



Region 4 Parks and Recreation Division
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**Environmental Assessment Decision Notice
For Smith River Camp Baker Bank Stabilization Project**

Description of Proposed Action: The Smith River Camp Baker Streambank Stabilization Project is proposed to be constructed to repair stream bank erosion and damage at Camp Baker and directly downstream. The damage has been caused by natural river dynamics, hydrologic impacts of the lower boat ramp, and traffic from lower boat ramp users and livestock walking on the affected bank just downstream of the lower ramp.

It is important for resource protection that the streambank restoration holistically addresses the causes of the bank deterioration and restores habitat. Natural features and vegetation, engineering design to overcome shear stresses, and public safety and prevention of future human and livestock-caused impacts are all addressed by this proposal.

A bioengineered method of treatment generally described as “Live Encapsulated Lifts” is proposed, whereby 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 to promote vegetative growth and stabilization. Minor small tree plantings in the bank would facilitate the interface of the bioengineered slope to the natural slope on the downstream end. A well and stock watering tank would be installed to replace the water gap.

Other work that would be performed as part of this effort includes re-aligned fencing to preclude livestock usage of the area and removal of the lower boat ramp. The work is proposed for late fall to take advantage of low water and the dormancy phase of the willows to be harvested and planted. Removal of the lower boat ramp was recommended by project engineers and designed into the proposal to better address bank deterioration and ensure long term success of the project.

Public Process and Comments: A draft Environmental Assessment proposing this action was posted on June 27th, 2022 in the Public Notice section of the Montana FWP

website. A press release was sent out to the media on June 28, 2022. Public comment was accepted for a period of 30 days through July 28th, 2022.

The following is a breakdown of the 10 comments FWP received.

- One comment in favor of the proposed alternative
- One comment addressing the specific design
- One comment addressing the specific design and opposing the removal of the lower boat ramp
- One comment in favor of the proposed alternative but against the removal of the lower boat ramp
- One comment opposed to the removal of the *upper* boat ramp
- Five comments that do not address the proposed alternative but are opposed to the removal of the lower boat ramp

Comments Specifically Addressed:

There were two comments questioning the specific design of the project while proposing alternatives.

Response: A professional consultant was hired by FWP to develop a comprehensive design that would effectively address the causes of the streambank degradation due to previous concerns and comments about the habitat impacts of an initial concept that relied on hardened rip rap but left the lower boat ramp in place. The current design was reviewed and approved by the Fisheries Division as an improved alternative that was more in line with FWP's approach to stream work and mission of stewarding and protecting habitat for future generations.

There were seven comments opposing the removal of the lower boat ramp as part of the restoration design and process.

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.

Decision:

Alternative B: Proposed Action; This alternative would stabilize the portion of the Smith River streambank which would prevent continued erosion and loss of property. A soft design approach will be used and the secondary boat launch removed to lessen the impact and disperse hydraulic pressure on the affected section of riverbank.

See Detailed Description above "Description of Proposed Action"



Gary Bertellotti Region 4 Supervisor



Date

