



Region 2  
3201 Spurgin Road  
Missoula, MT 59804  
November 14, 2022

Dear Interested Citizens:

Thank you for your thoughtful reviews and comments on a proposal by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) to undertake bridge safety and access improvements at Milltown State Park as a component to provide public access to the former Bonner Learning Park and FWP lands along the north bank of the Clark Fork River near the confluence with the Blackfoot River.

Enclosed is a decision document in which I explain my rationale for recommending that FWP proceed with these safety and access improvements. Upon completion of the public involvement process and by inclusion of the amendment and information noted in this Decision Notice, FWP accepts the draft environmental assessment (EA) as final. The decision document also includes public comment on the proposed acquisition and development.

Please feel free to contact me at 406-542-5500 with any questions you may have. Thank you for your interest and participation.

Sincerely,

Randy Arnold  
Regional Supervisor

RA:lf

*[This page left intentionally blank]*

**Decision Notice for the Draft Environmental Assessment:  
Bridge Safety Project and Access Improvements– Milltown State Park  
November 2022**

**PROPOSAL**

**Type of Proposed State Action**

Montana FWP proposes to complete safety and public access improvements to parking and railroad bridge infrastructure near Milltown State Park. This action would be a component of acquiring non-motorized public access to the former Bonner Learning Park along the north banks of the Clark Fork River.

**NARRATIVE SUMMARY OF THE PROPOSED ACTION**

In 2020, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks accepted donation of the 33-acre Bonner Learning Park (BLP) along the north bank of the Clark Fork River to be incorporated into Milltown State Park. The acquisition was the first step toward providing legal public access to this northern portion of the Milltown State Park along the Clark Fork River floodplain upstream of its confluence with the Blackfoot River. The property and a \$125,000 contribution for anticipated access improvements were donated by the Bonner Development Group (BDG - the group disbanded in 2020). The BLP acquisition features several park amenities that would provide opportunity for public recreational use. Current site developments include a stone and timber-framed picnic shelter, a vault toilet, kiosk, sundial, built-in spotting scope for nature viewing and short hillside trail network. Access to the site passes through Burlington Northern Santa Fe/Montana Rail Link (BNSF/MRL) property. Public parking and walk-in access under the rail line are contingent on developing an access agreement between BNSF/MRL and FWP. Construction of an overhead catchment structure, fencing and potential modification or expansion of the existing parking area on BNSF/MRL property are part of access agreement conversations. This environmental assessment covers the implementation of these required improvements. The project will occur in two parts, with some overlap in scheduling. Initially, Montana Rail Link (MRL) will construct improvements to its railroad bridge No. 113 to reduce the possibility of debris falling off the bridge on to the trail below. MRL will perform the work funded by FWP and the aforementioned contribution from BDG. The second part of the project will be to construct improvements to an existing trailhead parking lot surface, installation of concrete wheel stops to designate parking spaces, and installation of chain link fencing around the parking lot and along the bridge wing-walls. Activity will include site preparation, clearing and grubbing, excavation, placing crushed subbase material, placing recycled asphalt pavement with tack coat as surfacing, installing fencing and gates, and incidentals. The large ponderosa pine tree in the middle of the parking lot will remain. The work will be performed by a private contractor for FWP.

**DESCRIPTION OF REASONABLE ALTERNATIVES**

Alternative A: No Action With no action, the parcel acquired in 2020 will remain publicly accessible by float-in river access only. Access to the north bank of the Clark Fork River in Milltown State Park will remain limited.

Alternative B: Proposed Action Under this action, FWP will partially fund safety improvements to MRL's No. 113 railroad bridge. Additionally, FWP will hire a contractor to improve the safety and organization of the parking lot providing public walk-in access to the BLP and the north bank of the Clark Fork River of Milltown State Park.

## PUBLIC REVIEW PROCESS

### Public Notification

A draft environmental assessment (DEA) for the proposed project was made available for public review and comment for a 14-day period from October 27 through November 14, 2022. The DEA was also posted on FWP's website from October 25 through November 14, 2022, and comments could be submitted to Region 2 FWP via mail or email. Legal notices were published in the *Independent Record* (Helena, October 26) and *Missoulian* October 26 newspapers.

### Public Comment

FWP received 1 emailed, comment related to the proposed recreation permit. The comment was from Hellgate Hunters and Anglers and supported the proposed action.

## SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENTS

### RESPONSE TO PUBLIC COMMENTS

The following comments and FWP responses include specific questions, suggestions or comments received during the public comment period. We acknowledge and thank those who provided positive comments, but responses are not given below. *Public comments* below were grouped and paraphrased for FWP Response below. [Numbers in brackets refer to the Commenter # in the Appendix.]

#### 1. *Support for the project [1]*

FWP Response. Thank you for your response. We look forward to providing safe, legal public access to these public lands.

## DECISION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based upon the Draft Environmental Assessment and the applicable laws, regulations, and policies, I have determined that the proposed action will not have negative effects on the human and physical environments associated with this project. Therefore, I conclude that the EA is the appropriate level of analysis and the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is unnecessary.

This proposal for FWP to complete these required safety and access improvements. In consideration of these facts and with the addition of this Decision Notice and its Amendment and information herein, I adopt the Draft EA as final.

I have selected the proposed action (Alternative B) identified in the Draft EA. Therefore, I am pleased to approve that FWP move forward with the necessary work to allow the public to safely and legally access these lands.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Randy Arnold  
Region 2 Supervisor  
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

\_\_\_\_\_  
*November 14, 2022*  
Date

## APPENDIX A

Comments on the proposed Bridge Safety and Access Improvements at Milltown State Park. All comments received via E = email.

Com- men- ter #	Via	Para- graph	Comment
1	E	1	On behalf of Hellgate Hunters & Anglers (HHA), I offer the following support on FWP's proposal to make access improvements to Milltown State Park. HHA is a local, all volunteer rod-and-gun club based in Missoula. We represent over 400 local hunters and anglers who routinely wade, float, hunt and fish throughout Montana. Thus, we have a vested interest in protecting and accessing the publicly-owned natural resources and wildlife. We support this step toward providing legal public access to this northern portion of the Milltown State Park along the Clark Fork River floodplain upstream of its confluence with the Blackfoot River. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.