

DRAFT

MEPA/NEPA/HB495 CHECKLIST

PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

1. **Type of Proposed State Action** Construct new boat ramp and approach loop, stabilize substrate at toe of existing boat ramp, extend parking area, construct rock vein upstream of existing boat ramp (rock vein not currently funded).
2. **Agency Authority for the Proposed Action** The 1977 Montana Legislature enacted statute 87-1-605 which directs Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) to acquire, develop and operate a system of fishing accesses. The legislature established an earmarked funding account to ensure that this function would be accomplished.
3. **Name of Project** Bighorn Fishing Access Site New Boat Ramp Construction, Repair of Existing Boat Ramp, Parking Extension, and Future Rock Vein Installation.
4. **Name, Address and Phone Number of Project Sponsor (if other than the agency)**
MFWP Sponsored
5. **If Applicable:**

Estimated Construction/Commencement Date Fall, 1998

Estimated Completion Date Fall, 1998

Current Status of Project Design (% complete)

Planning Design 100% complete (see attached site map with proposed actions)

Engineering Design 0% complete

6. **Location Affected by Proposed Action (county, range and township)**

Bighorn Fishing Access Site (FAS), 27 miles south of Hardin on Highway 313, Bighorn County, Montana, T05S, R32E, Sections 8 and 9. Total site acreage = 78.44 acres

7. **Project Size: Estimate the number of acres that would be directly affected that are currently:**

(a) Developed:	(d) Floodplain
residential _ acres <u><1</u> acres
industrial _ acres	
(b) Open Space/Woodlands/ Recreation <u><1</u> acre	(e) Productive:
	irrigated cropland _ acres
	dry cropland _ acres
	forestry _ acres
	rangeland _ acres
(c) Wetlands/Riparian Areas <u><1</u> acre	other _ acres

8. **Map/site plan: attach an original 8 1/2" x 11" or larger section of the most recent USGS 7.5' series topographic map showing the location and boundaries of the area that would be affected by the proposed action. A different map scale may be substituted if more appropriate or if required by agency rule. If available, a site plan should also be attached.**

Location map and site plan attached.

9. **Narrative Summary of the Proposed Action or Project including the Benefits and Purpose of the Proposed Action.**

The proposed action will construct a new boat ramp (24' x 50') and approach loop providing vehicle access to the ramp. The concrete ramp will be framed and poured to the water's edge. Three 8' x 20' sections of concrete block "cable ramp" will be installed with washed gravel below water line. Three additional sections of cable ramp will be installed at the base of the existing boat ramp to help stabilize the substrate. The rock vein will be constructed upstream from the existing ramp and extend approximately 20' from the southeast bank. The top of the vein will be near water surface level at base flow (2000-2500 cubic feet per second or cfs). Material will consist of Class I rip rap from the county highway department quarry. All construction will occur during the time of lowest water levels (fall or early spring). The parking area will be slightly increased near the new ramp. Please refer to the attached site plan (Attachment 3).

An estimated 60-70 vehicles/day enter Bighorn FAS during the peak season, with the vast majority of these involved in boating activities. Site users have made numerous requests to MFWP for a second ramp due to the high visitation and because the existing ramp does not safely accommodate users during high water. The second ramp will be located in a more sheltered area, angled downstream and slightly cut into the bank to alleviate hazards during high water use. It will disburse site visitors, which will reduce vehicle and boat congestion during loading and unloading. The cable ramp installed adjacent to the existing ramp will reduce damage to trailers and vehicles as well as substrate degradation.

The rock vein will direct flow away from the bank, thus creating a small "back water area" surrounding the existing ramp. This will reduce the possibility of accidents caused primarily during high water when the end of the ramp is exposed to strong current. The vein's low profile will allow relatively safe passage over it during average (3500 cfs) or higher flows. The rock vein may be installed in the future, if more funding becomes available. Approximately \$10,000 additional funding is needed to install the vein.

10. Listing of any other Local, State or Federal agency that has overlapping or additional jurisdiction.

(a) Permits:

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Permit</u>	<u>Date Filed/#</u>
Water Quality Bureau	3A Permit	Fall 1998
Corps of Engineers	404 Permit	Fall 1998
MFWP	124 Permit	Fall 1998
Bighorn County	Weed Permit	Fall 1998

(b) Funding:

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Funding Amount</u>
MFWP - General License Account	\$25,000
Bighorn Alliance	\$ 5,000
TOTAL	\$30,000

(c) Other Overlapping or Additional Jurisdictional Responsibilities:

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Type of Responsibility</u>
State Historical Preservation Office	Cultural Clearance
Crow Indian Reservation	Contractor Hiring Preferences

11. List of Agencies Consulted During Preparation of the EA:

MFWP - Fisheries Division
Design and Construction Division
Parks Division

PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

1. LAND RESOURCES Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown*	None	Minor*	Potentially Significant		
▶ a. Soil instability or changes in geologic substructure?		X				1a.
b. Disruption, displacement, erosion, compaction, moisture loss, or over-covering of soil which would reduce productivity or fertility?			X		yes	1b.
▶ c. Destruction, covering or modification of any unique geologic or physical features?		X				1c.
d. Changes in siltation, deposition or erosion patterns that may modify the channel of a river or stream or the bed or shore of a lake?			X		yes	1d.
e. Exposure of people or property to earthquakes, landslides, ground failure, or other natural hazard?		X				
f. Other <u>N/A</u>						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

1a. No changes to the soil stability or geologic substructure are anticipated.

1b. Soil will be removed (and used for road fill on site) for construction of the new ramp, approach loop, and parking extension. Due to the close proximity of the new ramp in relation to the existing roads, soil disruption and displacement will be minimal. Much of the affected area is currently disturbed by vehicular traffic overflowing the existing facilities. After construction, native grass seed will be planted as per specifications to reduce possibilities of erosion adjacent to the new ramp.

1c. No unique geologic or physical features will be altered with this project.

Bank excavation to install the new boat ramp may result in minor and temporary amounts of deposition and erosion. The concrete cable ramps will help stabilize the substrate at the base of the ramps.

The rock vein is designed to slightly turn the water away from the bank to protect the existing boat ramp. Consequently the water will "bounce" back to the bank farther downstream, possibly causing minor bank erosion. Some aggradation and degradation will occur on each side of the vein due to altered flow vectors. This instability should be minimal and short-lived due to the low profile of the vein. It is expected that the change in water direction will also help keep the boat ramp clean of silt. The river channel will not be significantly altered by the proposed actions.

⊛ Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or can not be evaluated.

⊛ Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM)

◆ Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

◆◆ Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

2. AIR Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown*	None	Minor*	Potentially Significant		
a. Emission of air pollutants or deterioration of ambient air quality? (also see 13 (c))			X		yes	2a.
b. Creation of objectionable odors?		X				
c. Alteration of air movement, moisture, or temperature patterns or any change in climate, either locally or regionally?		X				
d. Adverse effects on vegetation, including crops, due to increased emissions of pollutants?		X				
e. ♦For P-R/D-J projects, will the project result in any discharge which will conflict with federal or state air quality regs? (Also see 2a)		N/A				
f. Other <u> N/A </u>						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Air Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

2a. Some minor and temporary amounts of dust may be generated during excavation for the new boat ramp, approach loop, parking extension, and grading for surrounding landscaping. Removal of vegetation surrounding the project will be limited to minimize dust.

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PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

3. WATER Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown*	None	Minor*	Potentially Significant		
a. Discharge into surface water or any alteration of surface water quality including but not limited to temperature, dissolved oxygen or turbidity?			X		yes	3a.
b. Changes in drainage patterns or the rate and amount of surface runoff?			X		yes	3b.
c. Alteration of the course or magnitude of flood water or other flows?		X				
d. Changes in the amount of surface water in any water body or creation of a new water body?		X				
e. Exposure of people or property to water related hazards such as flooding?			X (negative)	X (positive)	yes	3e.
f. Changes in the quality of groundwater?		X				
g. Changes in the quantity of groundwater?		X				
h. Increase in risk of contamination of surface or groundwater?		X				
i. Effects on any existing water right or reservation?		X				
j. Effects on other water users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quality?		X				
k. Effects on other users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quantity?		X				
l. ♦♦For P-R/D-J, will the project affect a designated floodplain? (Also see 3c)		N/A				
m. ♦♦For P-R/D-J, will the project result in any discharge that will affect federal or state water quality regulations? (Also see 3a)		N/A				
n. Other: <u> N/A </u>						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Water Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

3a. Excavation required by the project will increase turbidity during construction of the new ramp. Measures will be specified in the contract to mitigate the effect on the surface water quality. Placement of the cable ramps and rock vein will cause temporary and insignificant amounts of turbidity as well. The rock vein placement will cause a certain amount of turbidity, but will be limited to the time of construction (less than a day). Construction of the proposed projects will during periods of lowest water levels.

3b. A slight increase in surface runoff will occur due to the increase in impervious area associated with the new boat ramp, approach loop and parking extension. Proper construction and grading will minimize the affects on water quality or possible erosion.

3e. The rock vein will create a backwater area around the existing boat ramp, therefore reducing the possibility of accidents occurring when people take out or launch their boats in high water.

The vein itself could be a slight hazard if boaters float over the vein during periods of extreme low water (less than 2500 cfs). This impact is expected to be minor due to several items: (1) average river flows are 3500 cfs which would allow safe passage over the vein; (2) periods of low water (below 2500 cfs) seldom occur; (3) the majority of floaters are accompanied by guides who float the river regularly and would be aware of the hazard to avoid it if necessary; (4) local signing could help caution floaters of the vein's presence.

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PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

4. VEGETATION Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown*	None	Minor*	Potentially Significant		
a. Changes in the diversity, productivity or abundance of plant species (including trees, shrubs, grass, crops, and aquatic plants)?			X		yes	4a.
b. Alteration of a plant community?		X				
c. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				
d. Reduction in acreage or productivity of any agricultural land?		X				
e. Establishment or spread of noxious weeds?			X		yes	4e.
f. ♦♦For P-R/D-J, will the project affect wetlands, or prime and unique farmland?		N/A				
g. Other: <u> N/A </u>						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

4a. The majority of the area affected by this proposal has previously been altered due to high recreational use. These actions will help focus users to developed areas. Construction of the new ramp, approach loop, and parking extension will require removal of plant species in the immediate area. Most of these are native grass species. Construction plans will specify saving trees on either side of the new ramp. Vehicles are currently driving over areas that will be the approach loop and extended parking area. The new road delineation will help contain vehicles to designated roads, minimizing impacts to the surrounding vegetation. Vegetation may be removed or temporarily crushed by equipment and construction material in a narrow area along the bank to allow installation of the rock vein. All disrupted areas will be seeded with native grasses to help mitigate the effects of construction.

Areas disturbed during the excavation for the new facilities become prone to the establishment of noxious weeds. Native grass seed will be planted at the conclusion of the project to re-vegetate the site and to reduce the establishment of noxious weed species. In addition, ongoing weed control efforts (mechanical and chemical) will target disturbed areas until adequate ground cover has returned.

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PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

▶ 5. FISH/WILDLIFE Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown*	None	Minor*	Potentially Significant		
a. Deterioration of critical fish or wildlife habitat?		X				
b. Changes in the diversity or abundance of game animals or bird species?		X				
c. Changes in the diversity or abundance of nongame species?			X		yes	5c.
d. Introduction of new species into an area?		X				
e. Creation of a barrier to the migration or movement of animals?		X				
f. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				
g. Increase in conditions that stress wildlife populations or limit abundance (including harassment, legal or illegal harvest or other human activity)?		X				
h. ♦♦For P-R/D-J, will the project be performed in any area in which T&E species are present, and will the project affect any T&E species or their habitat? (Also see 5f)		N/A				
i. ♦For P-R/D-J, will the project introduce or export any species not presently or historically occurring in the receiving location? (Also see 5d)		N/A				
j. Other: _____ N/A _____						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

The areas affected by the proposed actions currently receive intense vehicular pressure. The addition of the proposed actions to the site are expected to have a very small impact on the area fish and wildlife. No known threatened or endangered species inhabit the site.

5c. Due to the excavation of vegetative habitat for the construction of the proposed facilities, minor displacement of small, terrestrial, non-game animals and bird species may occur. Construction specifications will ensure that vegetation removal will be kept to a minimum.

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HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

6. <u>NOISE/ELECTRICAL EFFECTS</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown*	None	Minor*	Potentially Significant		
a. Increases in existing noise levels?			X			6a.
b. Exposure of people to severe or nuisance noise levels?			X			6b.
c. Creation of electrostatic or electromagnetic effects that could be detrimental to human health or property?		X				
d. Interference with radio or television reception and operation?		X				
e. Other: <u>N/A</u>						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

6a. Temporary increases in noise levels can be expected during the construction and installation of the new facilities due to use of heavy equipment (i.e. cement trucks, backhoe, grader, etc) to complete the project.

6b. The noise levels created by the construction and installation of the proposed activity will disturb the recreational experience for some boaters and site visitors. The requests received by MFWP to install the new ramp and additional features imply that many visitors are willing to endure this temporary annoyance.

HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

7. <u>LAND USE</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown*	None	Minor*	Potentially Significant		
a. Alteration of or interference with the productivity or profitability of the existing land use of an area?			X (positive)			7a.
b. Conflict with a designated natural area or area of unusual scientific or educational importance?		X				
c. Conflict with any existing land use whose presence would constrain or potentially prohibit the proposed action?		X				
d. Adverse effects on or relocation of residences?			X			7d.
e. Other: <u>N/A</u>						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

7a. The majority of site users are accompanied by professional guides who helped elevate the priority of the proposed action within the MFWP Region-5 fishing access site projects. The new facilities will reduce the physical obstacles of conducting business safely with clients and will expedite guides' boat launching and loading times.

7b. The new ramp is close to the northern MFWP property boundary. The adjacent property owners have granted 30.07' of meander line as easement to MFWP in a previous agreement (see attached Right of Way Easement). This 0.018 acres may be used by boaters to launch and take out boats from the river. The new ramp will bring a greater number of boaters approximately 150' closer to the neighboring residence and fishing lodge. The adjacent property owners can benefit from the new facilities, as it pertains to their outfitting business, however they do own a private boat ramp farther downstream.

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HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

8. RISK/HEALTH HAZARDS Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown*	None	Minor*	Potentially Significant		
a. Risk of an explosion or release of hazardous substances (including, but not limited to oil, pesticides, chemicals, or radiation) in the event of an accident or other forms of disruption?		X				
b. Affect an existing emergency response or emergency evacuation plan or create a need for a new plan?		X				
c. Creation of any human health hazard or potential hazard?			X			8c.
d. ♦For P-R/D-J, will any chemical toxicants be used? (Also see 8a)		N/A				
e. Other: _____ N/A						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

8c. The current human health risks at the site motivated consideration of the proposed actions. The wider distribution of vehicles, people and boats will decrease the risks involved when entering and exiting the water with boats and gear, particularly during high flows. The new ramp's downstream angle and recessed position within the bank will reduce the risks involved with launching and pulling a boat out of the river. Construction of the rock vein would create a similar shielded situation at the existing ramp.

A minor hazard may be present if boaters attempt to float over the rock vein during flows less than 2500 cfs. Local awareness and cautionary signs can help mitigate possible dangers.

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HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

9. <u>COMMUNITY IMPACT</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown*	None	Minor*	Potentially Significant		
a. Alteration of the location, distribution, density, or growth rate of the human population of an area?				X (positive)		9a.
b. Alteration of the social structure of a community?		X				
c. Alteration of the level or distribution of employment or community or personal income?		X				
d. Changes in industrial or commercial activity?			X (positive)			9d.
e. Increased traffic hazards or effects on existing transportation facilities or patterns of movement of people and goods?			X (positive)			9e.
f. Other: <u>N/A</u>						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

9a. The new boat ramp will allow boaters to distribute themselves across the site to avoid congestion caused by vehicles, people, or boats. This redistribution is expected to speed up launching and take out times, which will further relieve congestion and enhance the users's recreational experience.

9d. Much of the boating use at this site is by commercial fishing guides. The proposed actions were encouraged by the local outfitting and guide club, the Bighorn Alliance. The additional boat ramp would increase their productivity and provide a more sheltered location for boat launching. It also facilitates river access for the non-guided boater.

9e. The new boat ramp and approach loop will help disburse and direct traffic, therefore providing safer traffic patterns.

⚙️ Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or can not be evaluated.

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HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

10. PUBLIC SERVICES/TAXES/UTILITIES Will the proposed action:	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown*	None	Minor*	Potentially Significant		
a. Have an effect upon or result in a need for new or altered governmental services in any of the following areas: fire or police protection, schools, parks/recreational facilities, roads or other public maintenance, water supply, sewer or septic systems, solid waste disposal, health, or other governmental services? If any, specify: <u>road and recreational facilities maintenance</u>			X			10a.
b. Have an effect upon the local or state tax base and revenues?		X				
c. Result in a need for new facilities or substantial alterations of any of the following utilities: electric power, natural gas, other fuel supply or distribution systems, or communications?		X				
d. Result in increased used of any energy source?		X				
▶ e. Define projected revenue sources						10e.
▶ f. Define projected maintenance costs.						10f.
g. Other: <u>N/A</u>						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

10a. This site is currently owned and maintained by MFWP, therefore the increased demands on a governmental body will be minimal. The new roadway and parking areas are small additions and will not require significantly more maintenance than existing roadways. The proposed rock vein is expected to further reduce silt loading on the boat ramps.

e. Funding sources for the proposed project:

MFWP General Licensing Account	\$25,000
<u>Bighorn Alliance</u>	<u>\$5,000</u>
TOTAL	\$30,000

Funding for the rock vein is not currently available.

10f. Maintenance costs for the proposed project are not expected to rise significantly with the addition of the proposed facilities. Yellowtail Dam and the Afterbay impoundment significantly reduce water turbidity and aggradation on the boat ramps, therefore requiring little maintenance. Visitation is not expected to rise significantly due to the proposed actions, consequently, amounts of solid waste and latrine sewage are not expected to increase. Road maintenance will increase slightly due to the added approach loop for the new boat ramp and extended parking area.



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Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM)



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HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

▶ 11. <u>AESTHETICS/RECREATION</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown*	None	Minor*	Potentially Significant		
a. Alteration of any scenic vista or creation of an aesthetically offensive site or effect that is open to public view?			X			11a.
b. Alteration of the aesthetic character of a community or neighborhood?		X				
▶c. Alteration of the quality or quantity of recreational/tourism opportunities and settings? (Attach Tourism Report)			X			11c.
d. ♦For P-R/D-J, will any designated or proposed wild or scenic rivers, trails or wilderness areas be impacted? (Also see 11a, 11c)		N/A				
e. Other: <u> N/A </u>						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

It is estimated that the proposed actions will have a subtle impact on the scenic beauty, but provide a significant increase in the recreational opportunities in the area.

11a. The new boat ramp will be visible from the river (west) or when closely approaching the ramp from the access road. The aesthetic impacts of the project are predicted to be insignificant due to the currently developed nature of the site and the low profile of the boat ramp.

11c. Public comments received by MFWP indicate that the proposed actions are desired and will positively increase the quality and quantity of recreational opportunities relating to the Bighorn River, i.e. boating access for recreational floating, fishing, hunting, and wildlife watching.

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HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

12. CULTURAL/HISTORICAL RESOURCES Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown*	None	Minor*	Potentially Significant		
a. Destruction or alteration of any site, structure or object of prehistoric historic, or paleontological importance?		X				12a.
b. Physical change that would affect unique cultural values?		X				
c. Effects on existing religious or sacred uses of a site or area?		X				
d. ♦♦For P-R/D-J, will the project affect historic or cultural resources? Attach SHPO letter of clearance. (Also see 12.a)		N/A				
e. Other: <u> N/A </u>						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

12a. The proposed actions will not impact any sites of historical significance. Please refer to the attached letter of clearance from the State Historical Preservation Society.

to ,

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HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

13. SUMMARY EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE Will the proposed action, considered as a whole:	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown*	None	Minor*	Potentially Significant		
a. Have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? (A project or program may result in impacts on two or more separate resources which create a significant effect when considered together or in total.)		X				
b. Involve potential risks or adverse effects which are uncertain but extremely hazardous if they were to occur?			X		yes	13b.
c. Potentially conflict with the substantive requirements of any local, state, or federal law, regulation, standard or formal plan?		X				
d. Establish a precedent or likelihood that future actions with significant environmental impacts will be proposed?		X				
e. Generate substantial debate or controversy about the nature of the impacts that would be created?		X				
f. ♦For P-R/D-J, is the project expected to have organized opposition or generate substantial public controversy? (Also see 13e)		N/A				
g. ♦♦For P-R/D-J, list any federal or state permits required.		N/A				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

13b. Activities occurring in or near cold water have potential risks. If a boater incorrectly navigates over the rock vein at low water, there is potential for a serious accident. The presence of the vein could be well signed and highlighted on area brochures/maps to reduce the possibilities of accidents. Local guide shops and the National Park Service visitors center could help inform visiting fishermen/boaters about the vein and proper navigation around it to avoid crises.

- ⊛ Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or can not be evaluated.
- ♦ Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM)
- ♦ Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.
- ♦♦ Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

2. Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives (including the no action alternative) to the proposed action whenever alternatives are reasonably available and prudent to consider and a discussion of how the alternatives would be implemented:

Alternative 1. No Action

This alternative does not address current problems involving public safety and site degradation due to concentrated use and high visitation. MFWP would continue to receive complaints from site users. Boating accidents would continue due to difficult take out/access conditions at the existing ramp during high water.

Alternative 2. Repair Existing Boat Ramp

Adding cable block sections to the existing ramp would help stabilize the substrate which receives extensive abuse. The issue of difficult and unsafe river access during high water would not be solved. Visitation would continue to be concentrated at one ramp causing vehicular, boat and visitor congestion. This alternative would be implemented through contracted services complying with MFWP guidelines.

Alternative 3. Repair Existing Boat Ramp and Construct Rock Vein

This alternative would address the safety hazards involved for boaters launching and leaving the river. The cable ramps installed at the ramp toe would stabilize the eroding substrate. Visitation, however, would remain concentrated at one location for all boating use, causing traffic congestion and long waiting periods for ramp access. MFWP has received several complaints indicating one boat ramp is not enough to accommodate the number of boaters using the site. This alternative would be implemented through contracted services complying with MFWP guidelines.

Alternative 4. Preferred Alternative: Repair Existing Boat Ramp, Construct New Boat Ramp

The majority of visitation (over 100 vehicles per day during peak season) at Bighorn FAS involves boating, therefore facilities regarding this activity are of highest priority. The proposed action as described, addresses safety concerns and accommodates the high site visitation. The new ramp would be inset into the bank and angled downstream providing calm water for boaters to launch and take out. The new ramp would allow visitors to disperse, yielding safer access, less congestion for visitors, vehicles, boats, and the likelihood of a positive recreational experience. Installation of the cable ramps at the existing ramp would stabilize the substrate and allow for continued high use without further degradation. Funding for the rock vein is not available at this time. This phase of the project could easily be completed during low water after use of the proposed facilities are evaluated. It is possible that the new ramp will sustain the demands for use during high flows when the existing ramp is most dangerous. Evaluation of one or two seasons, discussions with local guides and site users may indicate that the rock vein is unnecessary. The proposed alternative would be implemented through contracted services complying with MFWP guidelines.

Alternative 5. Repair Existing Boat Ramp, Construct New Boat Ramp and Rock Vein

This alternative would adequately address all concerns listed above. It is fiscally not possible at this time. It is unknown when or from where the additional funding would come if this action was selected. MFWP management and the local guide club believe that concerns with safety and site visitation are significant enough to act in the most speedy, realistic and affordable manner. This alternative would require waiting for an unknown time for funding and completion. This alternative would also be implemented through contracted services complying with MFWP guidelines.

3. Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency:

Water quality is always a concern when conducting work near a water body. Turbidity, erosion, and soil displacement can be mitigated with construction specifications such as: erosion controls, eliminating equipment in the water, proper road grading, and seeding of native grasses upon project completion. The installation of cable ramps at the bases both boat ramps will stabilize the substrate highly disturbed during launching and take out.

MFWP specifications will also require that vegetation is not removed past the immediate construction zone to minimize dust, erosion, and possible noxious weed growth. This will also limit the impacts on the abundance of vegetative species, small, non-game animals, and bird species in the area.

The only human health risk identified in this EA relates to passage over the rock vein during periods of water levels lower than 2500 cfs. The rock vein is not part of the proposed action, however if it is implemented at a later date, a cautionary sign, brochure, or mapping project may need to be considered in the communities of Fort Smith and Hardin, along the river, and at upstream fishing access sites.

4. Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required? NO If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action:

This review has clearly demonstrated that the impacts associated with this project are not significant. The net result of the proposed work is a positive impact to the human and natural environment. Due to the insignificant negative impacts of the proposed action, an EA is the appropriate level of analysis and an EIS is not required.

5. Describe the level of public involvement for this project if any and, given the complexity and the seriousness of the environmental issues associated with the proposed action, is the level of public involvement appropriate under the circumstances?

The public will be notified in the following manners to comment on the EA, the proposed action, and the alternatives:

- ◆ 6 legal notices: two notices published one week apart in each of these three newspapers: Billings Gazette, Bighorn County News, and the Helena Independent Record,
- ◆ 1 legal notice on Montana's electronic bulletin board,
- ◆ 1 statewide press release.

The opportunities for public input listed above are appropriate for the proposed project since little or no environmental impacts are identified and no substantial public controversy is expected.

6. Duration of comment period if any:

Thirty (30) days following the publication of the second legal notice.

7. Name, title, address and phone number of the Person(s) Responsible for Preparing the EA:

Dalbey Resources
Sue Dalbey
Independent Consultant
926 N. Lamborn St.
Helena, MT 59601
(406)443-8058

Jim Darling
MFWP
Region 5 Fisheries Manager
2300 Lake Elmo Dr.
Billings, MT 59105
(406)247-2961

PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

The negative impacts of the proposed actions are temporary and/or minor of which many can be mitigated. All disturbed areas will be graded and seeded. No unique cultural, geologic, or physical features will be affected. No threatened or endangered species will be disturbed. Wetlands or prime farmland will not be affected. SHPO has determined that no historic or cultural resources will be disrupted (see attached letter). This project has little cumulative negative impact on the site. There are two impacts (3e. and 9a.) determined to have a potentially significant positive effect in removing a water related hazard. The existing ramp is exposed to the main current during high water and has been the source of several complaints to MFWP. The proposed action will address this issue.

Public comment and local support have expedited the planning for this project. There seems to be a definite need for improvements at Bighorn FAS. It is anticipated that the proposed actions will most economically and thoroughly address the concerns for safety and overcrowding at the site. The new facilities and improvements will improve the overall experience for boaters, the largest user group at this site.

Attachments:

1. HB495 Qualification Checklist
2. Site Location Map (USGS)
3. Site Plan
4. Right of Way Easement
5. Clearance letter - State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)
6. Tourism Report

ATTACHMENT 1

HB495 PROJECT QUALIFICATION CHECKLIST

Date: August 5, 1998

Person Reviewing: Dalbey Resources,
Sue Dalbey

Project Location: Bighorn Fishing Access Site 27 miles south of Hardin, Bighorn County, Montana.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED WORK: Construct new boat ramp and approach loop, stabilize substrate at toe of existing boat ramp, extend parking area, construct rock vein upstream of existing boat ramp (rock vein not currently funded).

The following checklist is intended to be a guide for determining whether a proposed development or improvement is of enough significance to fall under HB495 rules. Please check all that apply and comment as necessary. Capital Construction projects prepared by D & C; Force Account projects prepared by Region.

A. New roadway or trail built over undisturbed land?

Comments: No. The land involved for the new approach loop has previously been disturbed by motorists off the designated routes.

B. New building construction (buildings <100 sf and vault latrines exempt)?

Comments: None.

C. Any excavation of 20 c.y. or greater?

Comments: Yes. It is anticipated that more than 20 c.y. will be excavated for installation of the new boat ramp, approach loop and extended parking area. Engineering designs were not available at the time of this evaluation.

D. New parking lots built over undisturbed land or expansion of existing lot that increases parking capacity by 25% or more?

Comments: No. The new area will extend the parking capacity much less than 25%.

E. Any new shoreline alteration that exceeds a double wide boat ramp or handicapped fishing station?

Comments: Yes. Repair to the existing ramp will extend three 8' x 24' sections of cable ramp on the downstream side of the ramp. The new ramp will be 24' wide.

F. Any new construction into lakes, reservoirs, or streams?

Comments: Yes. Three 8' x 24' sections of cable ramp will be installed downstream of the existing ramp and the new ramp will measure 24' wide. The rock vein will extend approximately 20' from the bank consisting of Class I rip rap.

G. Any new construction in an area with National Registry quality cultural artifacts (as determined by State Historical Preservation Office)?

Comments: Yes. There are two sites on the Bighorn FAS property that are of historical significance, however the proposed project will not affect these sites.

H. Any new above ground utility lines?

Comments: No

I. Any increase or decrease in campsites of 25% or more of an existing number of campsites?

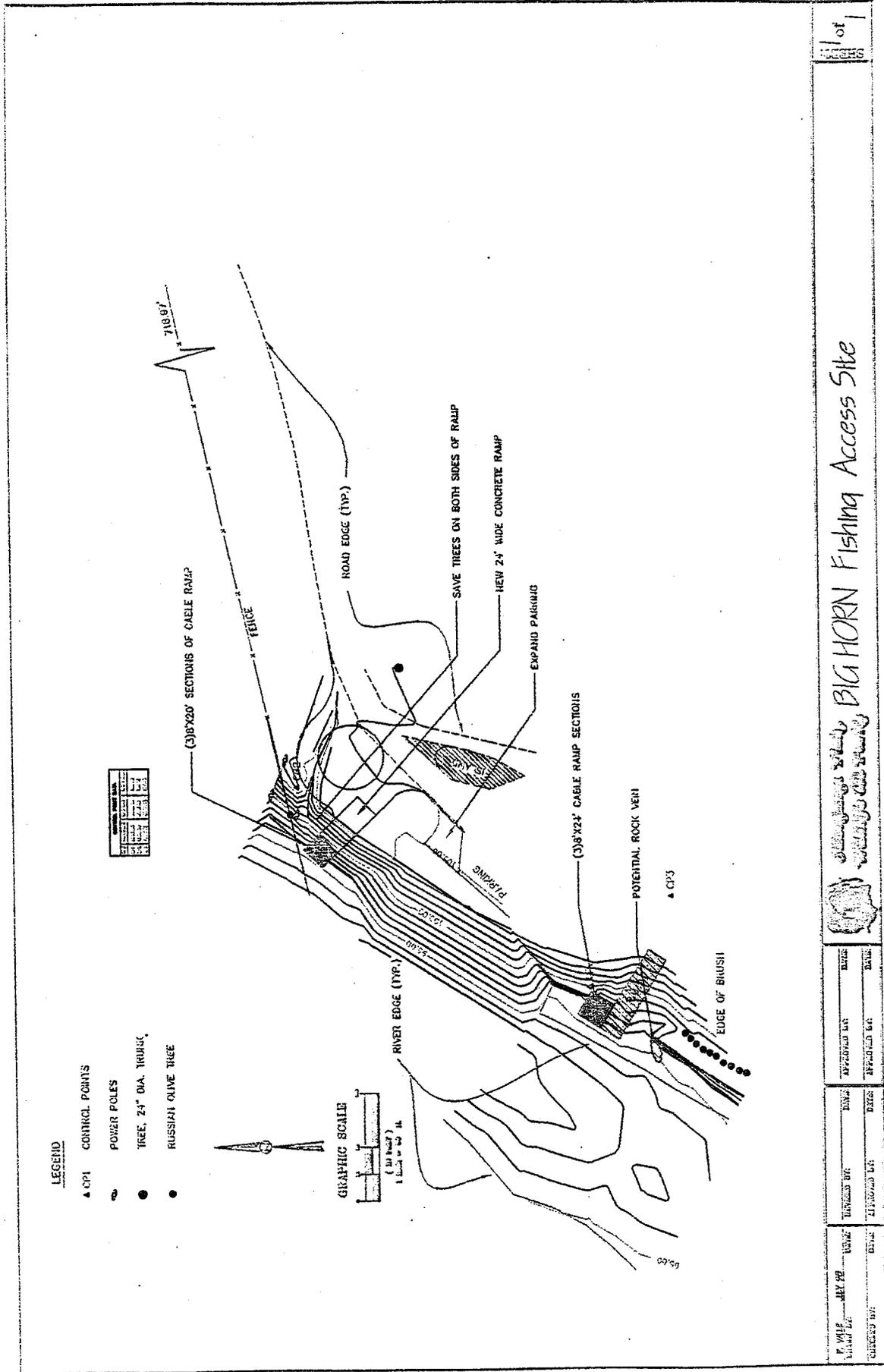
Comments: No

J. Proposed project significantly changes the existing features or use pattern; including effects of a series of individual projects?

Comments: No

If any of the above are checked, HB495 rules apply to this proposed work and should be documented on the MEPA/HB495 CHECKLIST. Refer to MEPA/HB495 Cross Reference Summary for further assistance.

ATTACHMENT 3 SITE PLAN



Big Horn Fishing Access Site

DATE	BY	APPROVED BY	DATE
DESIGNED BY	DATE	APPROVED BY	DATE
DRAWN BY	DATE	APPROVED BY	DATE
CHECKED BY	DATE	APPROVED BY	DATE

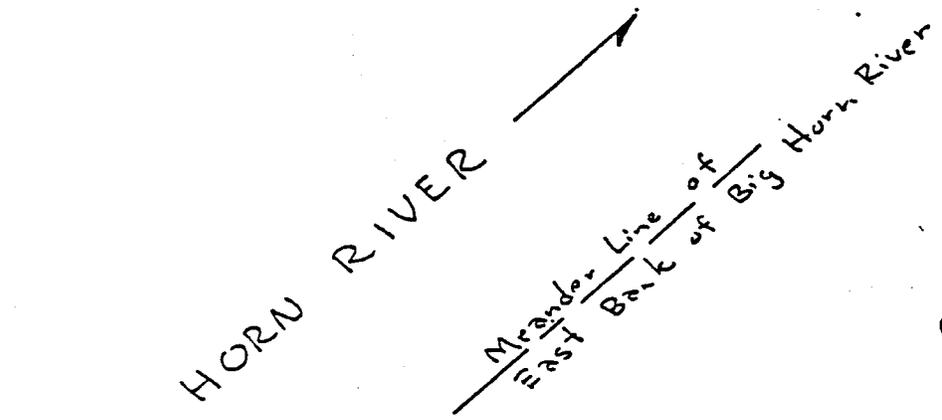
RIGHT OF WAY EASEMENT

Located in Lot 1, Sec. 5, T.5 S., R.32 E., M.P.M.

Big Horn County, Montana

Prepared for Montana State Fish, Wildlife & Parks

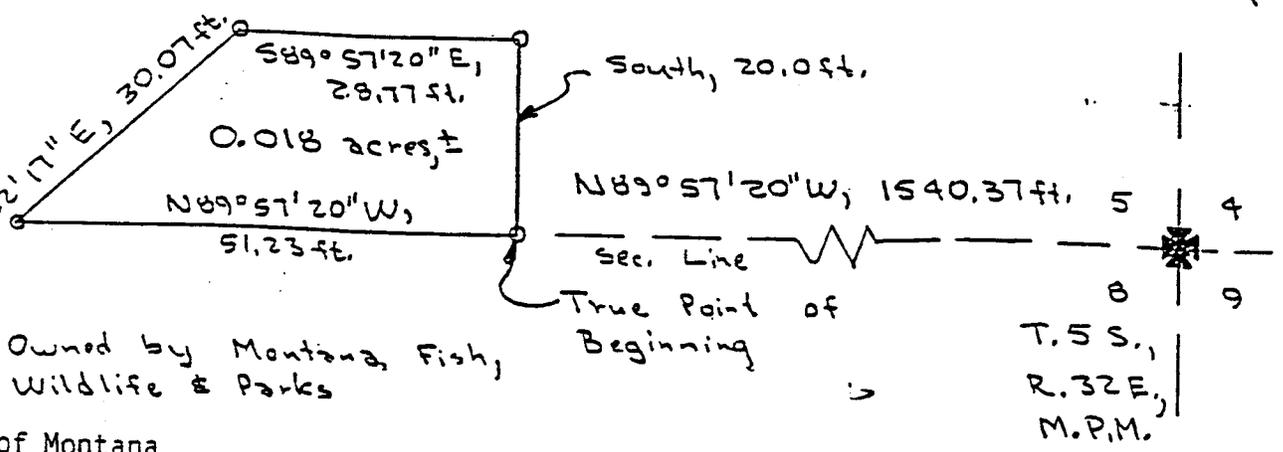
By Walter R. Egged 2948ES



C/S = 383

Scale 1"=20'

⊙ - Rebar & Plastic cap



Owned by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

State of Montana

SS

County of Big Horn

I, Walter R. Egged, do hereby certify that I am a licensed Land Surveyor in the State of Montana and that during the month of July, 1994, surveyed the Right of Way Easement shown and described on the annexed plat and that it is a true and correct survey.

Walter R. Egged

 Walter R. Egged 2948ES

Dated: July 19, 1994

DESCRIPTION

A 20 foot wide Right of Way Easement located in Lot 1, Section 5, Township 5 South, Range 32 East, M.P.M., described as follows; Beginning at the Southeast corner of said Section 5, thence N 89° 57' 20" W, 1540.37 feet, on and along the South line of said Section 5 to the true point of beginning, thence N 89° 57' 20" W, 51.23 feet, on and along said South line to the meander line of the East Bank of the Big Horn River, thence N 48° 22' 17" E, 30.07 feet, on and along said meander line, thence S 89° 57' 20" E, 28.77 feet, thence South, 20.0 feet, to the true point of beginning; containing in all 0.018 acres, more or less.



Montana Historical Society

Historic Preservation Office

1410 8th Avenue • PO Box 201202 • Helena, MT 59620-1202 • (406) 444-7715 • FAX (406) 444-6575

January 15, 1998

Paul Valle, Cultural Resources Coordinator
Design and Construction Bureau
1539 East Eleventh Ave. - 4th Floor
P.O. Box 200701
Helena, Montana 59620-0701

RECEIVED
JAN 16 1998
DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION
DEPT. OF FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS

Dear Paul,

It appears to us that you have looked at the areas to be impacted in future projects, which were listed in your letter of 24 December 1997. You found that only one project area has historic properties which must be dealt with. It is also our understanding that on this site (Bighorn FAS) you have two properties, which are 24BH2514 and 24BH610. We concur that the project as outlined should not have an effect on these properties. We also acknowledge that no properties were found at the other sites listed.

Sincerely,

Josef J. Warhank
Historical Survey Reviewer

File: FWP 1998

ATTACHMENT 6

MONTANA ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT (MEPA)/HB495 TOURISM REPORT

The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks has initiated the review process as mandated by HB495 and the Montana Environmental Policy Act in its consideration of the project described below. As part of the review process, input and comments are being solicited. Please complete the project name and project description portions and submit this form to:

Victor Bjornberg, Tourism Development Coordinator
Montana Promotion Division
Department of Commerce
1424 9th Ave.
Helena, MT 59620-0533

Project Name: Bighorn Fishing Access Site New Boat Ramp Construction. Repair of Existing Boat Ramp and Rock Vein Installation.

Project Description: Construct new boat ramp and approach loop. install cable ramp at base of existing boat ramp. construct rock vein upstream of existing boat ramp. extend parking area.

1. Would this site development project have an impact on the tourism economy?

NO

YES

If YES, briefly describe:

IF THIS PROJECT IMPROVES ACCESSIBILITY BY PROVIDING SAFER & EASIER ACCESS TO THE WATER, THIS WILL CERTAINLY INCREASE VISITOR TRAFFIC TO THE AREA. WITH INCREASED VISITORS, NEARBY SERVICES WILL LIKELY EXPERIENCE INCREASED BUSINESS. THUS, IMPROVED ACCESS WILL PROVIDE A BENEFIT TO THE LOCAL TOURISM INDUSTRY.

2. Does this impending improvement alter the quality or quantity of recreation/tourism opportunities and settings?

NO

YES

If YES, briefly describe:

IMPROVEMENTS TO THE AREA WILL BENEFIT THE QUALITY OF THE EXPERIENCE TO USERS OF THESE ACCESS POINTS. PROVIDING SAFER & MORE ACCESSIBLE LAUNCHES TO THE WATER WILL ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE FOR USERS AND THEY WOULD BE MORE LIKELY TO RETURN.

Signature MATTHEW OLIN / SO

Date 8-18-98