

Draft Environmental Assessment



LITTLE BLACKFOOT RIVER FISHING ACCESS SITE Improvement Project

October 2007



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

Little Blackfoot River FAS Improvement Project Draft Environmental Assessment MEPA, NEPA, MCA 23-1-110 CHECKLIST

PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

1. **Proposed state action:** Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes to implement various site improvement and protection projects at the Little Blackfoot River Fishing Access Site (FAS) near the town of Avon. Projects include building a new approach and entrance road, constructing a 10-stall gravel parking lot, and installing a latrine and signage.
2. **Agency authority for the proposed action:** The 1977 Montana Legislature enacted statute 87-1-605, which directs Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) 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 established.
3. **Name of project:** Little Blackfoot River Fishing Access Site Improvement Project.
4. **Project sponsor:** Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks is the project sponsor.
5. **If applicable:**
 Estimated start of construction: Spring 2008
 Estimated completion of construction: Summer 2008
 Current Status of Project Design (% complete): 50
6. **Location affected by proposed action (county, range and township):** That part of NE ¼ of Section 1, Township 9N Range 9W in Powell County (Figures 1 and 2, location maps).

7. **Project size:**

	<u>Acres</u>		<u>Acres</u>
(a) Developed:		(d) Floodplain	<u> 0</u>
Residential	<u> 0</u>		
Industrial	<u> 0</u>	(e) Productive:	
(b) Open Space/Woodlands/Recreation	<u> 4</u>	Irrigated cropland	<u> 0</u>
		Dry cropland	<u> 0</u>
(c) Wetlands/Riparian Areas	<u> 0</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>
Montana Dept of Transportation	Approach

(b) Funding:

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Amount</u>
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks	\$45,000

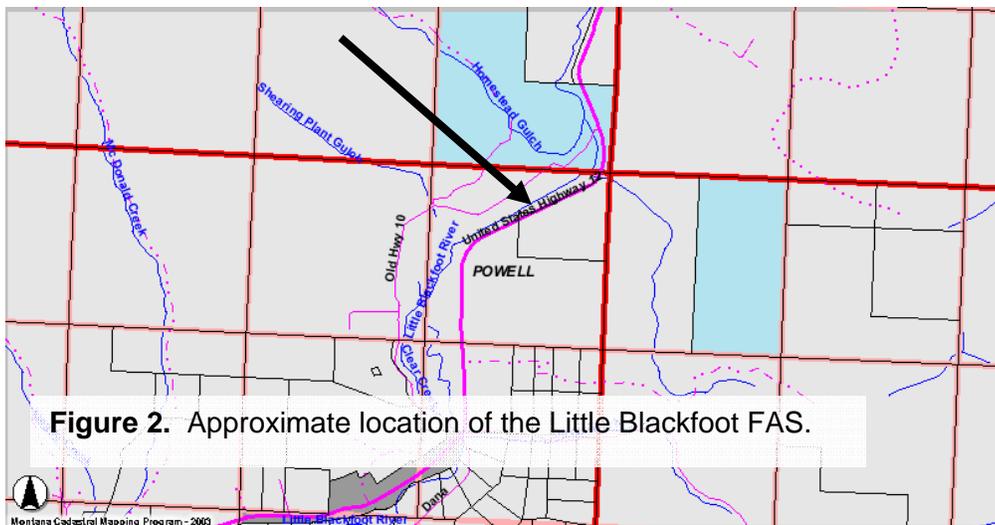
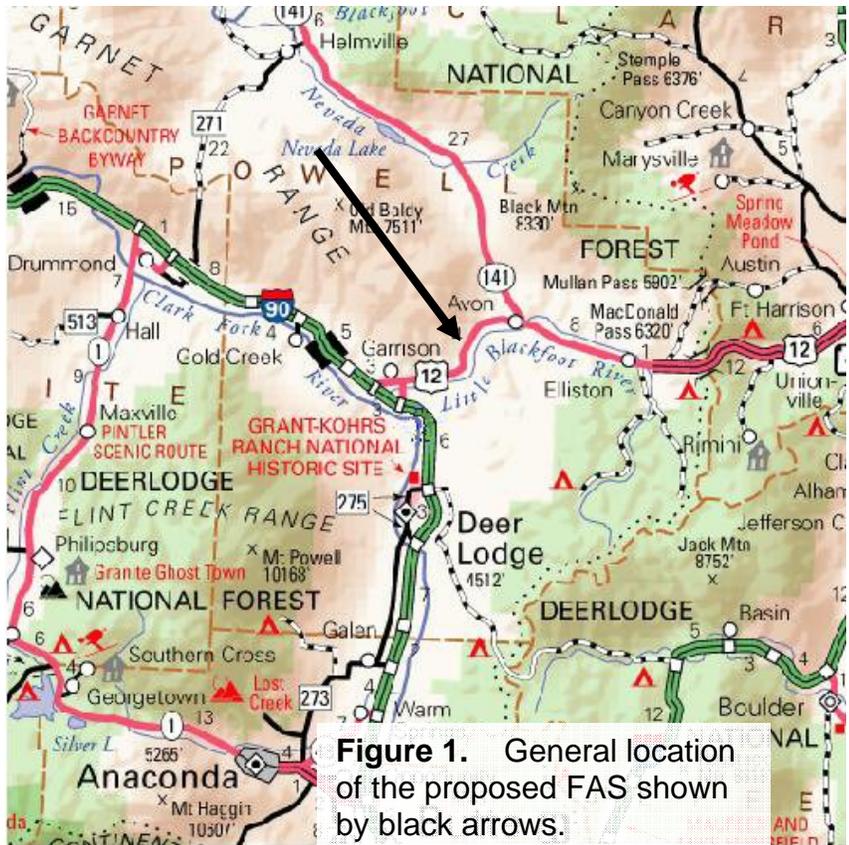
(c) Other Overlapping or Additional Jurisdictional Responsibilities:

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Type of Responsibility</u>
N/A	

9. Summary of the proposed action:

The Little Blackfoot River is a tributary to the Clark Fork River in FWP Region 2. The Little Blackfoot's headwaters are in the Boulder Mountains south of the town of Elliston and it flows for 40 miles to its confluence with the Clark Fork in the town of Garrison. Near its headwaters, the Little Blackfoot is very narrow in places and contains a lot of woody debris as it flows through the Helena National Forest. South of Elliston, the river slows and widens as it enters a valley. Streamside vegetation gradually changes from trees to grasses and shrubs, such as willow and red-osier dogwood. The fishery is dominated by brook and westslope cutthroat trout above Elliston and by brown trout below Elliston. Rainbow trout and mountain whitefish can be found throughout the length of the River but are less common. Recreational fishing for these species is considered to be very good in the spring and fall, especially during the brown trout fall spawning run. Summer fishing is made difficult by significant dewatering of the river by irrigation and, frequently of late, by drought.

Public access to the Little Blackfoot south of Elliston has long been limited to a handful of pullouts along state and county bridges and by permission of private landowners. Fishing pressure on the Little Blackfoot is relatively low due to the lack of public access and because of the proximity of better-known fly-fishing rivers like the Big Blackfoot and the Clark Fork. However, the Little Blackfoot does see more use than many people probably realize. In 2005 there were 4,854 angler days on the river between Elliston and Garrison.



In 2005, FWP acquired approximately 4 acres of land near Avon for a new Fishing Access Site on the Little Blackfoot River (Figures 1 and 2). The acreage sits between Highway 12 and the Little Blackfoot River and portions had been owned by Montana Dept. of Transportation (MDT) and private owners. The MDT parcel was approximately 2.0 acres in size and had been a highway rest stop from 1964 to 1996. The parcel now consists of a grove of cottonwood trees with a dirt road looping around it and a partially reclaimed approach.

One of the reasons the rest area was closed down by MDT was because the visibility for vehicles entering and leaving the site was insufficient (Figure 3). When FWP acquired the parcel from MDT, an additional 2.3 acres of adjacent land was purchased at the same time from a private owner in order to construct a new, safe approach approximately 200 ft. west of the old one. Conditions on the approval of the new approach permit may include, but are not limited to; satisfying current sight distance standards (vegetation removal if necessary), paving the approach to the highway right-of-way boundary, sloping and seeding of reclaimed topsoil slopes, satisfying roadside ditch drainage, and meeting minimum signing and traffic control requirements. These conditions are based on approved approach permits at other FAS locations. Other conditions may be relevant depending on the site and MDT District preferences.

Monies are now available for the redevelopment of this site, which would include: the construction of the new approach referred to earlier; approximately 700 feet of new gravel-surface roadway (0.3 acres); 2200 square feet (0.05) of gravel surface parking area for 10 vehicle spaces; a latrine, barrier rock, and fencing. Five to ten hazard trees may be removed in and around the parking area and cul-de-sac for safety concerns. A minor amount of embankment material may be imported for the approach construction (Figure 4). The majority of the proposed development would be overlaid on existing roadbed that was used when the site was a rest area (Figures 5 and 6). This approach minimizes disturbance and lowers the cost. The Little Blackfoot is not a navigable water body so a boat ramp is not going to be constructed, but the parcel has stable banks for streamside angling and the river is generally shallow enough to wade in (Figure 7). The budget for the improvements is \$45,000.

The benefits of the proposed action include the provision of greater public access to a high-quality fishery; the establishment of site protection measures, and the construction of a safer approach from the state highway. The development of this FAS would greatly add to public recreational opportunities in the Region.

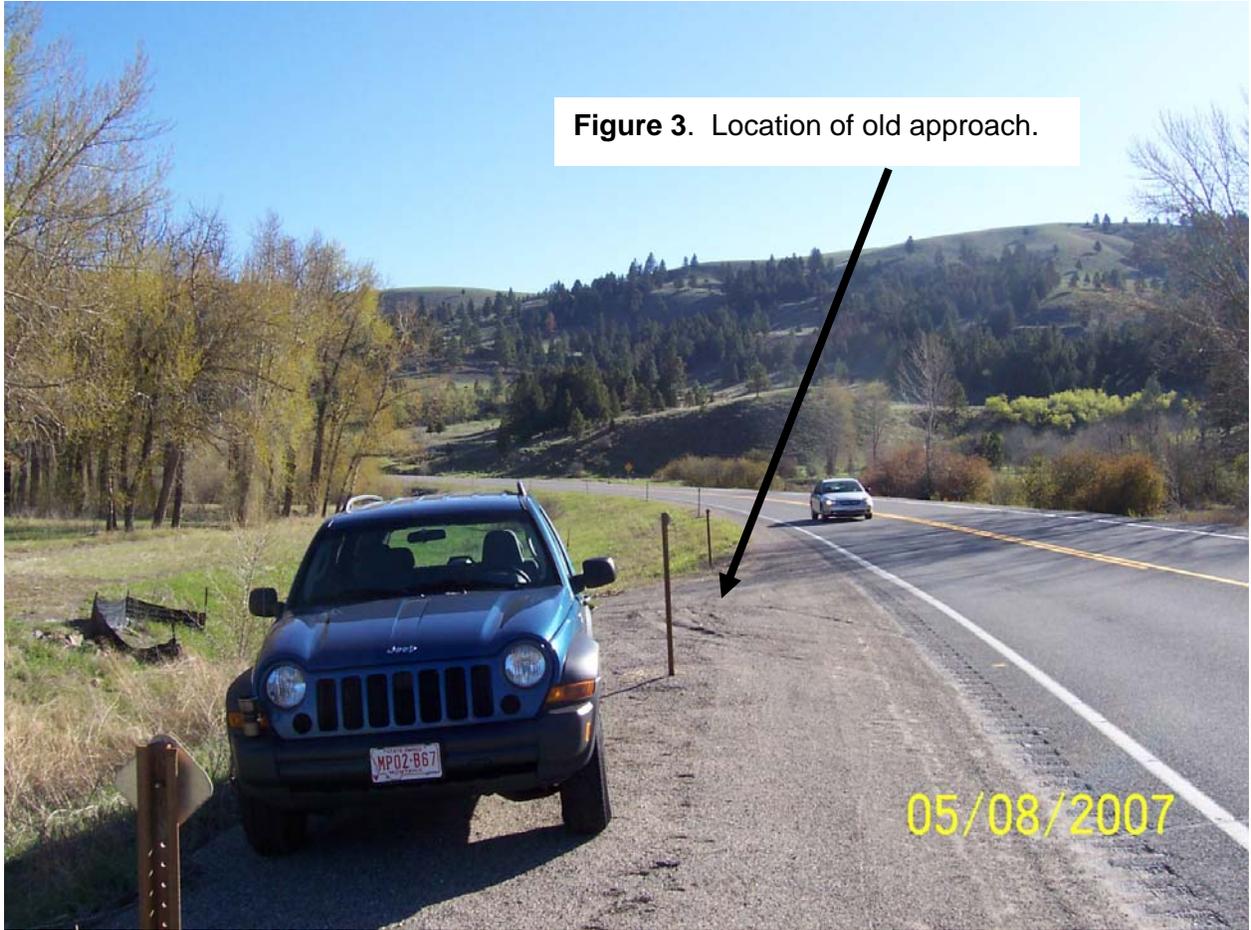


Figure 3. Location of old approach.

Figure 4. Location of new approach and entrance road. Some fill would likely be needed here for the approach construction.





Figure 5. The proposed parking area would be constructed in the location of the old rest-area turn-around, located behind the cottonwood trees shown here.



Figure 6. Photo of interior of parcel showing old roadbed. Proposed development would largely follow these existing roads.



Figure 7. Looking upstream on Little Blackfoot FAS.

PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

1. Alternatives:

Alternative A: No Action

If no action were taken, the Little Blackfoot FAS would remain undeveloped and receive little use by the public. Public access to the Little Blackfoot would remain difficult, and use would continue to be concentrated along a handful of pullouts along state and county bridges or by permission of private landowners.

Preferred Alternative B: Proposed Action

In the preferred alternative, FWP would proceed with plans to implement various improvements to the Little Blackfoot FAS and open it to the public. These improvements include a new approach and entrance road, a 10-stall gravel parking lot, barrier rock, fencing, signage, and a latrine. The Little Blackfoot FAS is the only designated public FAS on the Little Blackfoot River, and FWP would like to implement the proposed developments in order to provide better public access to this high-quality fishery.

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 other controls associated with the actions. Therefore, no evaluation is necessary.

3. Private Property Regulatory Restrictions:

Actions described in this environmental analysis do not regulate the use of private, tangible personal property, and therefore do not require an evaluation of regulatory restrictions on private property.

PART III. 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		yes	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				
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. Soil would be disturbed and over-covered during the construction of the parking area, approach, and entrance road. Negative impacts can be mitigated by the adherence to Best Management Practices (BMPs) during all phases of construction.

* 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 cannot 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. <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		yes	2b.
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 and temporary dust and vehicle emissions will be created by heavy equipment during construction of the parking lot and approach.
- 2b. Latrines can sometimes emit offensive odors. This impact can be mitigated by regular maintenance of the latrine.

* 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 cannot be evaluated.

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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				
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. It is unlikely that the proposed project would result in any discharge into adjacent surface water. FWP would ensure that Best Management Practices were employed during construction to minimize that risk.

* 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 cannot 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.

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			4a.
b. Alteration of a plant community?			X			4b.
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			4e.
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. Vegetation in the project area is comprised of grasses and forbs, with some small trees. The proposed project would require the removal of approximately 1/2 acre of vegetation for the parking lot, approach and entrance road. Additionally, 4-5 hazard trees would likely be removed in the parking area. These plant species are common and well represented locally and regionally, and the overall effect would not be significant.
- 4b. Please see comment 4a.
- 4e. Disturbed soils at the edges of the proposed parking lot could become colonized by noxious weeds. FWP would re-seed disturbed areas and actively manage the entire site for noxious weeds under the FWP Region Two Weed Management Plan.

* 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 cannot 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.

** 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		yes	5b.
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.)						
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.)						
j. Other:		X				

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

- 5b. The proposed action would increase public access to the Little Blackfoot River, which would likely result in more fishing pressure and more game fish mortality. Department fisheries biologists feel that fish populations in the Little Blackfoot can support the expected increase in pressure. Game wardens regularly patrol FASs to ensure that anglers are complying with state regulations. The removal of vegetation for the parking lot would likely result in the displacement of several small non-game animal species in the immediate area.
- 5f. A search of the Natural Resources Information System provided by the Montana Natural Heritage Program showed that the project area is within possible gray wolf, Canada lynx, and bald eagle habitat (Appendix 2). No observations of wolves or lynx have been recorded at this location, but it is possible that they have moved through the area. Bald eagles have been recorded in the river valley southwest of the project area, so it is likely that this species is an occasional visitor to this area.
- 5g. The increased presence of recreationists on the property could cause stress to wildlife populations. However, visitation would not be expected to ever be high, and most wildlife species present on the parcel are probably already accustomed to human presence, given the site's proximity to Highway 12 and area ranches.

* 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 cannot 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.

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				

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 parking area and associated projects, but would end after completion of the project. Adjacent landowners would not be affected.

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				7a.
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):

- 7a. The proposed action would not alter or interfere with the productivity or profitability of the existing land use, not does it conflict with a designated natural area or area of unusual scientific or educational importance.

* 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 cannot 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.

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		yes	8a.
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				
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 FWP Region 2 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 and conducted by people trained in safe handling techniques. Weeds would also be controlled using mechanical or biological means in certain areas to reduce the risk of chemical spills or water contamination.

* 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 cannot 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.

9. COMMUNITY IMPACT 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				
d. Changes in industrial or commercial activity?		X				
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):

- 9e. There would be a slight increase in traffic hazards from users entering and leaving the FAS. The new approach would be well sited, however, and use of the site would be light, so problems are not expected.

* 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 cannot 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.

10. PUBLIC SERVICES/TAXES/UTILITIES 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 cost of the proposed improvements is estimated to be \$45,000. The revenue source would be the Capitol Improvement Fund.
- 10f. Because the Little Blackfoot FAS is not on a caretaker's established route, the Department has explored the option of having Region 3 staff maintain the FAS, as travel time and costs would be less. Another option would be to hire a caretaker in the Avon or Elliston area where per diem for travel would be minimal. It is estimated it would cost approximately \$400 for weed control in years 2008 and 2009, dropping to about \$100 a year thereafter to maintain control. Total maintenance cost estimates for the site are pending.

* 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 cannot 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.

** 11. <u>AESTHETICS/RECREATION</u>	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Will the proposed action result in:	Unknown *	None	Minor *		
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.)						
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 acquisition would increase public access to the Little Blackfoot River, thereby improving recreational opportunities in the area and Region (Tourism Report, Appendix 3).

12. <u>CULTURAL/HISTORICAL RESOURCES</u>	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Will the proposed action result in:	Unknown *	None	Minor *		
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.)						
e. Other:		X				

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

12a. SHPO recommends that a cultural resource inventory be conducted in order to determine whether or not cultural properties exist. FWP will do prior to any ground disturbance.

- * 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 cannot 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.

SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

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 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.)						
g. ****For P-R/D-J, list any federal or state permits required.						

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

13a. This EA found no significant impacts to the human or physical environment from the proposed action.

* 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 cannot 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.

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PART IV. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

The Little Blackfoot River is an important tributary to the Clark Fork River and is a high-quality if lesser-known and visited fishery. Brook trout, westslope cutthroat trout and brown trout exist in sufficient numbers to support greater fishing pressure than the present. The development of an FAS at this site would be in line with FWP's Six-Year Operation Plan for the Fisheries Program, which has as a stated goal to "identify waters in need of additional access and develop strategies to meet these needs", and to "pursue access opportunities to high-quality, non-floatable (small/medium) streams."

The proposed development would increase public recreational opportunities with no significant negative impacts. Montana FWP would like to provide better public access to area anglers with an improved FAS on the Little Blackfoot.

PART V. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

1. Public Involvement

The public will be notified of the availability of the Draft EA for this proposed improvement project by: 1) one statewide press release; 2) legal notice to be published in the *Independent Record* (Helena), *The Missoulian*, and the *Silver State Post* (Deer Lodge); and 3) mailing copies of the Draft EA (or email notification) to persons, agencies and groups, as well as to the adjacent property owners. Additionally the EA will be posted on Fish, Wildlife & Parks' web page at <http://fwp.mt.gov/publicnotices/>. Individual copies of the Draft EA will be mailed to anyone who requests a copy.

2. Duration of comment period, if any.

A 32-day comment period is proposed to begin November 10, 2007, and comments must be received no later than 5 p.m., December 11, 2007. This level of public involvement is appropriate for this scale of project. Comments should be:

Mailed to: Lee Bastian
Regional Parks Manager
Region 2 FWP
3201 Spurgin Road
Missoula, MT 59804

Emailed to: lbastian@mt.gov

Phoned to: Lee Bastian at 406-542-5517

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.

Based on an evaluation of the primary, secondary, and cumulative impacts to the physical and human environment, this environmental review found no significant impacts from the proposed action. 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 would occur or reasonable assurance that the impact would not occur. FWP assessed the 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 FWP to future actions; and potential conflicts with local, federal, or state laws. As this EA revealed no significant impacts from the proposed actions, and 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:

Lee Bastian
Region 5 Park Supervisor
3201 Spurgin Road
Missoula, MT 59804
(406)542-5517

Allan Kuser
Fishing Access Site Coordinator
1420 East 6th Ave
Helena, MT 59620
(406) 444-7885

Linnaea Schroeer-Smith
Independent Contractor
1027 9th Ave
Helena, MT 59601
(406)495-9620

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

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Parks Division
Wildlife Division
Fisheries Division
Design & Construction Bureau
Lands Division

Montana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)

Montana Department of Commerce – Tourism

Montana Natural Heritage Program – Natural Resources Information System (NRIS)

APPENDIX 1
HB 495
PROJECT QUALIFICATION CHECKLIST

Date September 25, 2007 **Person Reviewing** Linnaea Schroeer-Smith

Project Location: Little Blackfoot FAS, NE1/4 of Section 1, Township 9N, Range 9W in Powell County.

Description of Proposed Work: Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks proposes to implement various site improvement and protection projects at the Little Blackfoot River FAS near the town of Avon. Projects include building a new approach, constructing a 10-stall gravel parking lot, and installing a latrine.

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: Approximately 700 ft of gravel-surface road would be constructed over undisturbed land for the entrance road.
- 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. The proposed parking area would be constructed in the same location where the previous road loop existed.
- 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:
- G. Any new construction in an area with National Registry quality cultural artifacts (as determined by State Historical Preservation Office)?**
Comments: SHPO has requested a cultural resources inventory be conducted prior to ground disturbance.

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

If any of the above are checked, HB 495 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.

Appendix 2

Sensitive Plants and Animals in the Little Blackfoot FAS Area

Species of Concern Terms and Definitions

Montana Species of Concern. The term "**Species of Concern**" includes taxa that are at-risk or potentially at-risk due to rarity, restricted distribution, habitat loss, and/or other factors. The term also encompasses species that have a special designation by organizations or land management agencies in Montana, including: Bureau of Land Management Special Status and Watch species; U.S. Forest Service Sensitive and Watch species; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Threatened, Endangered and Candidate species.

▼ **Status Ranks (Global and State)**

The international network of Natural Heritage Programs employs a standardized ranking system to denote global (**G** -- range-wide) and state status (**S**) (NatureServe 2003). Species are assigned numeric ranks ranging from 1 (critically imperiled) to 5 (demonstrably secure), reflecting the relative degree to which they are "at-risk". Rank definitions are given below. A number of factors are considered in assigning ranks -- the number, size and distribution of known "occurrences" or populations, population trends (if known), habitat sensitivity, and threat. Factors in a species' life history that make it especially vulnerable are also considered (e.g., dependence on a specific pollinator).

Status Ranks

Code	Definition
G1 S1	At high risk because of extremely limited and/or rapidly declining numbers, range, and/or habitat, making it highly vulnerable to global extinction or extirpation in the state.
G2 S2	At risk because of very limited and/or declining numbers, range, and/or habitat, making it vulnerable to global extinction or extirpation in the state.
G3 S3	Potentially at risk because of limited and/or declining numbers, range, and/or habitat, even though it may be abundant in some areas.
G4 S4	Uncommon but not rare (although it may be rare in parts of its range), and usually widespread. Apparently not vulnerable in most of its range, but possibly cause for long-term concern.
G5 S5	Common, widespread, and abundant (although it may be rare in parts of its range). Not vulnerable in most of its range.

1. *Canis lupus* (Gray Wolf).

Natural Heritage Ranks:

State: **S3**

Global: **G4**

Federal Agency Status:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: **LE, XN**

U.S. Forest Service: **Endangered**

U.S. Bureau of Land Management: **Special Status**

No observational data exists for this specific site, but the project area is inside of possible wolf habitat.

2. *Gulo gulo* (Wolverine).

Natural Heritage Ranks:

State: **S3**

Global: **G4**

Federal Agency Status:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:

U.S. Forest Service: **Sensitive**

U.S. Bureau of Land Management: **Sensitive**

The mountain ranges of the Northern Continental Divide have relatively continuous habitat for this species. Observation records for the project area are not available, but the species may be present.

3. *Martes pennanti* (Fisher)

Natural Heritage Ranks:

State: **S3**

Global: **G5**

Federal Agency Status:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:

U.S. Forest Service: **Sensitive**

U.S. Bureau of Land Management: **Sensitive**

The mountain ranges of the Northern Continental Divide have relatively continuous habitat for this species. Observation records for the project area are not available, but the species may be present.

4. *Haliaeetus leucocephalus* (Bald Eagle).

Natural Heritage Ranks:

State: **S3**

Global: **G5**

Federal Agency Status:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: **LT, PDL**

U.S. Forest Service: **Threatened**

U.S. Bureau of Land Management: **Special Status**

No bald eagle nests have been observed in the project area, but it is likely that they utilize habitat within the area to some degree.

5. *Lynx canadensis* (Canada Lynx)

Natural Heritage Ranks:

State: **S3**

Global: **G5**

Federal Agency Status:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: **LT**

U.S. Forest Service: **Threatened**

U.S. Bureau of Land Management: **Special Status**

The mountain ranges of the Northern Continental Divide have relatively continuous habitat for this species. Observation records for the project area are not available, but the species may be present.

Information courtesy of Montana Natural Heritage Program

APPENDIX 3
TOURISM REPORT
MONTANA ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT (MEPA)/HB 495

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:

Carol Crockett
Tourism Development Specialist, Travel Montana
Montana Commerce Department
301 South Park Avenue
Helena, MT 59601
406-841-2796, FAX 406-841-2871
ccrockett@mt.gov

Project Name: Little Blackfoot Fishing Access Site Improvement Project

Project Location: The Little Blackfoot FAS is located within Region 2 in Powell County, in the NE ¼ of Section 1, Township 9N Range 9W.

Project Description: Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes to implement various improvement and site protection measures at the Little Blackfoot FAS, including the construction of a new approach, a 10-12 stall gravel parking area, and the installation of fencing, barrier rock, and a latrine. The site is currently not open to the public, as there is no usable approach onto the property.

1. Would this site development project have an impact on the tourism economy?
NO YES If YES, briefly describe:

As described, the project has the potential to positively impact the tourism & recreation industry economy.

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

NO YES If YES, briefly describe:

As described, the project would improve the quality and quantity of tourism & recreational opportunities.

Signature: Carol Crockett Date: August 23, 2007