



**DECISION NOTICE**  
**Flathead Lake State Park -Yellow Bay**  
**Road and Tent Camping Improvements**  
**FWP-DN-POR-R1-23-007**

[12/04/2023]

**ACTION**

Decision Notice (DN). Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) shall prepare a DN for the proposed action. The DN must identify the agency decision, the reasons for the decision, and any special conditions surrounding the decision or its implementation.

With this action, FWP hereby adopts the Draft Environmental Assessment or Draft EA as final, without modification, and approves Alternative 2, the proposed action.

**AUTHORITY: MONTANA ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT**

According to the applicable requirements of the Montana Environmental Policy Act or MEPA and its implementing rules and regulations, before a proposed action may be approved, environmental review must be conducted to identify, consider, and disclose any potential impacts of the proposed action on the affected human environment. The level of environmental review will vary with the complexity and seriousness of environmental issues associated with a proposed action. The level of public interest will also vary. The agency is responsible for adjusting public review to match these factors. *Title 75, Chapter 1, Parts 1 through 3, Montana Code Annotated (MCA)*.

Based on these factors, FWP determined a Standard Environmental Assessment (Draft EA) constitutes the appropriate level of review for the proposed action. Therefore, to assess and disclose potential impacts of the proposed action, FWP prepared a Draft EA for public review and comment. See *Public Participation Process* below.

Further, FWP must consider any substantive comments received in response to an EA and proceed in accordance with one of the following steps: determine the EA did not adequately reflect the issues raised by the proposed action and issue an Environmental Impact Statement or EIS; determine the EA did not adequately reflect the issues raised by the proposed action and issue a supplemental EA; or determine the Draft EA adequately addressed the issues raised by the proposed action and make a final decision, with appropriate modification resulting from the analysis provided in the Draft EA and the analysis of any substantive public comments received. See *Public Comment and FWP Response* below.

## **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCESS**

The Draft EA was made available for public review and comment from October 27, 2023 to November 25, 2023. The Draft EA was posted on FWP's Public Notice webpage: <https://fwp.mt.gov/news/public-notice> and also made available for public review on the Environmental Quality Council or EQC website: <https://leg.mt.gov/mepa/search/>, by individual request, and through notice to identified interested parties. FWP received comments during the public comment period.

## **DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION**

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) Region One is proposing to reconstruct Flathead Lake State Park – Yellow Bay's (FHLSP-YB) main entrance and interior road system. FHLSP-YB's internal road system is gravel which results in severe fugitive road dust during periods of high use (i.e., dust generated by vehicle travel over gravel roads). In addition, the existing park entrance onto US Highway 35 poses a challenge for FHLSP-YB users and other motorists due to its gravel surface and angle of approach onto US Highway 35. The existing FHLSP-YB access road merges with the highway at an angle that is nearly parallel to the highway; therefore, departing motorists have a difficult time gaining an adequate view of highway traffic approaching from the south. Additionally, this entrance angle does not provide an adequate turning radius for vehicles towing trailers. Finally, the existing gravel road surface can reduce traction and thus the ability for vehicles exiting FHLSP-YB to enter the highway safely.

The proposed project would reconfigure and pave FHLSP-YB's entrance and internal road system and would create 5 to 7 additional parking spaces designed to accommodate vehicle-boat trailer combinations. A cul-de-sac would be incorporated near the entrance to FHLSP-YB to provide a space for park visitors to turn around and to control traffic flow during peak use periods. The cul-de-sac would also function as a location for a small visitor contact station providing information about FHLSP-YB and for fee collection.

To accommodate the proposed project, one of the two existing park host sites and five existing tent campsites would be relocated. The proposed project would also result in a more attractive and appealing tent camping location within FHLSP-YB. An existing non-functional shower-house would be removed, and the existing wooden vault latrine would be replaced with a new concrete vault latrine. Further, six passenger vehicle parking spaces would be added at this location. Finally, FWP proposes to refurbish the existing flush toilet restroom and a small maintenance shed would be added in proximity to the refurbished restroom.

## **PURPOSE AND NEED**

The purpose of the proposed project is to improve existing FHLSP-YB infrastructure and add new infrastructure to improve safety conditions and the overall FHLSP-YB user experience, as follows:

### **Safety**

A primary goal of the proposed project is to enhance safety for people exiting and entering FHLSP-YB by improving sight distances, road surface conditions, and turning radius. The proposed project would re-orient FHLSP-YB's entrance to US Highway 35 to a 90-degree angle, thus improving visibility of oncoming traffic as vehicles leave the park. FWP expects a paved road surface would improve traction for exiting vehicles as they accelerate onto the highway, and a realigned entrance would improve the turning radius for vehicles towing trailers. Internal pedestrian safety would be improved by separating day-use traffic from overnight camping pedestrian use.

### **Air Quality**

Another goal of the proposed project is to reduce fugitive dust created by vehicles traveling over the existing gravel road surfaces, particularly during the summer months. The creation of fugitive dust can cause air quality concerns for park users and adversely impact park infrastructure. More specifically, this airborne dust results in vehicles, equipment, buildings, and vegetation being coated with a visible layer of dust. Under the proposed action, FWP would pave the park's internal road system, which would mitigate fugitive road dust emissions from vehicle travel. Air quality would also be improved by replacing an existing wooden latrine with a new precast concrete unit that would mitigate associated odors.

### **Accessibility**

FWP expects visitor accessibility to improve because of paving FHLSP-YB's roads. In addition to accommodating FHLSP-YB vehicle traffic, the existing gravel road surfaces function as pedestrian walkways to the park's day use area and tent camping sites. Paving the roads would improve access for visitors who utilize wheelchairs or other mobility devices. Access to tent camping sites would be improved through relocation and redesign.

### **Visitor Experience**

The proposed improvements would be expected to improve the visitor experience by improving safety, limiting road dust, improving traffic flow, providing better parking for visitors with boat trailers and improving tent camping amenities. Further, aging restrooms would be replaced or updated thereby mitigating the potential for odors resulting from old and dilapidated restroom infrastructure.

### **Aesthetics**

The proposed improvements would be expected to enhance the park's aesthetic appeal through the removal of old buildings, and reduction of road dust accumulation throughout the park. The proposed tent site relocation would provide a direct view of Flathead Lake, thereby improving the view, and would be further removed from highway 35, thus reducing noise disturbances for those camping within FHLSP-YB.

## **ALTERNATIVES ANALYZED**

### **Alternative 1: No Action**

In addition to the proposed action, and as required by MEPA, FWP analyzes the "No-Action" alternative in the EA. Under the No-Action alternative, the proposed action would not occur. Therefore, no additional impacts to the human environment would occur. The No Action alternative forms the baseline from which the potential impacts of the proposed action may be measured.

Under the No Action alternative, FWP would not implement the proposed improvements to FHLSP-YB's entrance, internal roadways, and visitor amenities. The existing ingress/egress would remain in its current state, and the park's roadways would remain gravel. Tent campsites would remain in their current location, as would the existing FHLSP-YB buildings, including the existing and non-functional flush restroom/washroom and dilapidated latrine. Finally, no changes would be made to the existing parking lots or camp host sites. Fugitive dust and pedestrian and vehicle safety would continue to be a concern for FHLSP-YB users and would continue to adversely impact facility infrastructure. Further, visitor satisfaction related to the proposed project would not be improved.

## **Alternative 2: Proposed Action**

Under the Proposed Action, FWP would reconstruct the FHLSP-YB's main entrance and interior road system to enhance safety and improve visitor satisfaction. The proposal would reconfigure and pave FHLSP-YB's internal road system and parking lots and create up to 7 new parking spaces designed to accommodate vehicle-boat trailer combinations and up to six additional passenger vehicle parking spaces. A cul-de-sac and visitor contact station would be incorporated to provide visitor information and to manage traffic flow, while facilitating an improved turn-around area for FHLSP-YB visitors. Also, the existing FHLSP-YB host site and five tent campsites would be relocated. Further, an existing, non-functional shower-house would be removed, and the existing vault latrine would be replaced with a new concrete latrine. The existing flush-restroom would be refurbished, and a small maintenance shed would be developed to replace storage space that had been provided by the decommissioned shower house. Fugitive dust and pedestrian safety would be mitigated, and FHLSP-YB visitor satisfaction would likely improve.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT AND FWP RESPONSE**

FWP received substantive public comments on the Draft EA. A substantive public comment was defined as the identification of a specific issue or impact. The following provides the public comments received and FWP response(s).

*Hi there!*

*I want to express my whole-hearted approval of the improvements you suggest! With the popularity of the Flathead Lake State Parks seemingly increasing year over year, I think your plans make all good sense for improving traffic flow and accessibility. As a 22-year neighbor and user of the Park, I've seen that growth in use over the years, and am grateful you are addressing the matter.*

**FWP Response:** FWP concurs.

- 1. parking along road leading to the 3 tent sites is ADEQUATELY signed so traffic from residents, Emergency and supply vehicles are not hindered in any way.*
- 2. Gates are ADEQUATELY signed for emergency vehicles to locate residence*
- 3. ROAD is maintained so emergency vehicles have safe access to residence.*
- 4. Consideration is given to cutting dangerously diseased and root eroded trees above upper road. no surface water visible.*

**FWP Response:** FWP agrees and will install signage as suggested. FWP intends to maintain the primary park roads that are open to the public for day use and boating access year-round. The road that accesses tent sites will be maintained during the camping season of May through September. FWP routinely assesses and removes hazard trees.

*As a heavy user of Yellow Bay, I would welcome some much-needed improvements. Starting at the entrance, there needs to be a wider turn radius so when exiting the park you can turn right without having to go into the oncoming traffic lane when towing a boat. Us Mack Days people have to deliver fish to Blue Bay and turning right, out of the park, can be problematic. Why is there 2 hosts sites? there isnt that much there to take care of? Addition towing/boat parking is much needed. If the stream of water that runs through the launch area to the boat ramp could be diverted eliminating the mud holes by the garbage can would be a major improvement as well. Yellow is my favorite, and my most used launch on Flathead Lake (I've launched there 40 -50 times at least this year) and one of the few launches that is available during low*

*water with out having any hassles. The old wooden outhouse needs to go! Lol Thanks for you consideration!*

**FWP Response:** A wider turning radius at the park's entrance is one of the stated objectives of the proposed action. Additionally, FWP intends to address the surface water issue that currently exists in the park's lower parking area. The consulting engineer would be required to develop ecologically sound proposals to address this seasonal seepage.

*It would be very nice to have better access to the boat ramp and more parking room. The problem with almost every state boat ramp or camp ground in the Flathead is the trees are taking over. Don't get me wrong I like trees as well. Apgar in West Glacier could use some tree removal as well. This is just my opinion from personal usage.*

**FWP Response:** One of the stated objectives in the proposed action is to improve access and provide more parking with FLSP-YB.

*I would like to submit a comment on the Yellow Bay proposed road and tent camping plan. I have visited the Yellow Bay state park on several occasions with my young grandchildren and also the Flathead Lake Biological Station. Both are great resources on Flathead Lake and deserve serious attention. I have read the proposed plan for improvements and want to commend you on an excellent proposal. The road entry, and exit, are indeed hazardous and need attention before a serious accident occurs. The removal of aging and outdated facilities for public use are constructive as well as the plan for a turn-around and more camping spots. I wholeheartedly endorse this plan for improvement of this special facility.*

**FWP Response:** FWP concurs.

*I am in favor of the contemplated improvements/refurbishing of Yellow Bay State Park. It'll be nice for all the increased pressure on the resource, the restroom facilities particularly.*

**FWP Response:** FWP concurs.

## **DECISION**

Based on the environmental review provided in the Draft EA, and in accordance with all applicable laws, rules, regulations, and policies, FWP determined the proposed action (Alternative 2), will not have significant adverse impacts on the human environment associated with the proposed action and constitutes a reasonable and appropriate strategy to achieve identified objectives. Therefore, preparation of an EIS is unnecessary. FWP hereby adopts the Draft EA as final and approves the Alternative 2, the proposed action.

Sincerely,



Lee Anderson  
Region 1 Supervisor  
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks