



Region 4  
4600 Giant Springs Road  
Great Falls, Mt. 59405

Dear Interested Citizens:

November 30, 2022

Thank you for your review and comments on a project proposal to stabilize a section of streambank located on the Smith River at Camp Baker, Smith River State Park.

Enclosed is a decision document that explains my rationale for recommending that FWP proceed with this stabilization project. Upon completion of the public involvement process and by inclusion of the 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 project.

Please feel free to contact me at 406-454-5846 with any questions you may have. Thank you for your interest and participation.

Sincerely,

Gary Bertellotti

Region 4 Supervisor

## **Decision Notice for Draft Environmental Assessment Smith River Camp Baker Bank Stabilization Project**

**Type of proposed action: (Alternative A):** Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks proposes to stabilize a 250-foot section of the streambank of the Smith River at Camp Baker, Smith River State Park and on adjacent private property. The relevant portion of the bank has seen substantial erosion downstream of the "lower boat ramp," amounting to the loss of 5 to 6 feet of streambank since 2011 and the degradation of a precontact cultural site confirmed eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

**Description of Proposed Action:** The proposed action would use a bioengineered method of treatment generally described as "live encapsulated lifts". In this method, a streambank toe is constructed with an engineered gradation of gravel and boulders. Above the toe and starting at the edge of the new bank, coir log lifts would be placed and anchored. Locally harvested willows would be planted between the horizontal lifts. Above the final lift, select backfill, topsoil, and seeding would be added to the newly shaped bank in the effort to promote vegetative growth and stabilization. The neighboring private landowner would install a well and stock tank off-site to eliminate the livestock water gap previously used to water cattle, and exclusion fencing would be installed to further protect and promote vegetation establishment in the project area. In addition, to protect the repaired area, the lower boat ramp would be removed to positively affect hydrological conditions of the Smith River where Sheep Creek enters it across from the project site and eliminate trampling caused by floaters staging on the streambank.

Since, a section of the project area would be located on private property, an agreement has been reached with the landowner regarding access for and long-term protection of the project.

## **Description of Alternatives:**

### **Alternative B: No action**

The no action alternative would mitigate the social and recreational opportunity impacts identified in the analysis of the proposed action but would result in the continued erosion of the riverbank. Further erosion would cause the continued loss of additional bank, including adjacent landowner property, sedimentation that diminishes water quality, and would continue to adversely affect the archaeological resources of precontact campsite 24ME0075, which is confirmed eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

### **Alternative C: Hardened approach to streambank stabilization with lower boat ramp remaining in place.**

This alternative relies on large rocks and/or concrete (aka riprap) to 'harden' or 'armor' 178 feet of bank to a height of approximately 7 or 8 feet. Alternative C would allow the lower boat ramp to remain in place, negating the social and recreational opportunity impacts identified in the analysis of the proposed action. In prior environmental analysis, FWP determined Alternative C would result in unnatural habitat conditions, contrary to best practices employed by the agency to improve habitat, would prevent lateral migration of the Smith River at this location, and could result in further erosion and decreased water quality downstream. Limited damage to the archaeological resources may occur due to the ground disturbance associated with Alternative C, but it would be expected upon completion to protect the main body of the precontact cultural site.

### **Alternative D: Soft approach to streambank stabilization with lower boat ramp removal and expansion of upper boat ramp to account for removal of lower boat ramp.**

The impacts of this alternative would be similar to the proposed action but include expansion of the upper boat ramp to negate the social and recreational opportunity impacts identified in analysis of the proposed action. A third-party evaluation conducted in 2013 identified that expansion of the upper boat ramp by 800 square feet would allow short-term migration of an eroding bank. The evaluation also identified the expansion may create congestion and reduce boat launching capacity with the single enlarged upper boat ramp. Additional funding would have to be identified and legislative authority secured for the design, permitting, cultural assessment, and construction of Alternative D.

**Public Notification:**

A draft Environmental Assessment proposing this action was posted on Oct. 12, 2022 in the Public Notice section of the Montana FWP website. A press release was sent out to the media on Oct. 13th, 2022. Public comment was accepted for a period of 30 days through Nov. 12, 2022.

**Summary of Public Comments**

FWP received a total of 20 comments:

All 20 comments were received via e mail. 19 comments were received by individuals. One comment was received from Trout Unlimited.

- 11 comments oppose the removal of the lower (downstream) boat launch but do not address the alternatives.
- 3 comments support the proposed action (Alternative A)
- 2 comments support the proposed action (Alternative A) but oppose the removal of the lower boat ramp.
- 2 comments were opposed to the timing of the construction project
- 1 comment in support of the proposed action (Alternative A) with additional design suggestions
- 1 comment proposed an AIS station at Camp Baker

**Response to Public Comments**

There were 2 comments from individuals and one comment from Trout Unlimited that specifically supported the proposed action including the removal of the lower boat ramp

Response: Thank you for the support of this project.

There were 11 comments that opposed the removal of the lower boat ramp. These comments did not specifically address any alternatives provided in the Environmental Assessment.

There were 2 comments that supported the proposed action but opposed the removal of the lower boat ramp.

Response: It was determined by the consultant that the removal of the lower boat ramp is necessary due to several factors. Use at the ramp has accelerated the erosion of the bank as a result of floaters staging directly downstream from the ramp and trampling the area. In addition, the energy from Sheep Creek (which is directly across from the lower boat ramp) creates hydrologic conditions in combination with the boat ramp that are expected to cause additional erosion and undermine stream bank restoration and habitat improvements if the lower boat ramp is left in place.

FWP is committed to taking steps to mitigate the loss of the lower boat ramp and manage congestion at the upper boat ramp, including the following: Floaters will be asked to prepare as much as possible before launching to minimize time on the ramp. During the phone registration process, groups will be asked to arrive at a scheduled time to minimize crowding, depending on location of their first boat camp choice; the closer the first boat camp, the later the launch time. Pre-staging areas will be set up to allow groups to assemble boats and prepare as much as possible before utilizing the ramp. FWP will actively recruit a camp host and/or intern to act as a boat ramp steward and assist with traffic control at the ramp. Boat ramp use will be monitored during the 2023 float season. If after that season it is determined that other administrative actions need to be taken or the upstream boat ramp needs expansion, the agency will take steps accordingly to accommodate safe and orderly launching.

There was one comment from an individual supporting Alternative D with suggestions including the addition of a temporary watering system for the willows. The commentor also suggested the addition of one more willow lift and a coir 700 product instead of the coir logs which could be less expensive. Photos of other stabilization projects were included with the comments.

Response: The consultant was contracted by FWP to provide a practical design that would be in the funding range available for the project. The design was reviewed by FWP's Design and Construction Bureau and found to be suitable for the project scope and funding availability. Specific design changes would add to the cost and delay the project which is contingent on a time frame for willow cutting/survival and minimal use by the public at the site.

There were 2 comments that opposed the timing of the construction project.

Response: The project is scheduled to take place in the fall/winter to ensure survival of the willow cuttings which are dormant during that time of year. The timing of the construction will not interfere with any use on the river during late fall early winter.

There was one comment unrelated to the EA which suggested an AIS station be placed at Camp Baker.


### **Decision and Recommendation**

Based upon the Draft Environmental Assessment and the applicable laws, regulations, and policies I have determined that the project will not present significant negative impacts to the human environment associated with this project. I conclude that the EA is the appropriate level of analysis, and the preparation of an Environmental Impact Study is unnecessary.

In consideration of these facts and with the addition of this Decision Notice and information herein, I adopt the Draft EA as final.

I have selected the proposed action (Alternative A) identified in the Draft EA. Therefore, I am pleased to approve that FWP move forward with the necessary work to complete this project.

  
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Gary Bertellotti Region 4 Supervisor

  
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Date