



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

2300 Lake Elmo Drive
Billings, MT 59105
December 12, 2006

TO: Environmental Quality Council
Director's Office, Dept. of Environmental Quality
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks*

Director's Office
Parks Division
Fisheries Division
Wildlife Division

Lands Section
Design & Construction
Legal Unit
Regional Supervisors

Mike Volesky, Governor's Office *
Sarah Elliott, Press Agent, Governor's Office*
Montana Historical Society, State Preservation Office
Janet Ellis, Montana Audubon Council
Montana Wildlife Federation
Montana State Library*
George Ochenski
Montana Environmental Information Center
Wayne Hirst, Montana State Parks Foundation
MTFWP Commissioner Shane Colton*
Montana Parks Association (land acquisition projects)
Bob Raney (Parks EA's only)
DNRC Area Manager, Southern Land Office
County Commissioners
Other Local Interested People or Groups

* (Sent electronically)

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DEC 18 2006

LEGISLATIVE ENVIRONMENTAL
POLICY OFFICE

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The enclosed draft Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared for renovation of the Whitebird FAS site and is submitted for your consideration. Questions and comments will be accepted until January 20, 2007.

If you have questions or need additional copies of the draft EA, please contact Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks at 247-2940. Please send any written comments to the following address:

Whitebird Fishing Access
Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks
PO Box 254
Joliet, MT 59041
jalexander@mt.gov

Thank you for your interest,

Gary Hammond
Regional Supervisor

Environmental Assessment

Whitebird FISHING ACCESS SITE RENOVATION

December 2006



*Montana Fish,
Wildlife & Parks*

**Whitebird Fishing Access Site Renovation
Environmental Assessment
MEPA, NEPA, MCA 23-1-110 CHECKLIST**

PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

1. **Type of proposed state action:** Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP) proposes to renovate the Whitebird Fishing Access Site (FAS) by reworking the access and interior roads. Parking would be improved and a graveled river access created for fishing and recreational floaters. A wooden latrine would be replaced and relocated, and the wooden bridge crossing the irrigation ditch refurbished.
2. **Agency authority for the proposed action:** The 1977 Montana Legislature enacted statute 87-1-605, which directs MTFWP to acquire, develop and operate a system of fishing accesses. The legislature established an earmarked funding account to ensure that this fishing access site function would be accomplished.
3. **Name of project:** Whitebird Fishing Access Site Renovation
4. **Name, address and phone number of project sponsor (if other than the agency):** Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks is the project sponsor.
5. **If applicable:**
 Estimated Construction/Commencement Date: Spring 2007
 Estimated Completion Date: August 2007
 Current Status of Project Design (% complete): 75
6. **Location affected by proposed action (county, range and township):**
 Stillwater County, T3S R19E Section S28. Whitebird FAS is 6 miles southwest of Columbus on Hwy 78.
7. **Project size -- estimate the number of acres that would be directly affected that are currently:**

	<u>Acres</u>		<u>Acres</u>
(a) Developed:		(d) Floodplain	<u>22.76</u>
Residential	<u>0</u>		
Industrial	<u>0</u>	(e) Productive:	
(b) Open Space/Woodlands/Recreation	<u>0</u>	Irrigated cropland	<u>0</u>
		Dry cropland	<u>0</u>
(c) Wetlands/Riparian Areas	<u>1</u>	Forestry	<u>0</u>
		Rangeland	<u>0</u>
		Other	<u>0</u>

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

(a) **Permits:** permits will be filed at least 2 weeks prior to project start.

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Permit</u>
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	404 Fill Permit in Waters of the U.S.
Department of Environmental Quality	318 Short-Term Water Quality; Turbidity Related to Construction
Stillwater County Sanitarian	Sealed vault latrine permit
MT Fish, Wildlife & Parks	Stream Protection Act Permit
Stillwater Co. Floodplain Administrator	Floodplain Permit

(b) **Funding:**

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Funding Amount</u>
General MTFWP License Funding	\$
Private Funding Source	\$
	TOTAL \$57,729.10

(c) **Other Overlapping or Additional Jurisdictional Responsibilities:**

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Type of Responsibility</u>
State Historic Preservation Office	Cultural site protection

9. Narrative summary of the proposed action or project including the benefits and purpose of the proposed action:

The Whitebird FAS was purchased in January of 1966 from Walter J. Brown. The original access consisted of 21.46 acres. In May of 1967 MTFWP added a small parcel by leasing 1.3 acres from Curtis and Rose Cummings. The Whitebird FAS is located between the towns of Columbus and Absarokee in Stillwater County, and is located on the east bank of the Stillwater River south of the Swinging Bridge FAS. The 22.76-acre site is open year-round and has two latrines (including an old wooden latrine) graveled roads and parking areas. We are proposing to renovate the road system, and access to both the site and the Stillwater River. The project includes creating a river access, renovating the road system, replacing the wooden vault latrine, and refurbishing the bridge crossing the irrigation ditch. The river access would provide for hand launching of rafts, canoes, kayaks and other craft.

This site's outdated design no longer provides for established uses; the old latrine is hard to keep clean and in a sanitary condition. There is heightened fire danger and resource damage due to off-road travel. MTFWP would be able to keep this site available during higher fire conditions with vehicles confined to graveled surfaces. These options would allow managers to better provide for day-users and anglers, and provide adequate boat access, regulate use, establish site protection measures, and improve the weed control at the site.

PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

- 1. 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 A: No Action Note: A detailed evaluation of the Proposed Actions are included in Part VI., the Environmental Review Checklist.

If no action is taken, recreationists and boaters will either avoid using Whitebird FAS for put-in or take-outs, or will use undeveloped areas for launching. The Stillwater River is increasing in popularity at a high rate, and the most likely outcome is that users will increasingly use undeveloped areas for launching. This unregulated use will continue to cause shoreline degradation, resource damage, and the spread of noxious weeds. Fire danger will remain at a higher level due to vehicles not being confined to the road system and parking areas. The old wooden vault will be left as is and will potentially cause safety and sanitation risks due to its condition.

Alternative B: Our Preferred Option

In Alternative B, a gravel river access would be created. River access parking for nine vehicles would be constructed, graveled camping spurs would be created, the bridge providing access would be renovated improving access safety to the site. The road renovation and boat launch would eliminate off road vehicle use, and reduce erosion and the spread of noxious weeds. Noxious weeds are already monitored and controlled at Whitebird FAS by MTFWP staff in accordance with methods outlined in the Region 5 Weed Management Plan and approved by the Stillwater County Weed Board, and this control would continue after project completion. Approach signs would inform the public of the entrance and location of the Whitebird FAS. The old wooden vault toilet would be replaced with a concrete vault improving the sanitary conditions of the latrine facility we provide to the public. This area of the FAS is already developed, and construction would disturb very little new ground. Estimated project budget total would be \$57,729.10.

- 2. Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency.**

There are no mitigation stipulations or requirements associated with the actions. Plans for mitigation discussed in part VI (such as adherence to BMP's) are associated with actions that would have a minor impact, and thus are not subject to specific requirements. Therefore, no evaluation is necessary. These actions do not involve permitting or granting of a license on which stipulations would be placed.

The proposed renovations and improvements have been designed to follow Best Management Practices (BMP's). MTFWP engineering staff would oversee the completion of the project to ensure that construction meets State specifications, such as limiting soil and vegetation disturbance to the immediate project area, limiting changes in surface water runoff or drainage patterns once the project is completed, and seeding disturbed areas to aid in reclamation. The Stillwater County Sanitarian must approve the location and installation of the sealed vault latrine proposed in Alternative B.

3. Private Property Regulatory Restrictions:

Actions described in this environmental analysis do not regulate the use of private, tangible personal property, or real property under a regulatory statute adopted pursuant to the police power of the State; the actions do not involve the denial of an application for a permit or other permission; and the actions do not restrict the use of the regulated person's private property. The actions of accepting a donation of land and developing it for a fishing access site do not place regulatory restrictions on private property and therefore do not require an evaluation of regulatory restrictions on private property.

PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

Whitebird FAS is an important point of access for the public to the Stillwater River in Region 5. This EA did not reveal any significant negative impacts to the physical and human environment. Most minor impacts could be mitigated. The proposed renovations would greatly increase visitor enjoyment of the site.

PART IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

- 1. 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 by way of two statewide press releases in local newspapers and by public notice on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks web page: <http://fwp.state.mt.us/publicnotices> . Individual notices will be sent to those that have requested one.

- 2. Duration of comment period, if any.**
A 30-day comment period is proposed. This level of public involvement is appropriate for this scale of project.

PART V. EA PREPARATION

- 1. Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required? (YES/NO)? If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action.**

No, an EIS is not required. Based on an evaluation of the primary, secondary, and cumulative impacts to the physical and human environment, this environmental review revealed no significant impacts from the actions. In determining the significance of the impacts, Fish, Wildlife and Parks assessed the severity, duration, geographic extent, and frequency of the impact; the probability that the impact will occur or reasonable assurance that the impact will not occur; growth-inducing or growth inhibiting aspects of the impact; the importance to the state and to society of the environmental resource or value affected, any precedent that would be set as a result of an impact of the proposed action that would commit MTFWP to future actions; and

potential conflicts with local, federal, or state laws. We have determined that an EA is the appropriate level of review, and an EIS is not required.

2. Name, title, address and phone number of the person(s) responsible for preparing the EA:

Jenny Alexander
Park Manager
PO Box 254
Joliet, MT 59041
(406) 445-2326

Doug Habermann
Regional Parks Manager
2300 Lake Elmo Drive
Billings, MT 59105
(406) 247-2954

3. List of agencies consulted during preparation of the EA:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Parks Division
Fisheries Division
Design & Construction Bureau
Montana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)
Montana Natural Heritage Program – Natural Resources Information System (NRIS)

PART VI. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW CHECKLIST

3. Evaluation of the impacts of the Proposed Action including secondary and cumulative impacts on the Physical and Human Environment.

A. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

1. <u>LAND RESOURCES</u> 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				
b. Disruption, displacement, erosion, compaction, moisture loss, or over-covering of soil, which would reduce productivity or fertility?			X			1b.
c. **Destruction, covering or modification of any unique geologic or physical features?		X				
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			1d.
e. Exposure of people or property to earthquakes, landslides, ground failure, or other natural hazard?		X				
f. Other:		X				

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

- 1b. The creation of the boat launch, and construction of the associated parking areas and access roads would cause some soil disruption, displacement and compaction of soil. Any newly disturbed areas and would be reseeded or otherwise reclaimed.
- 1d. The changes to a river's deposition and erosion patterns that the creation of the boat launch might cause are negligible. Focusing use at one properly proposed site should reduce the pioneering of sites by users and thereby potentially reduce erosion.

2. <u>AIR</u> 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			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.)						
f. Other:		X				

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

- 2a. Minor/temporary dust and vehicle emissions would be created by heavy equipment during construction. Increased visitation is likely; therefore vehicle-created dust levels would increase slightly, but not to problematic levels. The new vaulted toilet will reduce the objectionable odors from the current wooden latrine, thusly improving the public's experience at the site.

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			3a.
b. Changes in drainage patterns or the rate and amount of surface runoff?			X			3b.
c. Alteration of the course or magnitude of floodwater 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				
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.)						
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. Other:		X				

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

- 3a. Minor and temporary turbidity would occur in the immediate area of the boat ramp as gravel is graded into place. Providing a workable boat ramp would have the positive effect of concentrating boat launching activities in one designated location, instead of being spread out over several pioneered areas, causing bank erosion and sedimentation.
- 3b. Proposed parking areas and new sections of road would be located in areas with low slope (0-2%) and sandy loam soils, resulting in little to no surface runoff.

4. <u>VEGETATION</u> 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			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?						
f. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project affect wetlands, or prime and unique farmland?						
g. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Vegetation (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

- 4a. The renovations that MFWP is proposing would not cause significant changes to the diversity or productivity of the plant community. Some shrubs, grasses and forbs would be removed in Alternative B in order to create a gravel boat launch, but such losses would be extremely minor and would not significantly affect their abundance within the FAS or greater area.

** 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				
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				5f.
g. Increase in conditions that stress wildlife populations or limit abundance (including harassment, legal or illegal harvest or other human activity)?			X		yes	5g.
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.)		x				
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.)		x				
j. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Fish and Wildlife (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

- 5f. A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program Database did not yield any documented observations of endangered, threatened, or sensitive species on Whitebird FAS. Bald Eagles, a threatened species, are fairly common along the Stillwater River and have been documented in T3S R19E S28 (please see Appendix 2). Because of the limited development proposed and the distance involved, the proposed development and acquisition would not be likely to adversely impact this species.
- 5g. The proposed improvements would likely cause an increase in site visitation, which could cause additional stress to wildlife populations. However, the proposed projects would concentrate visitors in designated areas, thus reducing stress to wildlife in remaining undisturbed areas and therefore minimizing any negative effects of these proposals.

B. 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 serve or nuisance noise levels?		X				
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:			x			6e.

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Noise/Electrical Effects (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

- 6a. There would be a temporary increase in noise level during construction of the boat launch, renovation of the parking areas and road extensions. The increase in noise would not be excessive and would end after completion. No homeowners live close enough to the site to be affected. Likewise, there may be a very slight increase in noise associated with increased visitation to the site, but the overall noise level would still be very low and very unlikely to affect any homeowners in the area.
- 6e. Construction will occur during the summer use season because it is the only time the weather cooperates to get construction completed. Therefore, it might impact visitors who come to use the site during construction.

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				
b. Conflicted 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				
e. Other:		X				

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

8. <u>RISK/HEALTH HAZARDS</u> 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		yes	8a.
b. Affect an existing emergency response or emergency evacuation plan, or create a need for a new plan?			x			8b.
c. Creation of any human health hazard or potential hazard?		X				
d. ***For P-R/D-J, will any chemical toxicants be used? (Also see 8a)						
e. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Risk/Health Hazards (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

- 8a. The MFWP Region 5 Weed Management Plan calls for an integrated method of managing weeds, including the use of herbicides. The use of herbicides would be in compliance with application guidelines. Herbicides have been used at Whitebird FAS in the past without incident, and the proposed development should not affect that record. Where appropriate, weeds would also be controlled using mechanical and biological methods in certain areas. The latrine vault incorporated into Alternative B would be pumped as needed to manage collected human waste. There is a slight potential for petroleum products to enter the water from towing vehicles at the boat launch.
- 8b. The creation of a boat launch would be a positive resource for emergency response, and could reduce the time it would take emergency response to get on the Stillwater River in the event of an incident.

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				
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			9c.
d. Changes in industrial or commercial activity?			x			9d.
e. Increased traffic hazards or effects on existing transportation facilities or patterns of movement of people and goods?			X			9e.
f. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Community Impact (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

- 9c. The proposed renovations would make Whitebird FAS a more attractive site for recreationists in the immediate and surrounding area. Visitation would likely rise slightly as a result, which would result in increased expenditures in the towns of Columbus and Reedpoint on items such as gas, food and other supplies. The increase would not be significant (please see attached Tourism Report).
- 9d. The proposed actions could make Whitebird FAS a more attractive site for launching or retrieving boats for commercial vendors in the area. Data is not available to support or oppose this possibility.
- 9e. The anticipated rise in visitation to the FAS prompted by the proposed project would lead to an equivalent increase in traffic on roads leading to the site. The entrance into the site is visible, and this increase would not create a significant traffic hazard.

10. <u>PUBLIC SERVICES/TAXES/UTILITIES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Will the proposed action 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:		X				
b. Will the proposed action have an effect upon the local or state tax base and revenues?		X				
c. Will the proposed action 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. Will the proposed action result in increased use of any energy source?		X				
e. **Define projected revenue sources						10e.
f. **Define projected maintenance costs.						10f.
g. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Public Services/Taxes/Utilities (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

10e. The proposed project would be funded through State funding sources, if deemed appropriate.

10f. There would be very little additional costs incurred, as the caretaker time would be absorbed by the Region. The current latrine pumping cost approximately \$200 - \$400 per year, and would remain about the same for the new latrine. Site maintenance would be facilitated by limiting vehicles to graveled surfaces and controlling litter and noxious weed spread.

** 11. <u>AESTHETICS/RECREATION</u>	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
Will the proposed action result in:						
a. Alteration of any scenic vista or creation of an aesthetically offensive site or effect that is open to public view?		X				
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.)		x				
e. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Aesthetics/Recreation (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

- 11c. The proposed project at Whitebird FAS would improve the recreational opportunities for the public by making boat access to the Stillwater River easier at this location. See Attachment A for Tourism Report.

12. <u>CULTURAL/HISTORICAL RESOURCES</u>	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
Will the proposed action result in:						
a. **Destruction or alteration of any site, structure or object of prehistoric historic, or paleontological importance?		X				
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.)						
e. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Cultural/Historical Resources (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

13. <u>SUMMARY EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE</u> 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 that create a significant effect when considered together or in total.)		X				13a.
b. Involve potential risks or adverse effects, which are uncertain but extremely hazardous if they were to occur?		X				
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.)		X				
g. ****For P-R/D-J, list any federal or state permits required.		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Significance Criteria (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

13a. This evaluation of the proposed project revealed no significant impacts to the human or physical environment.

APPENDIX 1
HB495
PROJECT QUALIFICATION CHECKLIST

Date December 12, 2006

Person Reviewing Jenny Alexander

Project Location: Whitebird FAS, Stillwater County

Description of Proposed Work: Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks proposes to renovate Whitebird FAS by grading and creating a boat launch. Roadways would be reconfigured and a parking area would be renovated.

The following checklist is intended to be a guide for determining whether a proposed development or improvement is of enough significance to fall under HB 495 rules. (Please check all that apply and comment as necessary.)

- A. New roadway or trail built over undisturbed land?**
Comments: None
- B. New building construction (buildings <100 sf and vault latrines exempt)?**
Comments: None
- C. Any excavation of 20 c.y. or greater?**
Comments: None
- D. New parking lots built over undisturbed land or expansion of existing lot that increases parking capacity by 25% or more?**
Comments: None
- E. Any new shoreline alteration that exceeds a double wide boat ramp or handicapped fishing station?**
Comments: None
- F. Any new construction into lakes, reservoirs, or streams?**
Comments: The construction of the boat launch would reach into the Stillwater River. However, the area is already disturbed by users currently launching.
- G. Any new construction in an area with National Registry quality cultural artifacts (as determined by State Historical Preservation Office)?**
Comments: None.

H. **Any new above ground utility lines?**

Comments: None.

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

Comments: None.

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

Comments: None.

APPENDIX 2

Threatened and Sensitive Species in the Whitebird FAS Area

A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program (MNHP) element occurrence database (nhp.nris.state.mt.us/eoportal) indicates the following occurrence of federally listed threatened, endangered, or proposed threatened or endangered plant or animal species in the greater area of the proposed project site.

Threatened Species

Haliaeetus leucocephalus (Bald Eagle). The Montana Natural Heritage Program database indicates that bald eagles occur in T3S R19E S28; the proposed project site lies within this area. No other information about these populations such as number of individuals, date of last sighting, breeding status, etc. was available.

MONTANA ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT (MEPA)/HB 495
TOURISM REPORT

Project Name: Whitebird FAS Renovation

Project Description: Creating a boat launch, renovation of bridge, roads, parking area, and latrine replacement

12.8.604(1) ARM:

- i. tourism is defined as the guidance or management of tourists (residents and nonresidents), who are the individuals who make tours for pleasure or education; and,
- ii. site development projects will be sent to the department of commerce with a request for review as to the impacts on tourism economy.

MEPA:

Human Environment. 11:

- c. Alteration of the quality or quantity of recreation/tourism opportunities and settings?

Considering (1) ii under ARM rules and MEPA Human Environment 11, listed above, describe how this project will impact the tourism economy:

As described the project will improve the visitor and user services at this FAS, better protect the resource, and provide more recreational opportunities at Whitebird.

Signature

Victor Bjornh

Date

11-1-06

Please return to Jennifer Alexander
Cooney State Park Manager
POB 254
Joliet, MT 59041

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Tourism Report – Department of Commerce**
- B. Clearance Letter – State Historic Preservation Office**
- C. Threatened and Sensitive Species Map in the Whitebird FAS Area**
- D. Site Plan Map**



Jenny -
**Montana Fish,
Wildlife & Parks**

INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

November 27, 2006

TO: Doug Habermann, Allan Kuser
FROM: Bardell Mangum
SUBJECT: Whitebird FAS SHPO Concurrence

Enclosed is a copy of a letter from Damon Murdo of the Montana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) regarding the proposed improvements to the Whitebird Fishing Access Site. The letter is dated November 22, 2006. Murdo indicates that there are two NRHP eligible ditches on the site. However, he concurs that the proposed improvements hold a low likelihood of adverse impact to these sites.

I will keep the original letter on file in our office. Please feel free to call if you have any questions or concerns.

c: File 995.1



MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

225 North Roberts + P.O. Box 201201 + Helena, MT 59620-1201
+ (406) 444-2694 + FAX (406) 444-2696 + www.montanahistoricalsociety.org +

November 22, 2006

Bardell Mangum
FWP

RE: WHITEBIRD FISHING ACCESS SITE. SHPO Project #: 2006112203

Dear Mr. Mangum:

I have conducted a cultural resource file search for the above-cited project located in Section 13, T3S R19E. According to our records there have been two previously recorded sites within the designated search locale. Site 24ST0207 is the Whitebird Ditch, and site 24ST0208 is the Scott Ditch. Both of these ditches are considered eligible for the National Register. In addition to the sites there have been a few previously conducted cultural resource inventories done in the areas.

We feel that as long as there are no major alterations to the integrity of the two historic ditches there is a low likelihood cultural properties will be impacted. We, therefore, feel that a recommendation for a cultural resource inventory is unwarranted at this time. However, should cultural materials be inadvertently discovered during this project we would ask that our office be contacted and the site investigated. Thank you for consulting with us.

If you have any further questions or comments you may contact me at (406) 444-7767 or by e-mail at dmurdo@mt.gov.

Sincerely,

Damon Murdo
Cultural Records Manager

File: FWP/PARKS/2006





Ecological Information

WHITE BIRD

The geographic scope of your data search intersected an area for which the Natural Heritage Program databases have ecological information. Such information can be useful in assessing biological values and interpreting Species of Concern data. A summary is provided below of conditions at the time of site record creation.

WHITE BIRD

General Description

White Bird is located on the floodplain of the Stillwater River. Most of the landscape is dominated by mature stands of black cottonwood (*Populus balsamifera ssp. trichocarpa*). These stands are primarily grazing disclimaxes with no or minimal native shrub cover, and the understory is dominated by exotic herbaceous species, including Kentucky bluegrass (*Poa pratensis*) and reed canarygrass (*Phalaris arundinacea*). This area also supports a stand of black cottonwood / red-osier dogwood (*Populus balsamifera ssp. trichocarpa* / *Cornus sericea*). This stand has a well-established tall shrub layer of chokecherry (*Prunus virginiana*), but the red-osier dogwood (*Cornus sericea*) is heavily browsed by wild ungulates and reed canarygrass is abundant in the ground layer. Cottonwood regeneration is occurring in this area: a gravel/cobble bar supports a well-established stand of sapling-sized narrowleaf cottonwood (*Populus angustifolia*) and black cottonwood. Side channels below bankfull elevation are hydric and support a reed canarygrass community.

Biological Significance

No special status plants or animals were observed. One state significant community, black cottonwood / red-osier dogwood (*Populus balsamifera ssp. trichocarpa* / *Cornus sericea*), was documented in fair condition.

Key Ecological Factors

Flooding and associated substrate deposition and proximity of groundwater are the primary abiotic factors that influence vegetation in this floodplain. Ungulate browsing is also an important influence on the structure and composition of shrubs in this area.

Exotic Species

Exotic species are abundant in this area. Reed canarygrass (*Phalaris arundinacea*) dominates hydric sloughs and more mesic cottonwood stands. Other common exotic species include hound's tongue (*Cynoglossum officinale*), thistle species (*Cirsium spp.*), spotted knapweed (*Centaurea maculosa*), leafy spurge (*Euphorbia esula*), Kentucky bluegrass (*Poa pratensis*), and orchard grass (*Dactylis glomerata*). Leafy spurge has been spot sprayed along roadsides.

Other Values

Management Information

Greater weed control efforts would be helpful, although with high public use and upstream seed source, this effort will be perpetual. Away from the riparian area, land use is primarily livestock grazing, dispersed housing, and agriculture.

Information Gaps

Research into the landuse history of the area would be useful.

References

More detailed data on vegetation communities in this area may be available; if you are interested, contact Greg Kudray at (406) 444-0915 or gkudray@mt.gov



NOTE:
CAMPING PADS INDICATE DESIGN
INTENT ONLY. EXACT SIZE AND
LOCATION TO BE FIELD DETERMINED

Barrier and Rehab
Pioneered
Camping Area

(7) Gravel Camp Spurs
w/ Tables and Fire Rings

Replace Irrigation
Ditch Crossing

New Concrete
Vault Lairine

New Gravel River
Access Parking

New 16' Gravel
River Access

Improve Radius and
High Water Crossing

Barrier and Rehab
Existing River Access

STILLWATER RIVER



Overall Site Plan

SCALE: 1" = 100'



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



Montana Fish,
Wildlife & Parks

Whitebird Fishing Access Site
Stillwater River near Columbus, MT



SHEET
of