



DECISION NOTICE

Clearwater Crossing Fishing Access Site Improvements

October 20, 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 1, 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 checklist EA (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 September 19 to October 10, 2023. A legal Notice was published in: Helena *Independent Record*, *Missoulian*, and Seeley Swan *Pathfinder*, and the Draft EA was posted on FWP's Public Notice webpage: <https://fwp.mt.gov/news/public-notice>. The Draft EA was 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 1 comment during the public comment period.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION

Name of Project: Clearwater Crossing FAS Improvements. The Clearwater Crossing FAS is in the Blackfoot drainage along the Clearwater River, 30 miles east of Bonner on Highway 200. It is managed by Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks and is a highly popular site. Clearwater Crossing is used heavily by the public for river access and camping. The site is 16 acres in size and includes a day use area, one latrine, a pioneered hand launch, 6 campsites, and a gravel boat ramp with an undefined parking area.

The original design of the site located the camps directly in the riparian area of the Clearwater River. This has caused erosion and a corresponding decrease in streamside vegetation. There is a more suitable location for these campsites within the FAS boundaries. The project proposal would move the 6 campsites to the east into the treed area. The previous location of the campsites should be revegetated to improve aesthetics and stream health. A defined parking area for users of the boat ramp would also improve site vegetation and reduce erosion.

PURPOSE AND NEED

The location of the current campsites in the riparian area is problematic. Human activity in the sites is eroding the banks and causing a loss of vegetation. The location of the campsites is also making it difficult to encourage vegetation growth.

The location of the campsites along the river also interferes with the boat ramp and parking area. This increases human conflict and leads to dissatisfaction of visitors. The undefined parking area near the boat ramp causes chaotic situations especially during peak use.

Moving the campsites to the east into a treed area with a sagebrush understory would solve many of the problems in the site and would increase satisfaction of the visitor. The new location is adjacent to the river but better suited to maintaining riverside vegetation. The previous campsites would be revegetated, improving river health by providing adequate shade. The new location would achieve FWP goals of separating day and overnight use. The new location would provide shade and would be away from the boat ramp and parking.

The parking area near the boat ramp also needs to be defined. Stalls need to be defined with lines and parking curbs. This would decrease resource issues from parking in the grass and increase site efficiency. An increase in visitor satisfaction is another benefit of a defined parking area.

ALTERNATIVES ANALYZED

Alternative 1: Move the campsites to the proposed location and revegetate the current location. Define the parking area by putting in stalls and parking delineators.

Alternative 2: NO ACTION

If the No Action alternative is selected the current locations of the sites and the area around them will be vacant of vegetation soon. Also, campers and day users may continue to have conflicts.

PUBLIC COMMENT AND FWP RESPONSE

One public comment was received during the public comment period.

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

"The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) staff has reviewed the information on the Clearwater Fishing Access Site EA. This information indicates there will not be an increase to the number of campsites or change in use for the fishing access site. If the project impacts the approach onto MT 200 you need to contact the MDT Missoula Area Maintenance Chief (Steve Felix) for permits or any requirements. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.."

FWP Response: Thank you for your comment. Under the current proposal none of the work would encroach or impact the approach from Highway 200.

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 1), 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 1, the proposed action.

Sincerely,



Randy Arnold
FWP Region 2 Supervisor
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks