

# **Draft Environmental Assessment**

## **Bridge Safety Project and Access Improvements– Milltown State Park**



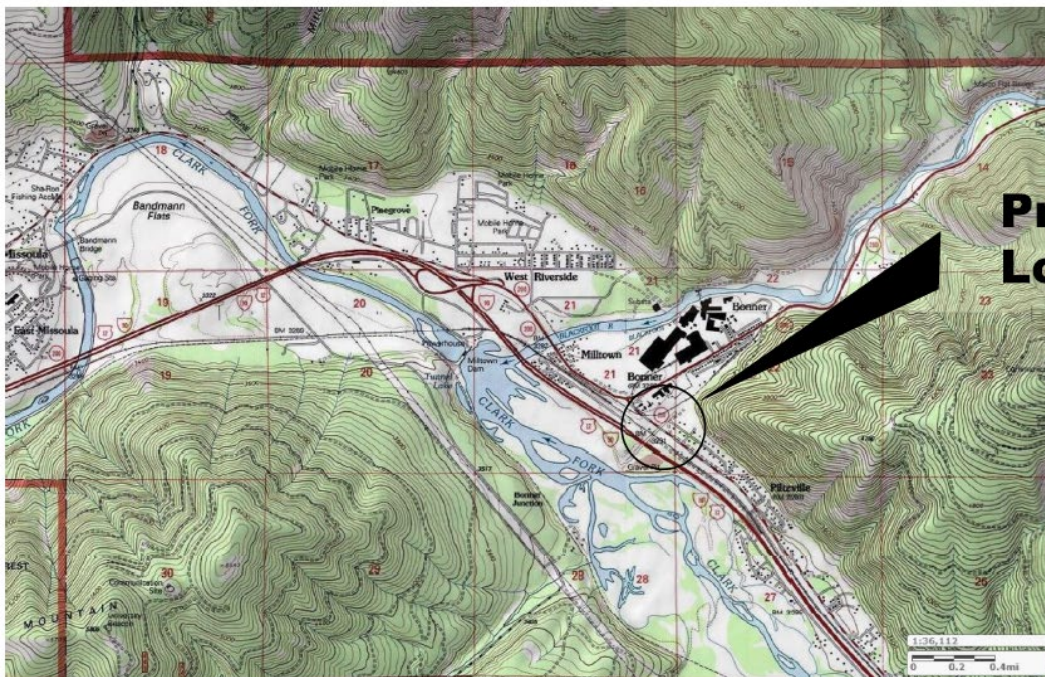
**October 21, 2022**



# Draft Environmental Assessment CHECKLIST

## PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

1. **Type of proposed state action:** Parking Lot Improvements and Safety Enhancements to Railroad Bridge
2. **Agency authority for the proposed action:** Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks
3. **Anticipated Schedule:**  
 Estimated Construction Commencement Date: Late November 2022  
 Estimated Completion Date: December 20, 2022  
 Current Status of Project Design (% complete): 100%
5. **Location affected by proposed action (county, range and township – included map):**



**Project  
Location**

Latitude: 46° 52'01.47" N Longitude 113° 52'23.61" W  
 SW ¼ S22, T13N, R18W, PMM, Missoula County Montana

6. **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>0</u>
Residential	<u>0</u>		
Industrial	<u>0.4</u>	(e) Productive: Irrigated cropland	<u>0</u>

(b) Open Space/ Woodlands/Recreation	<u>0</u>	Dry cropland	<u>0</u>
(c) Wetlands/Riparian Areas	<u>0</u>	Forestry	<u>0</u>
		Rangeland	<u>0</u>
		Other	<u>0</u>

## 8. Permits, Funding & Overlapping Jurisdiction.

(a) **Permits:** permits will be filed at least 2 weeks prior to project start.

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Permits</u>
Montana Department of Transportation	Retroactive Approach Permit
Montana Rail Link	Temporary Occupancy Permit

(b) **Funding:**

<u>Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (state match)</u>	<u>\$125,000</u>
<u>Montana FWP BDG Escrow Account</u>	<u>\$125,000</u>

## 9. 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. (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 Fee/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 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.

**10. Description and analysis 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.

**11. Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency:**

In 2016, FWP acquired an administrative access license to the Learning Park portion of Milltown State Park via an approach on Hwy 210 and a one-lane gravel road to the park. Public access to this part of MSP is currently only by the river. Once the safety and parking improvements are complete, FWP will complete an agreement with MRL to allow public parking and access to the park, per a previous agreement. The parking lot will remain closed until that time.

## **PART II. 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**

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Provided
1. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture				X		
2. Air quality or objectionable odors			X			
3. Water quality, quantity and distribution (surface or groundwater)				X		
4. Existing water right or reservation				X		
5. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality			X			
6. Unique, endangered, or fragile vegetative species				X		
7. Terrestrial or aquatic life and/or habitats				X		
8. Unique, endangered, or fragile wildlife or fisheries species				X		
9. Introduction of new species into an area				X		
10. Changes to abundance or movement of species	X					

2. Air quality could be impacted temporarily during construction activities related to the BNSF/MRL – FWP access agreement. These impacts would be minor and short-lived.

5. Minor clearing and grubbing of shrubs and weeds in the parking area.

## B. HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Provided
1. Noise and/or electrical effects				X		
2. Land use				X		
3. Risk and/or health hazards		X				
4. Community impact		X				
5. Public services/taxes/utilities				X		
6. Potential revenue and/or project maintenance costs			X			
7. Aesthetics and recreation		X				
8. Cultural and historic resources			X			
9. Evaluation of significance						
10. Generate public controversy	X					

3. Project could have significant positive benefit for pedestrian safety.
4. Safe public access to Milltown State Park will be a benefit to the immediate and greater community.
6. The public access to the picnic shelter could generate rental income. The site maintenance would be incorporated into the overall Region 2 maintenance program for Milltown State Park.
7. Safe public access will offer significant recreational benefit to visitors.
8. The access road to the BLP property is the original railbed of the Big Blackfoot Railroad, a spur off the Milwaukee Road. Future interpretive efforts could highlight this history.
10. Based on past public interest, the project is likely to garner widespread support.

### **PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT**

### **PART IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

#### **1. Public involvement:**

The public will be notified in the following manners to comment on this current EA, the proposed action, and alternatives:

- Two public notices in each of these papers: *Missoulian*; *Helena Independent Record*
- Public notice on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks web page: <http://fwp.mt.gov>.

Copies of this environmental assessment will be distributed to the neighboring landowners and interested parties to ensure their knowledge of the proposed project.

This level of public notice and participation is appropriate for a project of this scope having limited impacts, many of which can be mitigated.

#### **2. Duration of comment period:**

The public comment period will extend for (14) fourteen days following the publication of the second legal notice in area newspapers. Written comments will be accepted until 5:00 p.m., Nov. 10, 2022 and can be mailed to the address below:

FWP  
Attn: Milltown EA  
3201 Spurgin Rd.  
Missoula, MT 59804

Or by email: [MilltownEA@mt.gov](mailto:MilltownEA@mt.gov)

### **PART V. EA PREPARATION**

#### **1. Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required? (YES/NO)? If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action.**

The proposed project will have minimal impacts to the human environment, as both phases include improvements to existing structures. By paving the parking lot, FWP is hoping to reduce impacts to the landscape by directing public use and limiting erosion. The railroad will remain substantially unchanged, and is already inaccessible to the public.

No economic impacts are anticipated because (1) the railroad improvements are entirely on private property without public use or access and (2) no attractive amenities are being added to the pre-existing parking lot. Additionally, the parking lot is situated in sparsely populated residential community, with no businesses nearby. Therefore, no economic impacts are expected.

Because the cumulative impacts on the human environment are either negligible or beneficial, FWP concludes that a limited EA is the appropriate document.

- 2. Person(s) responsible for preparing the EA: Michael Kustudia, Loren Flynn, Randi Rognlie, Kevin Rechkoff**
- 3. List of agencies or offices consulted during preparation of the EA: Montana FWP.**

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## Appendix 2: Milltown State Park Map

Milltown State Park

