposed to wildfire in the summer, could cause the death of the bunchgrass as the heat from the fire in the thatch will kill the root system.



2. Alternative B: Proposed Action

FWP and DNRC will cooperatively implement a prescribed burn on 10-13 acres of native grassland at Lone Pine State Park in early April of 2022 or 2023. The prescribed fire will help sustain this fire-dependent community by removing the thatch build-up and fire-intolerant species encroaching into the native grassland, leaving a healthier plant community. This will improve and maintain a vibrant prairie ecosystem and associated flora and fauna. The prescribed burn would follow the "Burn Plan" written by Montana DNRC, specifically for this project.

3. Other Alternatives:

FWP could take a reactive approach with both the grassland. This would follow current practice of invasive species weed spraying/pulling. The weed spraying/pulling has been an annual task. The prescribed burn would be a better long-term solution to allow native species to thrive in the park.

Summary of Public Comment:

FWP received 4 emails on the proposed project, and FWP staff reviewed the emails to identify comments. A comment was defined as a specific issue or impact. In some cases, multiple people listed the same or similar comments; these comments are listed, 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.

I. **Support for the prescribed burn project**

- *...just read about the proposed burn, sounds like a good idea to me, go for it.*
- *I am fully in support of doing this burn and know that you will do everything possible to do what's best for the environment while maintaining safety for the residents around Lone Pine Park.*

II. **Supporting the project and future burns**

- *I am in favor of the proposed burn. I would also be in favor of follow – up burns.*
- *I wish to lend my support for implementing the burn. I would hope that you could do periodic reburns of the same area and add additional areas of the park would be beneficial in helping to maintain more opening and native grasses rather than allowing increasingly dense Douglas-fir forest; and if done right, would help reduce the potential for more intense wildfire with adverse resource impacts in the future.*

FWP Response: Conducting multiple burns, over multiple years, will be considered based on project outcomes and public feedback.

III. **Questions concerning fire history of the area and follow up monitoring.**

- *What is the fire history for the area is a question that should be asked and answer would be very helpful.*

FWP Response: Large fires in the area are recorded by charcoal sediment and pollen deposits in Foys Lake. The last local large fires appear to be around 1880 but fire

suppression of the area coincided with settlement of area by Euro-Americans from 1890 to 1970. Charcoal from the extralocal fires of AD 1910, burning over 4,111,249 ha in Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming, however, is present in Foy Lake.

(<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0169555X05003041?via%3Dihub>) *How about post fire monitoring? Very important in determining your success!*

FWP Response: This project will be monitored closely in the months and years following this project by both FWP and DNRC staff. If the results are favorable and meet the project goals, then the decision will be made if we are to conduct future burns.

FWP Recommended Alternative and Final Decision

I have evaluated the EA and applicable laws, regulations, and policies and have determined that the proposed action will not have any significant negative impacts on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement (EIS) will not be prepared.

Based on the analysis in the EA, I find Alternative B (the Proposed Action) to be the preferred alternative and support the prescribed burn of native grassland area as designated by the DNRC burn plan.

The EA and public participation process indicate that the proposed action to conduct a prescribed burn on a segment of the Lone Pine State Park grasslands would improve the vitality of native plants. Potential negative impacts can be mitigated, and the result is likely to provide long term benefit for the park's grassland plant communities.

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 proposal. 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:

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3/30/22
Date



