

**DECISION NOTICE:
KONA BRIDGE DEVELOPMENT
AND MANAGEMENT PROJECT**

**Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Region 2
3201 Spurgin Road, Missoula, MT 59804
(406) 542-5500**

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED PROJECT

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks proposes to manage 2.56 acres of land from Missoula County as a new Fishing Access Site (FAS), for inclusion in the statewide FAS system. The new FAS would be located adjacent to a new subdivision called Riverwood Meadows in southwest Missoula. When Riverwood Meadows was being developed, 1.06 acres was set aside as county parkland, as dictated by subdivision rules. Mike Priskie and Todd Peters, the developers, proposed that the dedicated acreage be located next to an existing 1.5 acre piece bordering the Clark Fork River that was already County property. The developers then approached FWP to see if the agency would be interested in developing the site as a FAS. Prior to this opportunity, the public did not have legal public access to that 1.5 acre parcel.

The public now uses this combined county parcel to access the Clark Fork River at this site and the county has already constructed a gravel approach and entrance road. Missoula Co. and FWP are jointly funding the development of the combined 2.56 acres of land into a new FAS, to be managed by FWP. FWP and Missoula County would sign a management agreement for FWP to manage the new FAS, which would be called Kona Bridge FAS. It would include the existing entrance road, a paved interior road, paved and striped parking, concrete boat ramp, an ADA-accessible parking space and vault latrine, rock barriers, fencing, and signing.

Managers with FWP are interested in managing this land and seeing it developed as a new FAS for several reasons:

1. The Kona Bridge site is located halfway between Kelly Island FAS (4 miles upstream) and Deep Creek FAS (4 miles downstream) on the middle Clark Fork River. An FAS situated there would provide easy ½-day floats for anglers and other recreationists between those sites, as well as provide an additional put-in and take-out site for longer floats, as the bridge adjacent to the site is one of the few crossings of the Clark Fork River below Missoula.
2. Public access is currently occurring at the site. Heavy recreational use of the undeveloped site is causing site degradation. As a result, much of the site has been denuded of vegetation causing severe soil erosion on the steeper sections of the site. This has led to excessive sediment delivery to the river at this location. The construction of a boat ramp and the implementation of other site protection measures outlined in this proposal would reduce erosion and other problems that the site is currently experiencing.
3. Fishing pressure and the demand for fishing access is increasing rapidly in many parts of the State and especially in Region 2. The other FAS's in the Missoula area are very popular and FWP managers would like to ease the pressure on those other access points. The middle Clark Fork River has a robust, mixed salmonid fishery that can support the current levels of pressure. Missoula County, along with Mike Priskie and Todd Peters, the developers of the adjacent subdivision, are very supportive of this site becoming an official FAS managed by FWP. It is believed that there would be good public support of the proposed project. Missoula County has promised up to \$50,000 in matching funds toward the development of the proposed project.

4. The Kona Bridge site has also been identified as a location to put a Lewis & Clark interpretive sign. It is believed that this site is close to the original crossing Lewis made with his men when exploring this stretch of the Clark Fork River. Such a panel would be part of a sign package project with the Western Montana Lewis & Clark Bicentennial Committee.

In summary, the development of the county acreage adjacent to the Riverwood Meadows Subdivision into a new FAS would be in line with FWP's goals to provide adequate public access to the state's rivers and lakes. The growing population of the Missoula area has put a lot of pressure on the existing area FAS's such as Kelly Island and Deep Creek. An additional FAS on this stretch of the Clark Fork River would help to absorb some of this use.

Alternative A: No Action

If no action were taken, FWP would lose an opportunity to see a new FAS developed in a densely populated area with high demand for public access. If this site is not developed into an FAS, pressure will continue to increase at the other FAS's in the area, and MFWP managers would need to find another alternative to ease congestion at these sites. Also, informal use of the Kona Bridge site would continue to cause site degradation and soil erosion issues.

Alternative B:

In Alternative B, FWP would develop and manage the Kona Bridge site into a new FAS in cooperation with Missoula County. In addition to the existing approach and entrance road, the site would offer 15 spaces for vehicle and trailer parking, 2 spaces for single vehicles, an ADA-accessible parking area and latrine, and a boat ramp on the upstream end. The tentative location of the boat ramp in this Alternative would be in roughly the same location that has historically been used. The benefits to this design are threefold: 1) More trailer parking would be available in this plan than the one in Alternatives C and D; 2) Placing the boat ramp in the historical access location would require less ground disturbance, and therefore less time and cost; and 3) this design has a better flow and is generally thought to be more aesthetic. The drawback to this design is that staff biologists have some concerns about stream bank stability and sediment movement, possibly shortening the lifespan of the boat ramp. Development of a boat ramp at this location will require substantial stream bank stabilization techniques including sloping the bank back at a shallower angle, revegetation of the slopes, and rip-rap. Bank stabilization, including the use of rip-rap would require a Missoula County floodplain permit in order to comply with County floodplain regulations.

Alternative C:

Alternative C is basically the same as Alternatives B and D except for the design of the FAS. In this design the boat ramp would be placed in the downstream corner of the site and the parking areas would be arranged differently. The main benefit of this design is that the boat ramp would be located in a section of bank that engineers feel is less likely to be affected by flooding events than the upstream location. The main disadvantages to this Alternative are that the riverbank is quite steep in this section, so construction crews would have to dig fairly far back into the lower parking area in order to achieve a desired slope of 12% or less. Also, this design provides less space for trailer parking, and is generally thought to be less aesthetic than Alternative B.

Alternative D:

In Alternative D, there would be an upper and lower parking area as in Alternatives B and C, but there would also be a third parking area in the grassy field in the southern end of the site. This Alternative is no longer being considered because it is too costly, the berm for the vegetative buffer does not meet floodplain regulations, too many of the trees in the current natural buffer area would have to be removed, and there would be a negative visual impact to the neighboring subdivision.

PUBLIC PROCESS AND COMMENT

The EA was sent out and the public comment period began August 21, 2006, and ran through September 19, 2006. Legal notices were published in the *Missoulian* and the *Helena Independent Record* newspapers, along with one statewide press release. There were 27 full copies, 6 electronic versions, and 35 post cards about the EA sent to interested parties consisting of neighbors, friends, conservation groups, Montana state legislators, county and state departments or agencies. The Kona Bridge FAS Development and Management EA was posted on the FWP web site August 21, 2006. The EA is still available for review at http://fwp.mt.gov/publicnotices/notice_1182.aspx.

Six comments were received from the public. Two of those comments were opposed to having a FAS developed at this location because of the large number of vehicles and people on peak weekends that currently use the site and the proposed development will not provide enough parking to accommodate this use. One of the two that commented against the proposal feels that part of the solution is for FWP to gain more access sites and manage them well. Four of the comments supported the project and want to see the site developed, as it needs a concrete ramp. Two of the four liked alternative B over C because it provides a few more parking places.

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 Alternative C and proceed with the improvements of this site. Even though Alternative C provides a few less parking places than Alternative B, the location of the ramp places it next to the bridge where the bank is more stable. Missoula County flood-plain regulations prohibit the placement of rip-rap along riverbanks unless it is to protect existing public structures. Alternative B places the ramp upstream from the bridge where there is not rip-rap to protect the bank and therefore makes a poor location to place a concrete boat ramp. 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 2 Supervisor.

In accordance with FWP policy, an appeal may be made by any person who has either commented in writing to the department on the proposed project, or who has registered or commented orally at a public meeting held by the department on the proposed project, or who can provide new evidence that would otherwise change the proposed plan. An appeal must be submitted to the Director of FWP in writing and must be postmarked or received within 30 days of this decision notice. The appeal must describe the basis for the appeal, how the appellant has previously commented to the department or participated in the decision-making process, and how the department can provide relief. The appeal should be mailed to: Director, Fish, Wildlife & Parks, PO Box 200701, 1420 East 6th Avenue, Helena, MT 59620-0701.

/s/ Mack Long
Mack Long
Regional Supervisor

9/28/06
Date