



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Region 2 Headquarters
3201 Spurgin Road
Missoula, MT 59804-3101
July 24, 2008

- *Governor's Office, Attn: Mike Volesky, PO Box 200801, Helena, MT 59620-0801
- Environmental Quality Council, PO Box 201704, Helena, MT 59620-1704
- *Dept. of Environmental Quality, PO Box 200901, Helena, MT 59620-0901
- *Dept. of Natural Resources & Conservation, POB 201601, Helena, MT 59620-1601
- *Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks:

Website, Commission Secretary, Division Secretaries, Regional Office Managers, Region 2 Information Officer

- **Region 2 Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Citizens Advisory Council
- *State Historic Preservation Office, PO Box 201202, Helena, MT 59620-1202
- *MT State Library, PO BOX 201800, Helena, MT 59620-1800
- DNRC, Attn: Tony Liane, 1401 27th Ave., Missoula, MT 59804
- MT Environmental Information Center, Attn: Jim Jensen, POB 1184, Helena, MT 59624-1184
- MT Department of Transportation, Attn: Shane Mintz, 2701 Prospect Ave., Helena, MT 59620
- Missoula County Commissioners, 200 W. Broadway, Missoula, MT 59802
- **Missoula City-County Health Dept., Attn: Ben Schmidt, 301 W Alder, Missoula, MT 59802
- **Missoula Co Public Works, Attn: Greg Robertson, 200 W Broadway, Missoula, MT 59802
- **Missoula Co Floodplain Administrator, Attn: Todd Klietz, 435 Ryman, Missoula, MT 59802
- Missoula Co Surveyor Office, 200 W Broadway, Missoula, MT Attn: Chuck Wright
- Missoula County Parks, Attn: Lisa Moisey, 200 W Broadway, Missoula, MT 59802
- **Montana Wildlife Federation, PO Box 1175, Helena, MT 59624
- **National Wildlife Federation, 240 N Higgins, Missoula, MT 59802
- **MT Audubon Council, Attn: Janet Ellis, PO Box 595, Helena, MT 59624
- MT Parks Foundation, Attn: Wayne Hirst, PO Box 728 Libby, MT 59923
- George Ochenski, POB 689, Helena, MT 59624-0689
- Bob Rainey, 212 S. 6, Livingston, MT 59047
- Rod Leister, 14400 Harper's Bridge Rd., Missoula, MT 59808
- Leonard Tuckett, 15100 Harper's Bridge Rd., Missoula, MT 59808
- Chuck Blue, 14900 Harper's Bridge Rd., Missoula, MT 59808
- Plum Creek Timber Co LP, Attn: Jaime Schaefer, Columbia Falls, MT 59912
- Gary Fredericks, 14700 Harper's Bridge Rd., Missoula, MT 59808
- Richard Babbitt, 14800 Harper's Bridge Rd., Missoula, MT 59808
- Westslope Chapter Trout Unlmt. Attn: Mike Willett, 108 N 2nd St., #2, Hamilton, MT 59840
- *Trout Unlmt., Attn: Michael Gibson, PO Box 7186, Missoula, MT 59807
- **Sen. Carol Williams, PO Box 9176, Missoula, MT 59807-9176
- **Sen. Jon Ellingson, 141 North Ave. E, Missoula, MT 59801-6011
- **Sen. Vicki Cocchiarella, 535 Livingston Ave., Missoula, MT 59801-8003
- **Sen. Greg Lind, PO Box 16720, Missoula, MT 59808-6720
- **Sen. Carolyn Squires, 211 South 10th St W, Missoula, MT 59801-3412
- **Rep. Rosalie Buzzas, 233 University Ave., Missoula, MT 59801-1809
- **Rep. Gail Gutsche, 1530 Cooper St., Missoula, MT 59802-2220
- **Rep. David Wanzenried, 903 Sky Dr., Missoula, MT 59804-2793
- **Rep. Holly Raser, 4304 Spurgin Road, Missoula, MT 59804-4520
- **Rep. Teresa Henry, 204 Chestnut St., Missoula, MT 59801-1809
- **Rep. Kevin Furey, PO Box 56, Milltown, MT 59802-4903
- **Rep. Dave McAlpin, 800 Woodworth Ave., Missoula, MT 59801-7046
- **Rep. John Balyeat, 4879 Scott Allen Dr., Missoula, MT 59803-2793
- **Rep. Robin Hamilton, 330 Daly Dr., Missoula, MT 59801-4338
- **Rep. Tom Facey, 418 Plymouth, Missoula, MT 59801-4133

*Mailed electronically; **Postcard notification

Dear Interested Parties:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) has issued a Decision Notice (DN) to acquire 12.34 acres of land adjacent to the Clark Fork River approximately 8 miles northwest of Missoula. The property consists of two tracts of land. Tract 1 contains 3.91 acres, which will be a donation to FWP, and Tract 2 contains 8.43 acres, which will be purchased by FWP. FWP proposes to acquire both tracts in fee title. FWP will recommend to the FWP Commission at its August 5, 2008 meeting that FWP acquire the property.

You may review this DN in Helena at the State Library, FWP Headquarters, or the Environmental Quality Council. Or, you may review the DN on FWP's Internet website at <http://fwp.mt.gov> ("Recent Public Notices"). To receive a printed copy of this DN, contact the Region 2 FWP office by phoning 406-542-5500; writing Region 2 FWP, 3201 Spurgin Rd., Missoula, MT 59804; or emailing shrose@mt.gov.

Sincerely,



Mack Long
for Regional Supervisor

Enclosure: Decision Notice for Old Harper's Bridge Fishing Access Site Acquisitions

DECISION NOTICE:
Old Harper's Bridge Fishing Access Site Acquisitions
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Region 2 Office
3201 Spurgin Road
Missoula, MT 59804
(406) 542-5500

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED PROJECT

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes to acquire 12.34 acres of land adjacent to the Clark Fork River approximately 8 miles northwest of Missoula. The property consists of two tracts of land. Tract 1 contains 3.91 acres, which will be a donation to FWP, and Tract 2 contains 8.43 acres, which will be purchased by FWP. FWP proposes to acquire both tracts in fee title.

Tract 1 – Donation

Tract 1 is located approximately 8 miles northwest of Missoula on the western side of the Clark Fork River. The owner wishes to donate the property to FWP as it provides little benefit to their farming operation due to its topography and location.

The acres are transected by the Big Flat Road that serves as the access road on the west side of the river. The topography of this tract has a slope of between thirty and sixty percent, with the exception of the river rock shoreline. Excluding the shoreline, most of the tract is heavily forested with fir and pine trees.

Although there is no parking area along Big Flat Road for accessing the property, the public can park at the Deep Creek FAS and walk along the river's shoreline to use the property for bank fishing.

Tract 2 – Purchase in Fee

This property, referred to as Old Harper's Bridge, is northwest of Missoula off of Mullan Road - Hwy 263 on Harper's Bridge Road. The proposed acreage to be acquired by FWP is next to the remaining eastern abutment of the Harper's Bridge. The landscape is comprised of young and mature cottonwoods along the river's edge, mature ponderosa pines, and native grasses. There are established areas of noxious weeds (spurge and knapweed) throughout the site. The riverbank has been eroded in places due to river processes and public usage.

The current landowners have historically allowed the public to access the river through their property for bank fishing and floating. Unfortunately, the popularity of the site has grown and increased parking along the county road is causing traffic hazards and congestion problems for local residents.

The current landowner is proposing the sale of his property to FWP to ensure the public's access to the river is maintained, the natural environment of the parcel is preserved, and the property is not developed into residential lots.

For FWP interests, the location of this site is strategically located 4-5 miles downstream from the Kona Bridge Fishing Access Site and 22 miles upstream from the Petty Creek Fishing Access Site. This acquisition would improve access to this stretch of the Clark Fork River giving floaters an additional put-in and take-out location within the 26-27 mile stretch between Kona Bridge FAS and the Petty Creek FAS. Furthermore, under the management of FWP, the site would be

added to the routine regional maintenance schedule of other fishing access sites in the area. Maintenance will include treatment of the existing noxious weed infestations.

Over the years, Missoula County officials have received calls from local residents complaining about the traffic caused by people accessing the river at the Old Harper's Bridge cul-de-sac. Missoula County supports the acquisition by FWP because of the possibility of the site being developed into a formal fishing access site in the future with off-street parking.

Alternative A: No Action

If FWP does not acquire the property, the public would lose this opportunity to add public access to the Clark Fork River for floating and angling activities. Tract 2 has the potential for residential development. Additionally, Missoula County officials are likely to continue to receive complaints from local residents about river users parking along Harper's Bridge Road and blocking traffic.

Alternative B: The acquisition of approximately 12 acres adjacent to the Clark Fork River

The acquisition of the land at Old Harper's Bridge will provide the public with additional recreational sites along the Clark Fork River that will be under the management of FWP. This acquisition will provide further open spaces and protect the view-shed along the Clark Fork River. The acquisition would provide key access to the Clark Fork River in a stretch where access is currently quite limited. If acquired, the nearest access locations would be Kona Bridge Fishing Access Site (4-5 miles upstream) and Petty Creek Fishing Access Site (22 miles downstream).

PUBLIC PROCESS AND COMMENT

The EA was sent out and the public comment period began June 19, 2008, and ran through July 21, 2008. Legal notices were published twice each in the *Missoulian*, and the *Helena Independent Record*. There were 17 full copies, 7 electronic versions, and 35 post cards about the EA that were sent to interested parties consisting of neighbors, friends, conservation groups, Montana state legislators, county & state departments or agencies. The Old Harper's Bridge Acquisitions EA was posted on the MFWP web site June 20, 2008. A statewide news release was also sent out.

There were nine comments received from the public, one of which was received late. All nine are in favor of FWP acquiring the 12.34 acres of land. The following is a summary of comments/questions received:

"Will any cottonwood trees be cut down for any future activities on the site? Would like to see them better protected in the county." *FWP Response: Any future improvements of the site should be able to avoid the removal of any live cottonwood trees since there is a nice open field available for improvements. Another EA will be completed for site improvements at the site.*

"Fully support acquisition of the properties, one of few places to access this part of the river, appreciate the willingness of the landowner to find a way to continue public access."

"This one is easy! Absolutely!!"

"Heck Ya!"

"We endorse FWP's plan to buy these eight acres on behalf of the public, and to accept ownership of the four acres offered on the Deep Creek side of the river."

"Looks good to me, any time we can get access, go for it."

"Yes, yes, yes to the great bargain and wonderful purchase of the Leister land on the Clark Fork!"

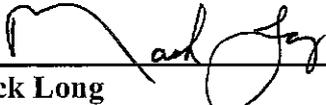
“The purchase of Old Harper’s Bridge site has no negative impacts that can’t be taken care of. What it does do is provide lots of positive impacts and the opportunity to provide even more as time goes on. Please support this purchase to help protect this land and the river that passes thru it.”

“...we would like FWP, as much as possible, to manage this site not only as a fishing access site, but also for its riparian vegetation. This area contains young and mature cottonwoods, ponderosa pines, and native grasses – all are important habitat types in western Montana for wildlife.” Further, the commenter stated, “Although we support the purchase/donation of this land, it is important for FWP to manage its riparian landholdings in a way that allows recreationists to access the stream, but also protect this important area for both fish and wildlife habitat.” *FWP Response: Management of this site will accommodate both the angling/floating public as well as local wildlife populations. Minimal disturbance of trees and shrubs is anticipated in the event of the site being developed into a more formal fishing access site. FWP has acquired numerous other sites similar in composition over the years and has successfully integrated all aspects of resource management.*

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 B, and proceed with FWP acquiring the 12 acres of land. This action also requires the approval of the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission scheduled in August. 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. The EA is still available for review at http://fwp.mt.gov/publicnotices/notice_1777.aspx

In accordance with MFWP 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, 1420 East 6th Avenue, P.O. Box 200701 Helena, MT 59620-0701.



Mack Long
Regional Supervisor

7/23/08

Date