



## **Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks**

Helena Area Resource Office  
930 Custer Ave. West  
Helena, MT 59620  
(406) 495-3260

May 2, 2005

**TO:** Governor's Office, Mike Volesky, Room 204, State Capitol, P.O.200801, Helena, MT 59620-0801  
Environmental Quality Council, Capitol Building, Room 106, P.O Box 201704, Helena, MT 59620  
Dept. Environmental Quality, Metcalf Building, P.O. Box 200901, Helena, MT 59620-0901  
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Director's Office, Parks Division FWP Commissioners  
MT Historical Society, State Historic Preservation Office, P.O. Box 201202 Helena, MT 59620-1202  
MT State Parks Association, P.O. Box 699, Billings, MT 59103  
MT State Library, 1515 E. Sixth Ave., P.O. Box 201800, Helena, MT 59620  
Rep. Jill Cohenour, 2610 Colt Drive, East Helena, MT 59635  
Rep. Dave Gallik, 120 E Lyndale Avenue, Helena, MT 59601  
Rep. Christine Kaufmann, P.O. Box 1566, Helena, MT 559624  
Rep. Hal Jacobson, 4813 US Highway 12 W, Helena, MT 59601  
Sen. Dave Lewis, 5871 Collins Drive, Helena, MT 59602  
Sen. Duane Grimes, 4 Hole in the Wall, Clancy, MT 59634  
Sen. Mike Cooney, 713 Pyrite Court, Helena, MT 59601  
Sen. Ken Toole, P.O. Box 1462, Helena, MT 59624  
James Jensen, Montana Environmental Information Center, P.O. Box 1184, Helena, MT 59624  
Janet Ellis, Montana Audubon Council, P.O. Box 595, Helena, MT 59624  
George Ochenski, P.O. Box 689, Helena, MT 59624  
Jerry DiMarco, P.O. Box 1571, Bozeman, MT 59771  
Wildlife Federation, P.O. Box 1175, Helena, MT 59624  
Wayne Hurst, P.O. Box 728, Libby, MT 59923  
Glen Hockett, 745 Doane Road, Bozeman, MT 59715  
Perry Backus, 65 Redtail, Dillon, MT 59725  
Tom Sathers, Headwaters Fish & Game Assoc., P.O. Box 1941, Bozeman, MT 59771-1941  
Lewis and Clark County Commissioners, 316 North Park, Helena, MT 59601

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Enclosed, please find the Decision Notice for the Spring Meadow Lake State Park and the old Steadman Foundry Complex Project. The initial proposal included a number of modifications, improvements to and developments on the site. Changes in the original proposal were made based on comments on the document received during the public review period. If you have questions or would like to discuss the project, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Michael Korn  
Helena Area Coordinator

**FINAL DECISION NOTICE  
SPRING MEADOW LAKE STATE PARK  
GROUP USE AREA TRAILS AND EDUCATION CENTER**

**Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks  
Helena Area Resource Office  
930 Custer Ave. West**

**Helena, MT 59802**

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## **PROPOSAL**

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On January 27, 2005, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) released a draft Environmental Assessment (EA) proposing to improve public recreation and education opportunities on the southwest end of Spring Meadow Lake State Park. The proposal calls for a phased approach that is dependent upon securing private funds and grants over the next 10 years. The following actions were proposed in the EA:

**Education Center Area (old Steadman Foundry Complex)**

- Renovate and modify the Steadman Foundry Machine Shop for use as an education center with approaching sidewalks, entrance, and infrastructure.
- Dismantle the foundry Pattern House, retaining materials for landscaping, parking barriers, walkways, and interpretive displays on site.
- Construct curb, gutter and paved entrance and parking space for approximately 25-40 vehicles.
- Construct gravel overflow parking west of Education Center.
- Construct a Living Stream and small amphitheater. The living stream is an artificial stream that replicates a real stream in a controlled environment for educational purposes.
- Reclaim disturbed areas with native vegetation and landscaping.
- Erect interpretive outdoor displays.

**Recreation Area (Spring Meadow Lake State Park)**

- Pave existing gravel road south of the park entrance and parking for approximately 35 vehicles.
- Construct a group use shelter and associated swimming beach.
- Construct an amphitheatre on the west side of the park.
- Install a sealed vault latrine,
- Construct connecting trails and a trailhead from the education center to the park.
- Renovate the footbridge at the south end of the lake.
- Establish a nature trail at the southwest end of the park.
- Erect directional and interpretive signs as needed to aid public use.

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## **PUBLIC PROCESS**

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A public comment period occurred from January 27, 2005 to February 28, 2005. Legal notices describing the proposal and comment period were published in the Helena Independent Record on January 20 and January 26, 2005. A statewide press release was sent to the print and broadcast media and the document was posted on the state's Electronic Bulletin Board. A public meeting was publicized and held on February 8, 2005. A front-page feature article regarding the proposal appeared in the Helena Independent Record on January 27, 2005.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

FWP received a total of 25 written comments on the proposal. Of those, 15 supported the project, but also expressed support for FWP to allow people to bring dogs to Spring Meadow Lake State Park year round. Currently, dogs are not allowed on the site from April 15 through October 15. Modification of this rule regarding the presence of pets at the site was not proposed in this EA, nor presented for general public comment. Therefore, this issue is outside the scope of this decision.

The following comments were received directly regarding the proposal:

**Comment:** The EA does not accurately assess the relative significance of the historic property, and how the Spring Meadow Project will negatively affect the "Steadman Foundry".

**Response:** The significance of the property is addressed in the recognition of the listing of the property on the National Register of Historic Places as well as the original reasons for the selection of this site for state ownership. Its selection to be part of the Spring Meadow State Park complex in 1991 was based not only on location, and compatibility but also on its historicity and how an historic resource would complement the natural resources of Spring Meadow Park. The department does not view this project as a detriment to the Steadman Foundry Complex but feels it will serve to enhance the values already there as well as provide a means to honor the buildings and social history of the site.

**Comment:** The decision to divert an insurance settlement for an arson caused fire that destroyed part of the Steadman Foundry while in the care of the state from that historic properties most threatened structure, the Pattern House, demonstrates a lack of success in protecting unique historic resources of the state of Montana.

**Response:** Protection of the site from vandalism prior to the fire was a priority of the department along with cooperation of local law enforcement. The layout of the site made this a difficult task and admittedly, some vandalism did occur. That vandalism was considerably less than had been occurring prior to state oversight when the buildings were unoccupied or protected. The origin of the fire that destroyed the middle building of the Steadman Foundry was never determined but it was fortuitous that other buildings as well as animals located in the adjacent Wildlife Center were not harmed. Insurance money is not being diverted through use on the Machine Shop rather than the Pattern House. Stabilization of the Machine Shop has been deemed a priority due to the plans to develop it into an Education Center and therefore, required immediate attention. The department feels it important to consider how to best move forward with development of the site as a whole.

**Comment:** The EA’s suggestion that demolition of the Pattern House would be forestalled for the period of 12 months to allow a third party the opportunity to raise over \$350, 000 to stabilize that structure is impractical and risks the characterization of being disingenuous.

**Response:** MFWP used 12 months as an estimate of the minimum amount of time that would be necessary to attempt to mobilize new individuals or groups to come forward and become seriously involved in the fund-raising process that has been going on for many years. Although a handful of fundraising ideas came from the comment period, it remains a challenge and the department hopes that with the renewed visibility of the overall project, new interest, particularly among Historic Preservation groups in the area will help to provide alternatives to demolishing the building.

**Comment:** The EA does not adequately address the loss of historic structures and the loss of public enjoyment. Classifying this impact as “minor” misses the mark. This classification should be “potentially significant” due to the rare nature of the structure and the public loss involved. Mitigation of structure loss through ‘representative’ interpretation is not an adequate substitute in light of the real option of funding the stabilization of the Pattern House.

**Response:** There is no question that the loss of historic structures and the subsequent diminishment of public enjoyment is an issue in Montana and the Helena area in particular. Unquestionably, many people are currently looking back at the demolition of historic structures and sites that has occurred over the last 30 years as a result of shortsighted development and renewal projects. It is the department’s hope that the Pattern House ultimately will remain standing. However, without the support and activities of the public in raising necessary stabilization funding on behalf of the structure, liability/safety risks of allowing an unsound structure, regardless of its’ historicity, to stand adjacent to a public recreation area is unacceptable. Although interpretation can be used to mitigate the loss of an historic site, and is allowed by both federal and state historic preservation statutes, it is still second best. Given the lessons learned from previous demolition of such sites around Helena, it is hoped that renewed interest in the Pattern House will result in the necessary financial help to keep it standing on the property.

**Comment:** Loss of the Pattern House would be potentially significant due to the rare nature of the structure. The commenter supports a variation of alternative B wherein FWP would work with private organizations to stabilize the Pattern House or repair it for a new use. The commenter also suggested forming a collaborative effort involving the state historic preservation office, HPC and other groups to successfully manage this historic resource.

**Response:** The department concurs.

**Comment:** We support the fact that MFWP is planning to rehabilitate and use the Stedman Foundry machine shop building as an education center. However, the demolition of the Pattern House represents an adverse effect to the National Register listed Foundry Complex. The commenter offered the following recommendations: Mothball the building including sealing the building from vandals, market the Pattern House as real estate and make potential partners aware of grant programs that could be used to fund the building.

**Response:** MFWP would consider any options to stabilize the Pattern House including the possibility of leasing or selling the building if the new use was compatible with the State Park and the Wildlife Rehabilitation Center.

**Comment:** I do not support FWP building a fake beach adjacent to the group use shelter.

**Response:** Spring Meadow Lake is a man made site that was built from the development of a gravel pit. The beaches that are currently at the park have been created over the years by adding sand over the rock to create a more user-friendly swimming area for adults and children. The public has repeatedly expressed a need and desire for sand beaches at Spring Meadow Lake and the department regularly receives requests that additional sand be added on existing beaches. Sand does, in fact, provides a buffer between the soils, reduces erosion and provides a good surface for high use areas where turf will not grow. It is the department's belief that additional beachfront will be an asset to the Group Use Shelter as well as to the entire site.

**Comment:** The EA failed to address the impacts that will occur to the lake's water quality from the development of the new beach area. The water quality has degraded since MFWP developed the area. Prior to any more development at Spring Meadow Lake that may affect the water quality, FWP needs to do secchi disk baseline eutrophication data.

**Response:** There is no question that the water quality of Spring Meadow Lake has been affected by numerous factors since it's development into a recreational site. Initially, the process of what was basically a gravel pit filling in with water and sediments added nutrients and turbidity to the water. Over the years, other effluents from both the site itself as well as those brought in through the natural water system of the lake have contributed to changes in clarity and possibly water quality. The severe drought cycle has contributed in as much as Spring Meadow Lake has not had the recirculation and water exchange that normally occurs in the spring along with subsequent reduction (or complete elimination) of discharge from the spillway. MFWP follows Best Management Practices and has implemented measures at Spring Meadow Lake such as rebuilding the parking area so run off and other contaminants will drain away from the lake. This is an important aspect of the site and there is no empirical baseline data from which to draw formal conclusions or implement mitigation measures. Therefore, as part of the project, MFWP will begin monitoring water quality including eutrophication and collecting baseline data. A data collection and sampling protocol will be established and data will be collected annually and analyzed to ascertain fluctuations in water clarity and quality.

Additional comments were received from the individuals who expressed general opposition to dismantling the Pattern House, and value the Pattern House for its historical significance related to Helena history. At the February 8<sup>th</sup> public meeting, members of the Montana Preservation Alliance formally opposed the demolition of the Pattern House but pledged to assist in seeking partners and funding sources. One suggestion was made that the Pattern House could be used as a youth hostel.

The Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) submitted a comment regarding possible Asbestos in the Stedman buildings. FWP is aware that the Stedman buildings contains minor amounts of asbestos and the FWP Design and Construction Bureau will be working with DEQ on a remediation plan prior to any action affecting the structure.

Approximately one week after the close of the formal comment period, the department received a comment related to the water quality at Spring Meadow Lake. The commenter suggested that prior to any additional development the department should study the water quality and begin collecting baseline eutrophication data. The Department concurs with this recommendation.

## **DECISION**

Based on the analysis in the Environmental Assessment (EA) and 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 modify the proposed action (preferred alternative) with the following modifications:

1. Retain the Pattern House in its current state for now. Because of the questionable structural integrity of the building, fencing will be erected around the Pattern House to provide a “buffer zone” to keep the public and department employees a safe distance from the structure. The agency, along with other public and private entities will continue to explore additional funding or partnership opportunities for stabilization and renovation. These efforts will be reviewed at the close of a year’s time to assess the progress and likelihood of successfully securing funding. FWP would have the option of dismantling the Pattern House if no significant funding sources or partners are identified and should funding become available for the stabilization and renovation of other structures on the site included in the proposal.
2. MFWP will begin monitoring water quality including eutrophication and collecting baseline data. A data collection and sampling protocol will be established and data will be collected annually and analyzed to ascertain fluctuations in water clarity and quality.

MFWP will proceed with the remainder of the project as proposed. By notification in this decision notice, the draft EA is hereby made the final EA with the above described modifications or additions. The final EA may be viewed or obtained from Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks, Helena Area Resource Office, 930 Custer Ave, Helena, MT 59620.

Implementation of Phase I of this project will take place when funding becomes available.

**May 2, 2005**

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Michael Korn, Helena Area Coordinator

Date

Please direct requests and questions to:

Michael Korn, Helena Area Coordinator  
Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks  
930 Custer Ave.  
Helena, MT 59820  
(406) 495-3260