



Environmental Assessment Decision Notice

Somers Beach State Park Development Proposal

April 2023

Background and Description of Proposed Project

In October 2021, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) purchased the 106-acre Somers Beach State Park (SBSP) on the northwest shore of Flathead Lake for inclusion into Montana's state park system. In 2022, FWP installed a dynamic equilibrium beach to mitigate severe shoreline erosion and completed interim visitor amenities that included a temporary park entrance road and parking lot, regulatory signage and fee station, and placement of a portable toilet and trash receptacles. Throughout 2022, FWP conducted public scoping and planning meetings, both virtual and on-site, to inform the development of alternatives for a second round of proposed visitor amenities. These planning efforts culminated in the release of the Somers Beach State Park Development Proposal Draft Environmental Assessment in January of 2023.

Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) Process and Public Involvement

FWP released a draft environmental assessment (EA) for a 30-day public review period on January 13, 2023, with comment closing February 13, 2023. The EA was advertised through media releases and legal notices in the Daily Inter Lake, Helena Independent Record, the Flathead Beacon, and on the FWP website and social media (Facebook & Twitter). Copies of the EA were available at the Kalispell FWP office, on the FWP website, on the Environmental Quality Council (EQC) website, and at the Montana State Library and the Flathead County libraries.

Purpose and Need

FWP proposes to develop recreational opportunities at SBSP in a manner that is sustainable and causes no significant adverse impacts to the human or physical environment in the affected area. SBSP is the most recent addition to Montana's state park system, and it is in an area of high recreational demand. The site has seen public utilization for several decades courtesy of the previous owners. SBSP is comprised of lakeshore, wetlands, floodplain, and uplands, and is situated between the federal Flathead Lake Waterfowl Production Area (FHL WPA) and the townsite of Somers. The intent of developing recreational amenities is to guide and enhance use in a way that minimizes visitor impacts and conserves important natural, cultural, and recreational resources. Benefits include improved accessibility, opportunities for outdoor recreation, wildlife viewing and interpretive and educational programming.

Alternatives Analyzed

The EA evaluated the potential impacts of the following alternatives:

Alternative A: No Action

Under the No Action Alternative, FWP would not install any additional visitor amenities beyond what is currently provided. A parking lot and a single portable toilet are present at the park, and the east and

west boundaries have been marked. Visitors to the park have pioneered a foot path from the parking lot to the Flathead Lake shoreline in the eastern half of the park, and they utilize Burnell Avenue to access a primitive road leading to the lake on the west side of the park. This alternative would result in the least amount of change to the park's current condition.

Alternative B

This alternative would provide several visitor amenities that are consistent with rustic and core levels of development within the Montana state parks classification system while enhancing natural and recreational experience opportunities. This alternative proposed the current entry and parking lot become permanent and provides administrative features such as host sites, entry station, and an administrative building.

Alternative C (preferred alternative)

Alternative C was the preferred alternative and proposed all the developments of Alternative B plus the addition of limited overnight accommodations via six tent camping sites and 3 rentable 12'x12' rustic cabins.

Public Review Process

FWP received 202 correspondences via email and through the online portal during the 30-day EA public comment period. FWP staff reviewed the submissions to identify substantive comments. A substantive comment was defined as a perceived beneficial or adverse impact that would result from an alternative or a component of an alternative. In many cases, multiple people listed the same or similar comments; these comments are summarized and listed once, and one response is provided by FWP. Some written correspondences spoke to a single element of the proposal, while others offered extensive feedback on multiple elements of the proposal. Some correspondences simply stated a preference for one of the three alternatives, while others suggested preferences for a hybridized version of two or more alternatives.

The following is a synopsis of public input received during the comment period. FWP carefully considered each comment and developed responses to them, organized by subject matter. Some comments have been paraphrased or combined to provide a response to multiple comments of similar nature.

Summary of Public Comment:

General comments concerning the alternatives listed within the Environmental Assessment:

Alternative A (No Action):

Several comments were received stating a preference for, or opposition to, the no action alternative. FWP summarized these comments and provided responses.

- I support a proposal for this park to be a protected habitat, remaining a nature area and as undeveloped as possible.
- Please leave the park as it is currently, in order to minimize further impact on Flathead Lake, the surrounding environment, and wildlife.

FWP response: The proposed developments in alternatives B and C are consistent with the Montana State Parks Classification System and with classification preferences expressed during public scoping for EA development.

- The noise & light pollution that will occur from the other options does not fit with the character of the Somers' neighborhood and will be of great disturbance to them
- The traffic is already horrible for property owners on Somers Road. The increased traffic and the noise from a once wild place is absolutely insane.

FWP response: The concern for light pollution is noted, and any light installations would utilize fixtures such as light shields or sconces that focus light downward to minimize light pollution. Area lighting such as parking lot lighting would not be installed. In accordance with Montana state park user rules, the following are prohibited in state parks:

- Creating excessive noise, causing excessive noise to be created, or otherwise conducting oneself in a manner that disturbs others.
 - Operating sound-emitting electronic devices, including but not limited to speakers, radios, televisions, or other such equipment, at a volume which projects sound beyond the person's immediate vicinity in a manner that disturbs other visitors.
 - Additionally, FWP enforces day use closures and quiet hours.
- We know you at the state don't care about locals...you care about money.
 - With this level of development day use fees would be charged similar to other parks to help support the site.

FWP response: All of Montana's state parks utilize the Montana State Parks Fee Schedule, which establishes user fees. State parks are not funded through Montana's general fund and earned revenues offset operational costs.

- I support Alternative A - No Action. I do not believe any of this proposed development will have minor impacts to the area, and the local users of this resource.
- The proposed amenities in both Alternatives B & C will assuredly result in a packed mad-house of users.

FWP response: SBSP is Montana's newest state park and has been open to the public as a state park since October 2021. Prior to that, the site was open to public use under private ownership. Interim developments were completed in 2022 to address parking and sanitation issues. Developments proposed in the EA are intended to improve resource protection and enhance the visitor experience.

- While I understand that the population and tourism will continue to grow, and use of public spaces will grow accordingly, I believe there is merit in preserving some near-in public space that is undeveloped.
- As a 4th generation family that grew up in the Flathead Valley, I would like to see option A) no action taken and leave the property as is. Adding facilities will not benefit the Somers community but make more problems for them.
- Locals can no longer enjoy our own backyard because the tourists learn of spots and take over the areas. Let us locals have this place to enjoy while it's still "our quiet and peaceful " place.....please.

FWP response: The proposed developments in Alternatives B and C are consistent with the Montana State Parks Classification System and with classification preferences expressed during public scoping for EA development. While Montana’s state parks are available to locals as well as out-of-area visitors, other state parks in the vicinity of SBSP continue to be utilized heavily by local communities. Flathead County is home to six state parks and the percentage of Montanans opting to purchase annual state park passes through light motor vehicle registration remains at approximately 82%. That is the second highest of Montana’s 56 counties and signifies strong local use of state parks.

- It would save a lot of money, time and effort if we waited and saw what changes to the state park were needed before assuming and investing in the entry station, staff and cabins. There is no need to rush.

FWP response: SBSP was designated as a state park in 2021 and extensive public scoping has indicated a need and a desire for both visitor amenities and basic operational features that are successfully employed at other Region 1 state parks.

- We've seen exponential growth in visitors to the North Shore area in the past few years. With that comes the need for toilets, garbage cans, and other amenities and attentions.
- Leaving the area untouched while allowing public access is not reasonable, especially since restrooms would be needed for health reasons since the park will encourage additional visitors in the near future

FWP response: FWP concurs and has addressed these fundamental needs through the installation of interim amenities in 2022, and the current proposal for permanent amenities.

Alternative B (Visitor Amenities):

FWP received many comments regarding Alternative B, or specific elements within the alternative. Several comments expressed support for or opposition to specific elements of the proposal or suggested a scaled-down version of the alternative. Some comments suggested amenities that were not included in Alternative B. FWP has categorized comments by subject matter, and in some cases has paraphrased comments.

ADMINISTRATIVE FEATURES

Entry Station

- Do not see a need for entry station

FWP response: Entry stations have proven to be a highly effective management tool in other Region 1 state parks. During peak use periods, staff can collect applicable entry fees and provide important information to visitors as they enter the park such as park rules, nesting closures, or other resource related notifications. Entry stations have also been useful in preventing traffic congestion within a park and helping emergency responders if needed.

Host Sites

- I do not like the idea of two camp hosts there to monitor everything as well. One camp host to clean restrooms, keep an eye on things, and shut the gate at night seems more than enough, unless you do overnight camping.
- I question the need for two host sites. Two sites seem excessive for this size Park. Do you anticipate the need?
- I believe on site hosts would greatly aid in educating people about the waterfowl closure, keep dogs on a leash!, help eliminate pioneered trails, trash, etc, and greatly benefit this project and keep it better maintained and the facilities cleaner. I do like that the host sites are near the parking area and road and wouldn't impact the beauty of the park.

FWP response: Park host sites are utilized in all Region 1 state parks and in some Region 1 fishing access sites and have proven to be a highly efficient and effective means by which to provide staff presence. Staff presence is a deterrent to inappropriate visitor behavior and provides valuable visitor services. Host sites have been used to attract both paid and volunteer staff who might otherwise be difficult to retain in highly competitive job and expensive housing markets. Two host sites are necessary to provide coverage 7 days per week during peak use periods.

Restrooms

- Pit Toilets is a much better solution, & a lot less to maintain
- is it really necessary to have a restroom by the beach at Burnell Ave when you plan to have a good one at the parking area which is not far away?

FWP response: Due to proximity to municipal sewer services, plumbed restrooms with flushable toilets could be provided at SBSP. The cost of maintaining vault latrines ranges from approximately \$517 to \$862 per unit per pumping. FWP believes providing a restroom facility at more remote locations within the park is necessary given the distance from the main parking lot that may be too great for children or visitors with reduced mobility.

Administrative Building

- Administrative building not needed.

FWP response: FWP believes a small administrative building is necessary for efficient operation of the park. An administrative building would be used to store cleaning and sanitation supplies as well as light maintenance tools and supplies. It could also serve as a workstation for staff to complete administrative tasks associated with park operations.

General Comments

- I favor restrooms, administrative buildings, and park host sites, that provide for public safety, operational efficiency, and site stewardship.

FWP response: FWP concurs.

- Staffing is a must, in my opinion, to ensure compliance and minimize disruption to neighbors.
- please consider any improvements that cannot be overseen by staff as a negative.

- Frequent upkeep by park staff of restroom facilities, trash disposal and walkways. Picnic areas must be monitored for trash and wildlife attractants. No campfires. Self-contained cooking equipment (bbq, fuel stoves, only).

FWP response: FWP concurs that staffing is an important component of park operations. SBSP is situated between the Wayfarers and West Shore units of Flathead Lake State Park, and approximately seven miles from the FWP Region 1 headquarters in Kalispell. Parks and Outdoor Recreation staff and game wardens make frequent trips to SBSP. Campfires are prohibited at SBSP. If host sites are installed at the park, FWP would be able to station staff at the park during peak use periods.

- The parking area is cramped and will be too small to handle summer crowds.

FWP response: This proposed action does not increase parking beyond the ADA parking spaces proposed in conjunction with a hand launch area for boats and parking spaces associated with rental cabins. The existing parking lot provides space for 50 vehicles with the ability to designate a small amount of overflow parking if needed. FWP acknowledges the challenge with parking at many recreation sites throughout the region during peak summer months. This problem existed at Somers Beach previously and particularly during the spring of 2020 during the pandemic. The installation of entry stations at other state parks in the vicinity have provided a tool for FWP to manage vehicle traffic during heavy use periods.

- It looks like FWP's proposed route to bring water and wastewater on the site has the potential to go through the Controlled Groundwater Area. Please consult with EPA and DEQ prior to any utility placement to ensure the utilities do not act as a preferential pathway for future contaminant migration.

FWP response: FWP has consulted with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) throughout the acquisition and interim improvements and would continue that consultation prior to any further construction or ground disturbance at SBSP.

- These amenities lend themselves to larger group activities and will lead to lots of boats and other gear on the beach -stuff better limited by hand-carry from the main parking lot

FWP response: FWP has consistently heard support for a boat hand launch at SBSP that can be accessed by vehicle. Such an amenity would facilitate use by people with limited mobility while avoiding placement of a large parking lot near the lakefront.

- Signage, trails, a flush toilet and potable water and a carry-on boat site will allow park visitors to enjoy the site to its fullest.

FWP response: FWP concurs.

- FWI hopes the availability of SBSP will take some of the recreational pressure off the nearby Somers FAS and adjacent Flathead County Recreation Site.

FWP response: SBSP does offer an alternative for water-based recreation on Flathead Lake. SBSP would provide more opportunity for nonmotorized use and distribute use across the two sites.

- Does FWP have data from other waterfront parks showing that “formalized access, regulatory signage, and staff presence” are effective at maintaining “a noticeable but relatively small adverse impact that does not affect the function or integrity” of nesting birds? While the property may have “been in use by people and pets for decades without regulatory oversight”, the level of use has been nowhere near what it will be once you implement your preferred alternative.

FWP response: It is not yet clear what visitation levels will be at SBSP during the nesting closure at the adjoining U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Waterfowl Production Area. FWP has had success with the aforementioned tools in other locations that are proximate to sensitive nesting locations. The Wild Horse Island Unit of Flathead Lake State Park utilized these techniques for several years to protect a bald eagle nesting site on the north side of the island. That nest site produced eaglets for several consecutive summers despite increasing visitation. Similarly, visitor management measures were employed on Horseshoe Lake at Thompson Chain of Lakes State Park to protect a bald eagle nest site there. That nest site has remained productive.

- Who is monitoring wells drilled to determine the overall effects of the Super Fund Site on BNFS land? Where are the results?

FWP response: BNSF Railway monitors the wells on both BNSF and state park lands under Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Montana Department of Environmental Quality oversight. Sample results are submitted in reports to the agencies semi-annually. Reports can be viewed online at:

<https://cumulis.epa.gov/supercpad/cursites/cscdocument.cfm?id=0800390>

- The narrow stretch of road in front of the park needs to flow freely for these reasons:
 - 1- residents traveling to and from work
 - 2-Somers Fire Department located on Somers Road
 - 3-school buses and parents taking children to school. The current Somers beach can be used as an example of overflow traffic choking a road.

FWP response: FWP concurs with the need for traffic to flow freely on Somers Road. The development of an interim access road and parking lot in 2022 has reduced parking complaints along Somers Road. FWP will work with Flathead County and the Montana Department of Transportation to address traffic and pedestrian safety issues if they arise.

LAND BASED AMENITIES

Picnic Shelters

- It will attract other types of unsafe people to take shelter in and about

FWP response: All visitors are required to abide by state park user rules. Picnic shelters are available for day use only and are frequented by FWP staff.

- I appreciate the addition of the rental gazebo type space for gatherings.

- The group pavilions sound like a nice addition, too!

FWP response: The proposed group picnic shelter would be available for gatherings of 50 or less people by reservation, or for use by individuals or groups smaller than 30 people on a first come basis when a reservation is not occurring.

Playground

- I'm not sure what a "natural playground" refers to. Doesn't that already exist with a beach and lake?
- Not exactly sure why a "natural playground" is needed in this natural area but it doesn't seem detrimental.

FWP response: The proposal in Alternatives B & C would be to create a playground out of natural materials that is near enough to the parking lot to provide easy access for families with young children.

- There is a desperate need for a playground for children in the Somers and Lakeside areas with the latest equipment including a climbing wall.

FWP response: FWP has been approached by a Somers area trail organization about the potential to partner on a small playground at SBSP. A climbing wall is not proposed.

Trails

- I would like to see clearly open access on the west side. Perhaps with bollards so that vehicular access is modest.

FWP response: Both action alternatives in the EA propose improving the west access for pedestrian traffic, and in the case of Alternative C, for limited vehicle access. The primary park access would remain where it currently is located.

- The collaboration with BNSF would be a significant win for the project and for the public.
- U mention wanting trail access thru BNSF property. Yet, to my understanding, the former Sliter Property/Now State Park already HAS a strip of land that connects thru BNSF parcels to the section of road beyond the gate. Put the foot trail there. Providing benches to sit and view the lake or wildlife. Continue it on the parking that already exists and put in a museum of history and interests of the logging that once occupied that end of the lake, the mansion on the hill.

FWP response: BNSF Railway owns two private parcels that abut SBSP. The northern-most parcel is approximately 16.36 acres, and the southern-most parcel is approximately 15.15 acres. SBSP does not own a strip of land through either parcel. FWP and BNSF are exploring an agreement that would allow for a trail to cross the northern parcel, thus creating a trail connection between the parking lot and the southwestern portion of SBSP.

- It also seems important to take measures, such as appropriate signage, fencing, etc, to prevent a proliferation of social trails and short cutting between designated, managed trails.

FWP response: An important function of intentionally placed trails is to reduce foot traffic in sensitive areas. We agree with the need to manage trails and prevent social trails from

developing. FWP has actively managed trails in this fashion in all of the surrounding state parks and intends to do so at SBSP as well.

- It might be wise to continue the bicycle trail to the state park. This could be accomplished with signs and bicycle route painted on the road.
- There is a walking trail just to the west of this area and runs north to Kalispell, near Del's bar. Why not extend that over and through to the beach area.

FWP response: FWP would work with the Somers community, non-governmental trail organizations and Flathead County to pursue bicycle/pedestrian trails that connect the park with current or future trail systems.

- Burnell Avenue is a very narrow 1 lane gravel road with little shoulder to share Walk-In Only traffic with proposed Cabin rental vehicles (with Coded Gate Access, another unnecessary expense). There is No Space for vehicles to pass each other outside (West of) the locked gate.

FWP response: Burnell Avenue is a county road and is open to public use. Under Alternative C, visitor vehicle traffic would be limited to ingress and egress for cabin rentals beginning at the southern terminus of Burnell Avenue where it enters SBSP. Cabin rentals would result in very little vehicle traffic on Burnell Avenue with a maximum of six renters' vehicles allowed per day for all three sites. The road will continue to serve as an administrative access to the park regardless of which alternative is selected. Burnell Avenue is a 50' public right of way, and FWP would work with Flathead County to address any park related vehicle use safety issue.

Landscaping

- The berm that you propose pushing at the end of the existing alfalfa field and want to plant with bushes and trees--within 10 years those bushes and trees will grow to end up obscuring the view of the lake from the homes that currently exist across from this field.
- I like the native plantings in lieu of alfalfa; this would support waterfowl and wildlife in the long term and be lower maintenance.

FWP response: This concern is noted, and if berms are developed, plantings would be carefully selected to address this concern. Berms would be designed to provide some ground-level visual buffering from visitor amenities while preserving the viewshed from the north.

WATER BASED AMENITIES

Dynamic Beach Enhancement

- I feel that this beach could be a wonderful place if done right.
- I would like to see the beach more user friendly with an area to let dogs swim also. The current area is muddy and hard to walk around.
- why is the shoreline and wetland wave protection tied to extensive recreation development? It seems to me they are entirely separate concepts. The shoreline integrity should be protected because that is our responsibility to the environment. Flathead lake is damned, thus an environment already altered by humans. Don't we have a responsibility to mitigate the effects of that?

- In reading the EA it appears that the protection of the wetlands is only considered important if there is a viewing platform attached. I disagree completely. It strikes me as very manipulative to tie the two projects together.
- waterfront area will not accommodate many people at one time. It would be nice to have a gravel spit put in for people to spend time at the water. Ideally it would be extended, or some sort of dock put in to accommodate canoes, kayaks, small private boats
- I also read the google comments and clearly the public is craving picnic spots, developed / obvious access points and a much wider shoreline.

FWP response: The dynamic equilibrium beach that was installed in 2022 has been very effective at arresting the heavy erosion that was occurring along the park's lakefront. In doing so, the shoreline has maintained a hydrologic connection to Flathead Lake, benefiting the aquatic environment and associated plant communities. A secondary benefit is that during full pool the beach provides some recreational opportunity to park visitors. In 2022, Flathead Lake saw prolonged periods of lake elevations at 2,894', which is a foot higher than the normal full pool elevations. Under that condition, waves can breach the existing structure and cause erosion. The proposal to enhance up to 922' of the existing structure would safeguard against extended periods of above average full pool elevations, while also providing secondary recreational benefits to park visitors. The proposed viewing platform is not necessary to the function of the dynamic equilibrium beach but is proposed to provide an opportunity for people with limited mobility to enjoy the lakefront.

- I do not see the need for the gravel spits to "control direction of sediment transport". This sounds like a Phd research project. Sediment deposits are trackable on many apps. Why do you want to try to control sediment deposits?
- I am curious about the measurements for wetland loss, and how the water levels of Flathead Lake influenced wetlands in recent years.

FWP response: A gravel spit would be intended to control the direction of sediment transport, enhance deposition of fine sediment, and radiate wave energy away from the shoreline. Fine sediments deposited in areas that were previously eroded due to heavy wave action can promote colonization by riparian and wetland plants. Dr. Mark Lorang, who FWP contracted with for the design and construction of the SBSP dynamic equilibrium beach, has documented the previous loss of wetlands along the north shore of Flathead Lake to be in excess of 1 meter (3.28 feet) annually. This was due in part to storms and associated heavy wave action while the lake was at full pool.

Hand Boat Launch

- Due to the boat over flow at Somers access hwy 93. Several trucks with trailers park on the side of the highway UNSAFE conditions. think the new park should Allow motorized boats with an installed dock.

FWP response: The proposed hand boat launch at SBSP best fits the park's attributes and is consistent with public input during public scoping. It is expected that some of the nonmotorized users at nearby Somers Fishing Access Site on Highway 93 would migrate to the SBSP hand launch and reduce congestion and conflict at Somers FAS.

- Please include a boat launch for hand carried craft. This is important to me because it separates the non-motorized boats from the motorized. Somers Bay launch is too busy as it is and something needs to be done.

FWP response: A hand boat hand launch is proposed in the action alternatives; however, motorized watercraft are not prohibited on Flathead Lake.

- I strongly disagree with the development of a gravel road down to the beach and the boardwalk trail that's being proposed across the wetlands (would be a lot of unnecessary disruption in a delicate area.) I know you are planning to mitigate erosion at the waterfront (which will be a temporary disruption to get this in place, but that seems necessary to me if 2 meters of shoreline is eroding annually.)
- I can see with dismay this proposed gravel road with ADA parking places becoming a high traffic area, and being used by many people and many vehicles to just drop off coolers and all sorts of apparatus, giant floaties and such at the beachfront (not just kayaks or SUPs of persons with disabilities). I believe people can walk their watercraft down to the water on the trail or use the Somers Bay launch site which is close by.) The road, to me, would be a big distraction in the natural beauty of this waterfront. This is just too much development in that fragile area.

FWP response: Approximately .45 acres of designated floodplain would be converted to a gravel hand-launch facility. The alternative location for a hand launch is on the southwest side of the park that utilizes the existing roadbed to reach the lake. Public scoping has indicated a strong preference for the proposed location. FWP is committed to making SBSP accessible for all visitors, and the distance from the parking lot to the lakefront would be prohibitive for people with mobility limitations.

- You are providing ADA access down Burnell Ave, and your proposed trail to the beach appears wide enough and graveled and could support wheelchair use if someone wanted to access that portion of the beach

FWP response: Alternatives B & C propose enhancing the western park road to accommodate ADA use for non-motorized travel beyond the rental cabins to the shoreline.

Boardwalk/viewing platform

- I disagree with the placement and construction of the boardwalk this close to the lake edge and the proximity to wetlands. There are significant permitting, as you mentioned on page 15, and I don't think we need to disturb wetlands and potentially wildlife for human recreational enjoyment.

FWP response: A board walked trail would be constructed so as not to obstruct water movement and would have a negligible impact to wetlands. FWP is committed to making visitor amenities accessible to people with mobility limitations.

General Comments

- My (now ex) husband who is third generation Flathead native told me about arrowheads found along Somers Beach. How will you promote respect for the beach and get people to leave what they have found back in its place.

FWP response: FWP shares these concerns and will work with Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes to develop an inventory and monitoring program for artifacts and archaeological sites within the park. The collection or removal of artifacts is strictly prohibited under the Montana Antiquities Act and related regulations, and user regulations for SBSP will prohibit motorized travel on the lakebed to avoid disturbance. The expansion of the dynamic equilibrium beach in the proposed action would help protect artifacts and cultural sites from shoreline erosion, but artifacts may still be exposed by wave action on the lakebed. FWP is committed to developing interpretive materials highlighting the cultural history of the site and conveying the importance of leaving cultural resources undisturbed should they be found.

- Lots of people and dogs start at Somers Beach State Park, and walk the exposed lake bed for miles, displacing and flushing the flocks of birds. The last time I visited, there was also a fat tire bicyclist, a high impact use that will increase rapidly if not prevented. Dogs are especially detrimental to wildlife.

FWP response: All of Montana's state parks require pets to be physically restrained (leashed). FWP is committed to enforcing this requirement at SBSP in order to limit disturbances to wildlife and other park visitors. FWP staff have been and will continue working with U.S. Fish and Wildlife staff to post regulatory and educational signage and increase staff presence during the March 1 through July 15 closure of the federal Waterfowl Production Area. The addition of on-site hosts and staff would enhance this effort.

- Put ins for non-motorized watercraft not exceeding 8 feet. SUPs, canoes, smaller kayaks okay, (no sea kayaks).

FWP response: The proposed boat hand launch would be developed to accommodate watercraft that can be transported to the water by hand. There are no plans to restrict watercraft beyond that requirement, as a boat ramp will not be provided, and vehicles will not be permitted beyond the surfaced cul-de-sac.

Alternative C (Visitor Amenities Plus Camping and Lodging Amenities):

FWP received many comments regarding Alternative C or specific elements within the alternative. Several comments expressed general support or opposition to overnight visitor amenities, while some comments suggested variations of Alternative C. Some comments are paraphrased.

Cabins

- I'm opposed to the cabins proposed on the West side of Burnell ave. I live directly above this site on Pavillion Hill Ave and my concerns are two-fold. The first is that the wetlands at the base of that hill and the shaded hillside results in an insane amount of mosquitos for about 2 months every summer. Overnighting there during peak months would be incredibly unpleasant. The second issue with the proposed cabin site is noise. The hillside acts as sort of a natural amphitheater.

FWP response: FWP is sensitive to this concern and acknowledges that there will be noise associated with visitor amenities, including cabins. FWP believes the proposed cabins would be situated in a location that would provide vegetative buffering from visual and noise related impacts. Cabin rental agreements would include information about quiet hour regulations, and

park staff would contact cabin users to inform them of the need for compliance. We acknowledge the presence of mosquitos at SBSP and park visitors will need to be prepared for them during the months they are present.

- seniors can enjoy a cabin stay
- I am additionally in support of offering a nominal amount of accommodation in the form of cabins which can be booked ahead and are maintained and monitored daily by a designated host.
- The addition of cabins also allows people without the means to have an RV to enjoy an overnight outdoor experience.

FWP response: Several state parks in Montana's state park system offer cabins, yurts, or lodges (tipis) for these reasons. Cabins offer a rustic overnight experience for people who may not have camping equipment or have physical limitations that make traditional camping difficult.

- Given the proximity of the cabins to groundwater contamination, EPA requests that any slab on grade cabins built along Burnell Road have vapor barriers installed as a preventative measure to ensure volatile organic contaminants associated with the creosote do not have the potential to enter the indoor air.

FWP response: FWP would consult with EPA and DEQ prior to any ground disturbance at SBSP.

- There will be many times during the winter months, with heavy use from the public, where the opportunity exists for some people to break and enter, or destroy some part of the structures.

FWP response: FWP acknowledges and shares concerns regarding vandalism. This is a threat to all state park properties, and FWP staff remain vigilant to guarding against theft and vandalism year-round.

- If cabins were built in animal and bird habitat, it would likely push the wildlife out

FWP response: The development of cabins and the public's use of them could have long-term minor adverse impacts to some animal species and their habitats in the park. FWP would implement park user rules that mitigate disturbance from pets and other human activities. The location and construction of cabins would minimize disturbance of vegetation to the extent possible to maintain wildlife habitat. This property has been in use by people and pets for decades without regulatory oversight and FWP believes that careful design and management of amenities would reduce impacts to wildlife and wildlife habitat.

- IF CABINS are to be part of the equation/development, then they should be located in the vicinity of Park Host/picnic area where there may be a Natural Playground & Likely flush toilets

FWP response: FWP has proposed cabins in a location that would offer a rustic overnight opportunity that is visually buffered from residential properties. This location is easily and quickly accessible from the proposed host site location.

- The camp host (when present "during Peak Season/usage", maybe 5-6 months of 12!), is far from proposed cabins in Option C

FWP response: FWP can align cabin rentals with staffing availability. Given the proximity of SBSP to other state parks and to the Region 1 headquarters, staff presence at the park will be frequent.

- I don't think that three cabins is even worth the infrastructure to support them

FWP response: Funding was allocated in the 2021 Montana legislative session for the development of visitor amenities at SBSP and for diversified lodging opportunities at select water-based state parks to increase lodging capacity and provide new types of experiences for visitors to enjoy. Investments are aimed at providing recreational opportunities at the park that are consistent with the Montana State Park Classification System, and cabins provide an opportunity for people who may lack camping equipment or are physically unable to partake in traditional forms of camping. Diversified lodging adds an additional, sustainable revenue source for state parks, particularly as shoulder season visitation increases. Many members of the public desire a camping experience other than tent camping or having to own or rent an RV or travel trailer.

Tent Sites

- tent campers should be allowed to park at the parking lot overnight, though. Otherwise, access will be limited to a very small group of people
- If some type of reservation system needs to be set up for this, maybe 3 sites could have the ability to be reserved, and the other 3 could be walk in/no reservation
- Having the tent campground opens up many more options for locals to use Flathead lake. I can envision using it as a stop on a bicycle tour around the lake. I can also see using it for a kayak tour around the lake.
- I am NOT in support of the first come, first serve tents based on a few potential problems that may arise. I foresee the tent sites not being available when an individual arrives, and then what? They are forced to find some kind of alternative that they may not be able to afford. I envision that may seek shelter and sleeping arrangements that may not benefit our community.
- I also cannot even fathom how a camp host is going to be able to adequately permit campers who have arrived in car from walking into tent sites. I know you explained no overnight parking in the lot. That just means they will park in our community and then walk in!
- Originally I was excited there might be walk-in and kayak tent camping to continue the Marine Trail sites which we have enjoyed around the lake, but the positioning of these seems obtrusive; it just doesn't seem like the right spot here, no topo relief, kind of in the open, so they don't seem suitable at this park

FWP response: The tent sites proposed in Alternative C are modeled after similar sites at Wayfarers and Whitefish Lake State Parks. They are intended to provide a rustic camping experience for people who arrive via foot, bicycle, canoe or kayak, or other human-powered watercraft. These sites have been operational since 2016 and have functioned quite well with little operational challenge. In the rare event that a person would arrive to find all the tent sites occupied, FWP staff are prepared to assist with alternatives. The most frequent use of these campsites has been from people traveling by bicycle. Due to the uncertainty of travel times and itinerary associated with bicycle touring, sites are available without a prior reservation. The

proposed location is intended to take advantage of existing vegetation for screening, and additional screening would be incorporated into the design.

General Comments

- Overnight use will result in noise and light disturbances to neighbors

FWP response: FWP is sensitive to this concern and acknowledges that there would be noise associated with visitor amenities, including cabins and tent sites. We believe that proposed cabins would be situated in a location that would provide vegetative buffering from visual and noise related impacts. All tent and cabin rentals would include information about quiet hour regulations, and park staff would personally contact visitors to inform them of the need for compliance. Lighting would be kept to a bare minimum and designed to cast light downward to illuminate safety hazards.

- Overnight use will result in garbage and fire danger
- overnight use lends itself to vagrancy, squatters, illegal behavior, etc., resulting in 'shutdown' of the site.
- Whenever there's overnight camping or tenting, human waste "will" become issue and if the State

FWP response: Region 1 state parks have experienced infrequent issues with vagrancy or squatters. This is attributed to staff presence, law enforcement patrols, and clear and enforceable park rules posted at all entrances. Restrooms are proposed in convenient locations in both action alternatives. Trash receptacles would be provided in convenient locations and campfires would be prohibited.

- Camping either tent or cabin. I think it will take away from that area and bring unwanted volume

FWP response: Overnight accommodations as proposed would likely account for a small percentage of overall visitation to SBSP. Six tent sites would provide rustic camping over a relatively brief season for people who arrive via foot, bicycle or boat. Cabins rentals are limited to three units, and each cabin has a maximum capacity of 4 people. By comparison, the Wayfarers Unit of Flathead Lake State Park offers 30 RV camping sites, 9 tent camping sites and 12 hike/bike sites. The West Shore Unit offers 37 RV sites and 7 tent sites, and the Big Arm Unit offers 39 RV camping sites, 2 tent camping sites, a group camping site and 3 rentable yurts.

- Overnight use will result It will increase the stress on the wildlife in the area, the natural setting
- Camping would attract more potential misuse of an environmentally sensitive area that is important for our local waterfowl and bird populations.

FWP response: The development of visitor amenities and the public's use of them could have long-term minor adverse impacts to some animal species and their habitats in the park. FWP would implement park user rules that mitigate disturbance from pets and other human activities. This property has been in use by people and pets for decades without regulatory oversight. Formalized access, informational and regulatory signage and staff presence would mitigate adverse impacts to wildlife through active management of the site and visitors.

- The water table is quite high along the north shore (there are many ponds along the more easterly region) so I wonder if camping and heavy use is compatible. Plus the areas close proximity to the EPA site.

FWP response: FWP has taken these considerations into account with the proposed placement of tent sites and cabins. The southernmost proposed cabins would be located approximately 150 yards north of wetlands and approximately 200 yards north of the “Swamp Pond” area within BNSF Railway ownership. The proposed tent sites would be located well north of wetlands on the west side of the park. All camping amenities would be constructed on-grade and would not contact or disturb the water table.

- the traffic is already horrible for property owners on Somers road..camping and cabins will RUIN what has been a local treasure for years
- If overnight use is allowed, I think it should be focused towards locals, not out of staters. Maybe that is just a formula of more sights to the locals, and a lower percentage to out of staters.
- I don't agree on making it a camping area for tourists. A nice day use area would be nice. We need to think of our local families first. Instead of tourists
- With Montana’s dramatic growth and tourism visitation increase most parks have become seasonally overrun by nonresident use. We feel limiting the park to day use only would provide more opportunity for local use.
- Camping only benefits out of state visitors who can plan visits months ahead, rather around a work schedule

FWP response: Montana’s state parks are available to all Montana residents and visitors to Montana. The FWP campsite reservation period is limited to the third weekend in May through the Labor Day weekend each year. Through August of 2023, 67% of reservations for campsites at the four reservable state park campgrounds on Flathead Lake are held by Montana residents. During the shoulder seasons, campsites are available on a first-come basis and resident use accounted for 71% of campers during those months in 2022. Proposed overnight amenities in Alternative C are modest compared to other Region 1 campgrounds in response to public input.

- FHL needs more camping – difficult to get site w/o reservations. The addition of cabins and tent sites will help ease the frustration by visitors trying to get reservations at the other sites around the lake.
- I agree with Alternative C. Because of the ongoing need for more reservable and/or spontaneous access to camping sites during summer season, although small in scope, this alternative will offer scenic and access to water activity for dozens to hundreds of visitors each year.
- Definitely a need. Dry camping is perfect, with access to drinking water.
- Camping there sounds wonderful, as does staying in the cabins.
- The preferred proposal by MT FWP is by far the best option for all considerations and the one I support and hope will be chosen for managing this park
- I like them both as they attract a variety of nature lovers to a pristine gem in the corner of Flathead Lake. Enjoying the lake at night is a special attraction as is appreciating the lakes beauty with family gatherings, swimming, recreational activities are important for generations in perpetuity.
- the addition of limited overnight camping facilities, especially for hikers/bikers meets an important need that is not adequately addressed in other places in the vicinity of SBSP.

FWP response: Camping opportunity on Flathead Lake is limited. The 5 Flathead Lake State Park campgrounds combined offer 161 campsites. By comparison, Glacier National Park provides 1,014 front country campsites.

- cabins and camping sites as it will help the park pay for its own maintenance and will support local businesses more than the other alternates

FWP response: User fees, including camping fees, help offset operational costs at state parks.

- add RV full hookup sites on north end along Somers Road would be a smart choice to allow longer use of area and bring in more money to the Montana FWP. Probably room for some tent sites also.
- 106 acres of land and you are proposing a handful of tent sights? Why not 24 or more rv spots you could easily fit on just a couple of those 106 acres? I would like to see a compromise between those who want no development and the needs of the public at large
- Would be nice to offer a few spots for RV folks even if it had to be self contained and on a first come basis. My wife and I travel some in a small pull behind camper and always find spots like this.
- It would be nice to have handicap access. Primitive camping, no monster size motor homes allowed, 7 to 10 day limit on stay. Noise and bright light limits and fines or removal for violation.
- I also like the idea of overnight camping in some form that remains consistent with the rustic/core designations.

FWP response: During extensive public scoping, RV camping received very little support. The proposed overnight amenities are consistent with the rustic and core designations within the Montana State Parks Classification System.

- I feel FWP chooses option C because it generates the greatest revenue.
- The FWP can't keep up with the existing parks they are charged with.
- What is the cost/benefit analysis of those few cabins and tent sites?

FWP response: FWP maintains high visitor satisfaction as documented through annual customer comments received via the campsite reservation system and state park visitor comment cards. Deferred maintenance is a challenge for Montana's state park system, and FWP has been addressing maintenance and capital investment every biennium. FWP is tasked with providing accessible outdoor recreation, including camping and diversified lodging. Although Montana's state park system relies in part on user fees for operations and capital investment, amortization of those investments may be reached more slowly than in a for-profit organization. The camping and lodging amenities in Alternative C are simple and long-lived to minimize the initial cost.

- Option B for Somers Beach development would be my preference due to the small size of the parcel and future cost to maintain a overnight camping option
- Flathead Lake is woefully short of camping spaces. However, the few sites proposed for this park would do little to offset demand while placing a large administrative burden on FWP out of proportion to the revenue or opportunity provided.
- This area is too open and camping would ruin the beauty of this new area in our community.

- Day Use only would provide more of a balance to the rest of the State's parks around Flathead Lake, i.e., primitive vs developed, and c) it would blend better and be accepted more readily by the local community.
- The option is not in keeping with other Montana state parks around Flathead Lake either.
- Overnight accommodations are available in nearby areas.

FWP response: The proposed camping and diversified lodging in Alternative C are modest and compatible with the size of SBSP. The five mainland state park units of Flathead Lake State Park range in size from 15 acres at Yellow Bay to 240-acres at the Big Arm Unit. All of these park units offer overnight accommodations. Combined, those units offer 161 overnight sites, which are in high demand. The addition of 6 tent sites and 3 rentable cabins would not satisfy the current demand during peak season, but any additional opportunity would add to availability.

- given the overall development of the region. I think it would be best to start with Alternative B and gauge its impacts before any further expansion.
- Rather than put cabins and an awkward (and costly?) auto access for cabin renters, wouldn't it be more generally useful to put in a few parking spaces, so people who wanted to use the swimming beach, as I've heard it called, don't have to rely on the more-distance main parking lot?
- My request is to keep this magnificent area that was so generously donated as Day Use ONLY.
- Clearly, campground or cabins should not be allowed on this newly acquired property. Such development would be intrusive and would negatively impact Flathead Lake's north shore.
- This proposal was recently opposed by the community whose input must be honored.

FWP response: Throughout the various stages of public participation, there has been interest from participants in seeing modest, rustic or core opportunities for overnight accommodations with a preference for tenting or cabins. There have also been participants who prefer that SBSP does not provide any camping or overnight amenities. The modest overnight opportunity proposed in Alternative C is consistent with the feedback received during public scoping and intended as compromise between these competing value sets.

Comments Regarding the Classification of SBSP:

- option A, no action is in alignment with the initial survey participants who predominantly indicated a preference for a rustic and natural park
- We prefer something less even than Alternative B. We see no need for a small rustic day-use park to have an entrance station, a playground, picnic shelters, and a drive-to-beach small boat launch. These amenities lend themselves to larger group activities and will lead to lots of boats and other gear on the beach - stuff better limited by hand-carry from the main parking lot. Please drop those amenities from Alternative B.

FWP response: The proposed amenities are consistent with the Montana State Parks Classification System. Public scoping during EA development showed service level preferences for rustic or core service levels over enhanced service levels. Preferences for experience categories showed preference for a natural or recreational emphasis. The action alternatives proposed in the EA reflect an approach that captures elements of these preferences with a heavier emphasis on natural and rustic designations.

- A more rustic experience is best suited for this park.
- Camping is not “natural or rustic”. Keep the visitor use sites as simple and primitive as possible.
- We object to Alternative C because it would provide overnight cabins and tent sites. This is neither natural nor rustic nor day-use only

FWP response: The action alternatives in the EA are reflective of the input received during public scoping. The Montana State Parks Classification System provides the following guidance:

Service Level Designations

RUSTIC: Parks with **rustic services** attract visitors who expect a self-directed experience with limited developed amenities. Visitors may expect:

- Limited amenities, such as vault toilets
- Gravel or paved road surfaces
- Campsites without paving or electrical service
- Trail systems that may be unpaved
- Sites without potable water
- Pack in/pack out trash
- limited on-site staffing *or* active programming

CORE: Parks with **core services** provide a moderate amenity and service level. In addition to the amenities at the rustic service level, they offer some or all of the following:

- A combination of vault latrines and flush toilet comfort stations
- Campsites or overnight facilities
- Paved and unpaved trail systems
- Potable drinking water
- Developed day use facilities - boat ramps, group shelters, picnic areas, and other services such as small concessions
- Interpretive signage or programs
- Limited, but regular on-site staffing that may not be available year-round

ENHANCED: Parks with **enhanced services** have a high amenity level and offer several options for an enhanced visitor experience. In addition to the amenities at the core service level, they offer some or all of the following:

- Full-service comfort stations and in many cases showers
- A variety of overnight camping options
- Visitor centers with interpretive exhibits
- Regularly scheduled interpretive and educational programming and special events
- Full service concessions
- On-site staffing, typically full-time and year-round

Experience Groups

NATURAL: Parks that connect visitors with nature in ways that cause them to learn, reflect, and appreciate. These experiences may provide the opportunity for solitary

reflection in the presence of Montana's scenic beauty, or they may engage the visitor with others as they explore natural processes related to exceptional geologic, wildlife, botanical, paleontological, riparian and riverine environments.

HERITAGE: Parks that invite reflection on the past by revealing the stories of Montana's cultures and histories, often in the very places where they occurred. Heritage parks provide opportunities to view, explore, or learn about the cultural and historic features unique to the site.

RECREATIONAL: Parks that encourage play in adult and child alike through a variety of options for outdoor activity. A recreational park may solely provide a specific type of outdoor recreation - e.g., fishing, camping, hiking, boating - or a mix of diverse outdoor opportunities, ranging from active to passive and from solitary to social in nature.

Comments Regarding Project Scoping and Public Process

- Was there a change in the demographics of those who responded to the July survey from the earlier survey responders? What demographic group do you anticipate primarily using the Somers Beach State Park? Residents of Somers? Seasonal residents of the Flathead Valley? Tourists and visitors to the area? Did your surveys reach and include your primary visitor group? What component of those who participated in the surveys were from this group? How did you quantitatively assess the input of your primary park visitors vs those less likely to be frequent visitors? Or are you giving equal weight to preferences of a once-per-year visitor and those of a daily visitor?

FWP Response: FWP enjoyed strong participation in the scoping survey that was conducted in the spring of 2022. FWP solicited participation through several channels:

- FWP hosted an evening Zoom informational session to launch the survey and provide the public with an opportunity to ask questions.
- FWP issued a press release and posted social media announcements on FWP's local and statewide channels.
- FWP sent emails to individuals who offered comments on past Somers Beach planning efforts (the land acquisition and interim development proposals).
- FWP hung posters with a QR code to the survey in the community of Somers, at local state parks and at FWP offices.
- FWP collaborated with partner organizations and key local entities who shared the survey with their membership

The 1,284 participants in the scoping survey were invited to participate in subsequent on-site and virtual EA development public input sessions if they provided contact information and expressed an interest in being notified of subsequent input opportunities. 73% of respondents provided that information. The predicted demographics of park usage are not known, but the demographics of survey respondents may provide some insight:

- 80% of respondents reside within Flathead County.
- 90% of respondents had visited a Montana state park within the last year. 31% from 1 to 5 times, 22% from 6 to 10 times, 11% from 10-15 times, 26% more than 15 times.

Only 2% indicated they had not visited a Montana state park in the previous year. 7% did not respond to that question.

- 56% of respondents were female, 25% male, and 19% did not respond to that question
- 11% of respondents were 18-29 years of age, 23% were 30-39, 17% 40-49, 12% were 50-59, 17% 60-69, and 9% were over the age of 70. 10% did not respond to that question.

- The EA states that the feedback you received significantly changed in some areas of the survey between the two feedback sessions. To what do you attribute that change? Might that change be due to shift in those reached and included in the July public input? Or how the question was framed?

FWP Response: Participants of the 2022 survey were offered the opportunity to participate in the subsequent July on-site or virtual meetings. Additionally, these meetings were heavily advertised through local media outlets, on FWP website and social media posts. The materials from these meetings were posted on the FWP SBSP web page for people who could not attend one of the meetings, providing them with an opportunity to review and provide input at their leisure.

- If 1,284 people participated in the first survey, how many participants did you survey in July? The above passage from the EA, to me, reads, 61% of 1,284 participants preferred day use only. Then 75% of an undisclosed number of participants in July indicated a preference for overnight accommodation. This is not informative without the second total number of participants. If you're going to use a percentage to summarize public input and the shift in said input, it would be more transparent if both totals were included.

FWP Response: There were approximately 70 participants in the July meetings (combined) with email input received from 9 additional participants who viewed the online materials. The July meetings were offered to share design concepts that were derived from the initial survey responses. Input gathered at the July meetings was further utilized to develop alternatives within the EA. Although the EA process is procedural and not a vote, FWP believes that the diverse preferences for overnight accommodations vs. day use only are reflected throughout the EA development and in the action alternatives.

- What is USFWS input on this proposal? What is their predicted level of impacts to nesting birds with the increase of human visitors, encroachment and disturbance, particularly if recreational use spreads to 24-hours through campsites?
- How can impacts to wildlife and habitats be determined to be minor without a baseline of comparison? At what point would trespass be at an unacceptable level and what will be done about it? USFWS was not listed on page 36 of the EA as an agency consulted during preparation of the EA.

FWP Response: In 2020, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) issued a letter of support for the purchase of Somers Beach for inclusion in Montana's state park system, citing that, *"The new public access site would provide much needed legal public recreational access to the north shore in the Somers area and buffer the adjacent U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Flathead Lake Waterfowl Production Area"* as a reason for that support. FWP is aware of the long-running challenge the federal Waterfowl Production Area (WPA) has experienced with trespass during the annual nesting closure and has partnered with the agency for several years to address this

issue. On the east side of the WPA, FWP has kept the Osprey View Fisheries Conservation Area open for spring access to reduce pressure on the WPA during the closure. In 2022, FWP staff posted notice of the WPA spring closure at the newly acquired SBSP to notify the public. In the past few months, FWP staff have met in person and on site with the WPA manager and USFWS law enforcement officers to strategize how to reduce trespass during the closure. Prior to the 2023 closure, FWP staff placed signage, jointly developed by the two agencies, at entry points to both FWP sites during the nesting closure, and FWP staff deployed movable boundary markers on the lakebed along the invisible shared boundaries between the sites. Signage has been reinforced with materials posted on FWP electronic and social media platforms, and staff patrols by both agencies during the closure period. The limited overnight opportunities proposed in Alternative C are not expected to increase trespass beyond what has previously occurred on the WMA. This is due to the location, limited number of sites, and season of operation for both tent sites and cabins, and due to information provided by FWP staff to users. FWP concurs with the USFWS that the state park will provide a buffer to the WPA that might not otherwise exist if the property had been sold to a private interest.

Comments Beyond Project Scope

The following comments are beyond the scope of the EA.

- Is there any ongoing or proposed monitoring of the species diversity and abundance of birds in the adjacent WPA?
- Please make sure you have the mosquitoes under control
- No pets or animals. Service animals must be on leash at all times and fitted with a swim diaper, as so should children
- No overnight parking. Limit vehicle numbers and length.
- Motor homes, trailers, semis with cargo containers don't belong.
- I think it is critical you put appropriate signage on the and in the small groves of trees to tell walkers and dog walkers to stay away from bird hunters and stay away from decoy spreads and blinds
- Please direct people to stay in that area during hunting season, as people walking also flush all the pheasants as they walk on the internal trails, public land hunters at that point are just wishing for a bird.
- I think access for duck hunting should be farther East with trails to the shore, as I remember walking in the north shore with my family one Christmas holiday with hunters shooting over our heads!
- Also of concern is the manner by which FWP will limit the personal use of drones over the park. The ease of use and their ubiquitous presence in everyday life and activities makes the use, or misuse of them, compete with and / or conflict with the values of the State Park system. Nowhere in the Environmental Study did I see the topic raised...though it may have been addressed under another area
- I have also questioned from the onset, the need for a gravel beach at the end of Burnell Road, which where erosion has not been due to protective riprap.
- A fishing pier extending out into Flathead Lake would be a unique addition to this area (3) Development of a frisbee golf course would provide another recreational opportunity for both children and adults.
- I strongly encourage FWP to adopt a non-motorized use for watercraft in the state park

- isn't there also another FWP acquisition along the North Shore on the other side of the WPA? What is its future role and how does that relate to SBSPP?
- consider adding signage that directs day use users away from the boat launch to the Somers Beach State Park.
- Is it prudent to have the park hosts detain or restrain people who may cause problems while waiting for the sheriff's department to show up?
- Please consider enlarging already developed camping areas with existing services in close proximity in a more cost effective manner rather than altering the unique setting of Somers Beach.
- Why can't you further develop or enlarge the camping and picnic areas that are already available at the state parks along the lake--West Shore, Wayfarers, Yellow Bay, Big Arm, Finley Point.
- Accessibility to the park would be from the Hwy 93 or Hwy 82, Hwy 93 already has a precarious turn in/out situation, Hwy 82 turning onto Somers road has seen accidents resulting in fatalities.
- 1. I am concerned about additional traffic turning off of/crossing Highway 82. This intersection is dangerous as it is currently. Can you keep the speed limit on 82 lower until east of this turn off (expect more traffic w/ directional sign for Park).

FWP Recommended Alternative and Final Decision

Based upon the modified final EA and the applicable laws, regulations, and policies, I have determined that the proposed action would not have significant adverse effects on the human and physical environments associated with this project. Therefore, I conclude that the EA is the appropriate level of analysis, and the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is unnecessary. Development of the chosen alternative is contingent upon State Parks and Recreation Board approval of expenditures over \$50,000.

I have decided to issue a modified final environmental assessment and to implement Alternative C (preferred alternative) with modifications, which with this decision notice will serve as the final documents for this proposal.

Based on input received during the public comment period and available funding, overnight opportunity will be limited to three rental cabins. The shared hike/bike tenting facility will not be installed.

Also, construction of double vault latrines (one on the west side of the park near the rental cabins and one near the main parking area) will be pursued instead of flushing restrooms. The park entry station and the proposed natural playground will not be installed at this time. The remaining components of Alternative C will be implemented pending actual construction costs received during the formal bidding process. If costs exceed available funding, the group picnic shelter and/or the hand launch may be excluded from construction and installed later should additional funding become available.

The final modified EA may be viewed at or obtained from Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Region 1, 490 N. Meridian Road, Kalispell, MT 59901. Please direct requests and questions to Dillon Tabish, Region 1 Communication and Education Program Manager, at (406) 751-4564, or Dillon.Tabish@mt.gov.

Lee Anderson

Lee Anderson
Region 1 Supervisor, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

4/17/23

Date