



Region 4 Parks and Recreation Division
4600 Giant Springs Road
Great Falls, MT. 59405
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**Environmental Assessment Decision Notice
For Eden Bridge Scat Machine Installation**

Description of Proposed Action: Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks is proposing to install a SCAT machine at the Eden Bridge take-out on the Smith River. A SCAT machine is a portable toilet dumping and cleaning station. On February 02, 2022, the department issued a decision notice for the 2022 Recreation Management Plan update, approving mandatory human waste pack-out using a department approved portable self-contained toilet system. On May 13, 2022, the Parks and Recreation Board approved the proposed change to the Smith River Biennial Rule requiring human waste pack-out using a department approved portable, self-contained toilet system. Installation of a SCAT machine would provide the public a convenient and sanitary means of human waste disposal.

Development would consist of installing the SCAT machine within a 10.5' x 30' precast building that will be placed on site. An additional passive waste disposal system would be constructed adjacent to the precast building which will serve as a "backup" to the SCAT machine in case of a breakdown. A separate 200-amp meter would be installed and underground electric lines. An underground water line would be installed and run from the existing water line that services the host pads. Two (2), 5,000 gallon holding tanks would be buried approximately ten feet deep to contain the wastewater from the SCAT machine. A one-way, 25-foot wide graveled ingress and egress road would be constructed, to allow vehicular access to the SCAT machine for the public and access to the buried holding tanks for a pumper truck.

Public Process and Comments: A draft Environmental Assessment proposing this action was posted on July 06, 2022, in the Public Notice section of the Montana FWP website. A press release was sent out to the media on July 06, 2022. Public comment was accepted for a period of 30 days through August 08, 2022.

The following is a breakdown of the comments FWP received.

- A total of twenty-two (22) comments were received via email. Two (2) of the emailed comments contained the names of two individuals. Twenty-one (21) of the comments were from individuals and one (1) comment was from the conservation organization Trout Unlimited.
- Nineteen (19) people, which includes Trout Unlimited, were in favor of the proposed action.
 - One (1) person in favor of the proposed action addressed the need for compliance enforcement at the Camp Baker put-in regarding the possession of an approved portable toilet.
 - One (1) person in favor of the proposed action expressed concern about the construction costs and wondered if other projects were being cancelled or delayed.
 - One (1) person in favor of the proposed action expressed concern about the long-term maintenance costs.
 - One (1) person in favor of the proposed action asked if FWP would allow the use of bag systems.
- Two (2) people were opposed to the proposed action.
 - One (1) person opposed to the proposed action suggested that FWP utilize bag systems and provide a disposal container at the Eden Bridge take-out.
 - One (1) person opposed to the proposed action said the SCAT machine will take up too much space at Eden Bridge and suggested that FWP require the public to remove their human waste away from the site as they are already doing and that the status quo is working.
- Two (2) people didn't express outright support or opposition to the proposed action.
 - One (1) person who didn't support or oppose the proposed action suggested that FWP conduct extensive research into the reliability of the SCAT machine.
 - One (1) person who didn't support or oppose the proposed action commented on the design, noting that the turning radius of the access road may be too sharp and suggested that a walking path be constructed for those who choose to carry their portable toilet to the SCAT machine.
- One (1) person didn't address the proposed action.
 - One (1) person who didn't address the proposed action expressed concern that he wouldn't be able to fit a portable toilet in his canoe.

Response to Comments:

There were two (2) comments that expressed concern about costs associated with the project; one concerned about the initial construction costs cancelling or delaying other projects, and one concerned about sufficient funds for long-term maintenance costs.

Response: The funding for this project was approved by the 2021 Legislature and will not preclude any other capital or major maintenance projects. FWP conducted extensive outreach to other rivers who utilize the SCAT machine and are fully aware that the machines can break down, often due to “user error”. FWP budgeted annual maintenance into the operational costs of the machine. On March 03, 2022, the Parks and Recreation Board approved a \$5.00 increase to the non-refundable permit application fee, to be used for operation and maintenance of the human waste pack-out and disposal system.

There were two (2) comments that suggested and asked if FWP should/would allow the use of bag systems.

Response: The issue of bag systems is outside the scope of this EA but was considered by the Parks and Recreation Board as part of updating the Smith River biennial rules and adopting a pack-out requirement. The board adopted language stating that floaters must carry with them throughout the duration of their trip a human waste carry-out system that has been authorized by the department. After extensive research, the department concluded that it would authorize hard-sided toilet systems but not bag systems due to health and sanitation concerns with storing bags at Eden Bridge and transporting them to a landfill. FWP will monitor the system over time and make adjustments where needed.

There was one (1) comment that suggested FWP perform compliance checks at the Camp Baker put-in to ensure that the public possesses an approved portable toilet prior to launching.

Response: FWP will conduct multiple education and outreach efforts via the Smith River website and press releases regarding the approved portable toilets and proper waste disposal post-trip. These efforts will help to reduce the number of groups arriving unprepared. The river rangers working at Camp Baker will conduct compliance checks with every group to ensure they have an approved portable toilet.

There was one (1) comment that the SCAT machine will take up too much space at Eden Bridge and that FWP should require the public to remove their waste away from the site as they are already doing and that the status quo is working.

Response: Most of the infrastructure, including the precast building housing the SCAT machine, will be in an area known as the “overflow parking” area. This area is used sparingly during the high use season and there will remain ample space within the overflow parking area for vehicles. FWP has provided pit toilets at each boat camp within the river corridor and has not required the public to carry and/or remove human waste. On February 02, 2022, the department issued a decision notice for the 2022 Recreation Management Plan update, approving mandatory human waste pack-out using a department approved portable self-contained toilet system. On May 13, 2022, the Parks and Recreation Board approved the proposed change to the Smith River Biennial Rule requiring human waste pack-out using a department approved portable, self-contained toilet system. Installation of a SCAT machine will provide the public a convenient and sanitary means of human waste disposal.

There was one (1) comment that suggested FWP should do extensive research into the reliability of the SCAT machine.

Response: FWP’s engineer and recreation managers conducted extensive research into the SCAT machine by consulting with the manufacture, as well as several river managers and rangers who utilize the SCAT machine. FWP is fully aware of past machine breakdowns and the causes. Several upgrades have been made to the machine over the past several years and FWP is confident in the reliability of the machine.

There was one (1) comment regarding the design, noting that the turning radius of the access road may be too sharp and suggested that a walking path be constructed for those who choose to carry their portable toilet to the SCAT machine.

Response: The design and layout of the infrastructure, including the gravel driveway, were completed by a professional engineer and meet the specifications of proper turning radius for vehicles pulling trailers. There is ample open space from the river landing through the parking lot and along the north edge of the gravel roadway for people to walk, who choose to carry their portable toilets to the SCAT machine.

Decision:

Final Action

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks has decided to install a SCAT machine at the Eden Bridge takeout on the Smith River. Installation of a SCAT machine would provide the public a convenient and sanitary means of solid waste disposal. FWP anticipates that installation would occur in 2023. The pack-out requirement would go into effect at such time the department determines there is a functioning system for disposal of human waste at the Eden Bridge take-out and no earlier than January 1, 2023.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Gary Bertellotti", written over a horizontal line.

Gary Bertellotti Region 4 Supervisor

A handwritten date in blue ink, "9/8/2022", written over a horizontal line.

Date

