DECISION NOTICE:
STUART MILL BAY FISHING ACCESS SITE
SITE PROTECTION PROJECT

RECEIVED
AUG 2 5 2004
LEGISLATIVE ENVIRONMENTAL
POLICY OFFICE

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
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Missoula, MT 59804
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DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED PROJECT

The proposed action would allow continued day use and camping at the Stuart Mill Bay Fishing Access, while providing site protection measures in an effort to limit off-road travel and reduce resource damage. The proposed actions would continue to allow a more primitive recreational experience than that offered at several other public sites around Georgetown Lake.

Land around Georgetown is quickly being developed; thus, public access is diminishing. In 1999, a local citizens group was formed to look at ways to protect the last undeveloped area of the lake. The Conservation Fund and this citizens group negotiated the purchase of 328 acres, known as Stuart Mill Bay from Denny Washington. The land was purchased through a grant from the Natural Resource Damage Program, then transferred to MFWP in 2003 for the purpose of protecting the tract for fish and wildlife habitat, scenic views, public recreation and public access.

The proposed level of development would be consistent with the intentions of The Conservation Fund and the desires of the public as conveyed to MFWP during a public meeting held at the site in October 2003, and in Anaconda on April 21, 2004. Site improvements as proposed would be completed by the Anaconda Job Corps managed by the Forest Service.

According to records kept by the Anaconda Search and Rescue group who has managed the site for many years, about 90 percent of the campers at Stuart Mill Bay are from Montana; 50 percent of the total campers are from the Butte or Anaconda area.

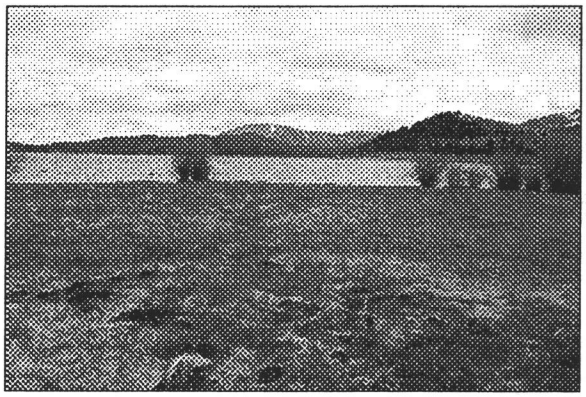
Georgetown Lake is highly popular in the state and region for anglers. MFWP Statewide Angler Pressure Estimates for 2001 indicate that 51,440 anglers use the lake annually, the third highest fished lake in Region 2 and ninth in the state. Anglers use non-motorized or motorized craft to access the lake, or fish from shore.

Roads and Parking and Trails It is proposed to use existing two-track pioneered roads as the base for improving roads within the site. Roads would be widened to about 22' to allow two-way-traffic. All surfaces would be graveled. Road edges would be ditched or similarly designed to limit off road use and provide drainage. These roads would be located outside of wetlands and major riparian areas. Two-track roads not improved would be blocked and reclaimed. A gate would be installed near the entrance to appropriately manage the site as needed, such as extreme wet periods when roads and resources could be more easily damaged.

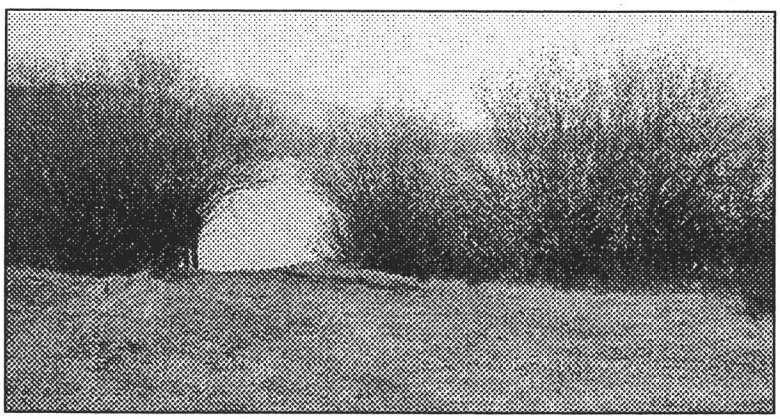
The road would be widened near the County Road to allow for plowing and parking of a few vehicles during winter months. A gravel road and cul-de-sac with parking for about a dozen vehicles, some with trailers, would be provided about 450' from the entrance to allow for day-use. The road system would include a loop at the north half of the site and a road ending with a cul-de-sac along the southwest shore. A cul-de-sac and parking for about 10 vehicles with trailers would be provided at the northern point for boating access.

An existing two-track road that parallels the county road on the south end of the peninsula would be barricaded to allow foot traffic only between the southwestern cul-de-sac and the day use area.

Boat Access The area currently used to launch small motor boats is proposed for improvements at the north end of the peninsula. Fabric barrier and gravel would be laid to provide a single-width boat ramp for small motorboats. Due to the topography and shallow water depths of this site, large boats would have to use other access sites around the lake to launch. Signs would be posted to notify the public of these conditions at the FAS entrance and at the boat ramp. Gravel is considered the most appropriate surface material due to the ice action on this end of the lake. A carry-in lake access would continue to be used along the south east side of the peninsula. An existing track about 12' wide to the lake shore would be covered with fabric barrier and gravel to provide an even surface for carrying float tubes, kayaks, canoes or similar vessels to the water. Barriers along the cul-de-sac parking area and about 100 feet from the water's edge would block vehicles from accessing the water.



Above: Boat ramp area at north end of point proposed for use by small motor boats. Photo by Terry Campbell May 2004.



Left: Carry-in lake access currently used and proposed for improvement on south east side of peninsula. Photo by Sue Dalbey, April 2004.

Camping Facilities

Camping unit capacity within the FAS is proposed to be similar to traditional use based on resource evidence (campfire rings and vegetation degradation) and local anecdotal knowledge of the site. Camp spurs would be located along the lake-side of the roads, but outside of the riparian zone to provide a buffer zone along the lake shore. Some traditional campsites close to the lakeshore may be eliminated due to this intended buffer zone, which would allow continuous lakeshore access for anglers and pedestrians, and protect the fragile shoreline from vehicle effects. One or two small group use areas are proposed on the northeast side of the peninsula.

Sites would be leveled and graveled to accommodate vehicles with tent units or those towing trailers. Numbered posts, picnic tables and metal fire rings would designate sites. Rock or other barriers would not be installed unless vehicles persist in traveling off established roads.

A camp host site would be designated in the FAS. At this time, no utilities would be provided. This site would be occupied by the Anaconda Search and Rescue designee(s) or other host assigned by MFWP who would help manage the site, maintain facilities and collect camping fees.

Three or four concrete, sealed vault latrines with aggregate exterior surface (standard MFWP FAS latrine) would be installed in the FAS according to anticipated visitor densities.

Site Management Issues

The site would have a "pack-in/pack-out" **garbage** policy consistent with other FASs across the state. This would also limit the potential for bear-human interactions at the site.
Winter use and parking needs would be observed in upcoming years. Plowing is not typically conducted on MFWP sites due to expense and low winter visitation. Roads near the site entrance, however, were designed to allow for possible winter access.
Signs would be posted along Highway 1 and along Denton's Point county road to direct visitors to the site. Signs within the site would identify day use areas, group use camping areas, fee collection regulations, trail access and boating access.

PUBLIC PROCESS AND COMMENT

Many community partners met on site in October 2003 to review the site features and discuss issues. A preliminary site plan was drawn-up based on these conversations & site-visit and were presented at a public meeting the next spring in Anaconda.

The public was notified of this meeting through publication in the Anaconda Leader, 250 direct postcard mailings generated by the Natural Resource Damage Program and the standard Region 2 MFWP list of interested individuals. About 27 people attended the public meeting in Anaconda on April 21, 2004, to discuss the proposed improvements as shown on the site plan. The meeting allowed for great discussion of the site improvements and issues affecting the site. Excellent suggestions were made as various options were discussed. As a result of that meeting, changes were made to the site plan and the Environmental Assessment (EA) was written.

The EA was sent out and the public comment period began June 15, 2004, and ran through July 20, 2004. Legal notices were published in the Missoulian, the Helena Independent Record, Phillipsburg Mail, Montana Standard, and the Anaconda Leader. There were 59 full copies, 5 electronic versions, and 271 post cards about the EA sent to interested parties consisting of neighbors, friends, conservation groups, Montana state legislators, Montana congressional members, county & state departments or agencies, and federal agencies. Also, there was a press release and a posting on the web site at FWP.

A total of 18 letters and/or e-mail messages were received from the public. Two of the letters represented groups or organizations. One was from a state agency. The others were from individuals. Of the comments received, 16 of them were supportive of the proposed action. (to maintain the historic use while protecting the site by making some basic improvements). The other 2 comments wanted very little improvements. Following are some of the comments and/or questions from all of the letters:

- Many of the comments supported the idea of closing the loop road on the south end of the site and rehabilitating it into a pedestrian trail. "Support the closure of the loop road and reclamation of this area." "I appreciate the road closure." " The closure of the loop road is a good idea as we were there this weekend and there were 4 wheelers running off the roads and causing lots of dust." *FWP Response: Eliminating some of the road system will be good for the site and the resources. It will also eliminate some potential locations for undesirable activities.*
- Most all of the comments supported the site plan. Here are some direct quotes from the comments. "Pleased to see the level of development." "This plan should protect the property in years to come." "Alternative B best addresses the effort to maintain historic use while protecting the site and making improvements." " Desire to maintain current use patterns. Requests that any improvements within SMB be minimal & not encourage additional use. Improvements designed to allow current levels of use while protecting the natural resource amenities is appropriate." "Support the proposed work plan for SMB as outlined in the EA." *FWP Response: The agency has tried very hard to make this plan the people's plan. We have listened very closely and have incorporated what we heard. Not everyone will agree with all of it but we felt there was consensus with those who participated with the process.*
- One person called and was concerned about the width of the road. The proposal called for a road width of up to 22' to allow two-way-traffic. Road edges would be ditched or designed to limit off-road use and provide drainage. *FWP Response: We discussed this with our engineers and agreed to an 18'road width that would still allow two-way-traffic.*
- One comment was made that there should not be any camping allowed at Stuart Mill Bay as Georgetown Lake has enough campgrounds that are not fully used. Another comment representing a group was concerned that FWP was proposing more campsites than is currently used, urging FWP to improve the minimal necessary number of campsites within SMB. Yet, other comments said that the number of sites is acceptable. One suggested adding more sites. Many comments supported the site plan addressed by the EA. *FWP Response: The majority of the people who have commented on this project either through this EA & site plan or back when the effort was on acquiring the Stuart Mill Bay*

site, have indicated that camping had been part of the historic use of the site and it should be continued. We concur. We also agree that the number of campsites stay the same. In trying to determine how many campsites there are currently, our engineering staff went out to the site with a GPS unit to field locate historic campsites. The number of sites on the plan is commensurate with their field data. In an effort to protect the shoreline however, it was necessary to move some of the historic campsite locations away from the shoreline and connect them to the road system. On the site plan in the box that says notes, #1 reads, "Campsites shown on the plan indicate design intent only, individual sites shall be field verified to ensure adequate buffer from lakeshore."

- The other main comment was in regards to the boat access on the North end of the peninsula and concerns about motorized watercraft use increasing within Stuart Mill Bay (SMB). Would like to see FWP restrict motorized watercraft within the bay to "no-wake" speed. Improvements could encourage an influx of "jet-ski" type watercraft or big boats. *FWP Response: Because the lake level is very shallow on the North end, the intent of the gravel ramp is to accommodate small watercraft. We do not believe big boats will launch there because of the shallowness at that location and the fact that there are deeper boat ramps elsewhere on Georgetown Lake to serve those folks. Currently, the use on the North end is just with the small fishing boats. As for the suggestion to restrict motorized use within the SMB, FWP will monitor and assess the situation after the improvements are completed. If this concern becomes a problem, FWP will consider management and/or regulation options to deal with it.*
- One person even suggested the ramp location be moved to the Southwest end of the property because they felt the North end was the best campsite. *FWP Response: The folks involved in the field trip last fall felt the location on the North end was the best location for a ramp because it was already being used in that manner.*
- Several comments supported the "carry-in only" access in the day-use area. *FWP Response: We concur.*

DECISION

Based on the analysis in the Environmental Assessment (EA) and the applicable laws, regulations and policies, I have determined that this action will not have a significant effect on the natural or human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared.

It is my decision to implement the proposed action with the identified FWP responses and proceed with the improvements of this site. By notification of this Decision Notice, the draft EA is hereby made the final EA with the FWP responses in this Decision Notice. The final EA with Decision Notice may be viewed at or obtained from Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks at the above address. Please direct any further requests or questions to Mack Long, Region Two Supervisor.

Mack Long — 8/17/04

Mack Long **Date**