

Draft Environmental Assessment

Lake Mary Ronan State Park Hiking Trail Project



June 2009



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

Draft Environmental Assessment MEPA, NEPA, MCA 23-1-110 CHECKLIST

PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

1. Proposed state action:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) is proposing to contract with the Montana Conservation Corp to provide an adult crew to construct approximately 1.75 miles of hiking trails at Lake Mary Ronan State Park.

2. Agency authority for the proposed action:

FWP has the authority to develop outdoor recreational resources in the state per 23-2-101 MCA.

Furthermore, State Statute 23-1-110 MCA and ARM 12.6.601-606 guides public involvement and comment for the improvements at state parks and fishing access sites, which this document provides.

3. Name of project: Lake Mary Ronan State Park Hiking Trail Project

4. Project sponsor:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
490 North Meridian Road
Kalispell, MT 59901
406-752-5501

5. Approximate Timetable:

Estimated Construction/Commencement Date: Late Summer 2009
Estimated Completion Date: Spring 2010
Current Status of Project Design (% complete): 50%

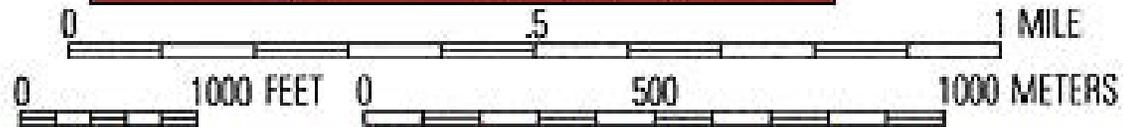
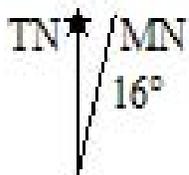
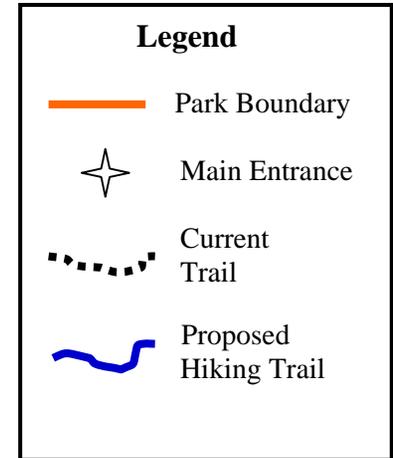
6. Location affected by proposed action (county, range and township):

The project is located at Lake Mary Ronan State Park approximately 7 miles northwest of Dayton, Montana, in Lake County. The project is more specifically located in Section 13, Township 25 North, Range 22 West. **See the following page for a location map.**

Figure 1.

Lake Mary Ronan State Park Proposed Trail System

Approximate Length
1.75 mi.



10. Alternatives:

Alternative A: No Action - The no-action alternative will maintain the status quo, and hiking opportunities will remain limited. Visitors still would be able to hike the area, but without benefit of a defined trail system. This would require greater physical effort to negotiate through brush and heavily vegetated areas. This may limit some visitors who are mobility impaired or who find cross-country travel unappealing. Benefits would be savings in cost for trail construction and trail signage.

Alternative B: FWP proceeds with hiking trail project - This option would open up hiking opportunities for many visitors, both campers and day users. It would provide alternative recreation opportunities for physical exercise, photography, development of outdoor skills, and watchable wildlife. At present, without trails very few visitors venture away from developed facilities. The project would stimulate activities other than those of camping, fishing, or boating. Existing game trails and those created by the recent timber thinning effort would be utilized as much as possible to create a loop trail system. Disadvantages of the project include the cost of construction and trail signage, and periodic trail maintenance.

PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW CHECKLIST

1. 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					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
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				

1b. Areas where hiking tread is constructed will be affected. Erosion may increase due to loss of vegetation, but will be mitigated by water bars where necessary. Soils on footpath will be compacted and result in loss of fertility and the ability to support vegetation.

2. <u>AIR</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Emission of air pollutants or deterioration of ambient air quality? (Also see 13c.)		X				
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.)		X				
f. Other:		X				

No impacts to air quality are anticipated.

3. <u>WATER</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Discharge into surface water or any alteration of surface water quality, including but not limited to temperature, dissolved oxygen, or turbidity?		X				
b. Changes in drainage patterns or the rate and amount of surface runoff?			X		yes	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.)		X				
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.)		X				
n. Other:		X				

3b. The proposed project is not expected to detrimentally alter any surface drainage patterns. On sections of trail where slopes are significant to create erosion patterns, water bars will be installed. Changes in drainage patterns will be limited by trail routing across slopes or by developing trail switchbacks where the route direction indicates travel directly up or down a slope.

4. VEGETATION Will the proposed action result in?	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Changes in the diversity, productivity, or abundance of plant species (including trees, shrubs, grass, crops, and aquatic plants)?			X		yes	4a
b. Alteration of a plant community?		X				4b.
c. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				4c
d. Reduction in acreage or productivity of any agricultural land?		X				
e. Establishment or spread of noxious weeds?		X				
f. For P-R/D-J, will the project affect wetlands, or prime and unique farmland?		X				
g. Other:		X				

- 4a. Some shrubs and grasses will be removed where trail is constructed. This will be limited to 18-24 inches in width. Existing game trails and skid trails will be utilized to reduce need to construct new tread.
- 4b. Disturbance of vegetation for tread construction is limited and not significant to affect plant communities overall.
- 4c. A search of the Montana Natural Heritage database revealed no occurrences of plant life that is designated a species of concern, threatened, or endangered within the park.

5. FISH/WILDLIFE Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
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				5g.
h. <u>For P-R/D-J</u> , 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. <u>For P-R/D-J</u> , will the project introduce or export any species not presently or historically occurring in the receiving location? (Also see 5d.)		X				
j. Other:		X				

5f. A search of the Montana Natural Heritage database revealed no occurrences of species that are designated a species of concern, threatened, or endangered within the park.

5g. A developed trail system will increase the number of people passing through the area. However, numbers would be limited and group sizes expected to be small. Consequently, it is not anticipated that this will have a detrimental effect on wildlife.

B. HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

6. <u>NOISE/ELECTRICAL EFFECTS</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Increases in existing noise levels?		X				
b. Exposure of people to severe 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				

No increase in noise levels will occur.

7. <u>LAND USE</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
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, the presence of which would constrain or potentially prohibit the proposed action?		X				
d. Adverse effects on or relocation of residences?		X				
e. Other:		X				

7a. The proposed hiking trail system development will not change the existing use of the area, but will provide park users additional recreation opportunities typically associated with formal hiking trails.

8. <u>RISK/HEALTH HAZARDS</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
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				
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			8c.
d. For P-R/D-J, will any chemical toxicants be used? (Also see 8a)		X				8d.
e. Other:		X				

8 c/d. Spot chemical spraying may be used to control the establishment and growth of noxious weeds along sections of constructed trail. Any weed development is expected to be minor and temporary and limited to the edges of the trail where soil has been disturbed. Weed treatment will follow the guidelines of the Region 1 Weed Management Plan.

9. COMMUNITY IMPACT Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
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				
f. Other:			X			9f.

9f. The construction of a hiking trail system will have a positive impact on the surrounding community by providing a relatively easy, formal, maintained walking trail system with the typical associated benefits.

10. <u>PUBLIC SERVICES/TAXES/UTILITIES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
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				

10e. Sources are park revenue dollars in the amount of approximately \$3,500.

10f. Small increases to current maintenance costs are expected by the proposed trail. Occasional maintenance will be necessary to remove downed trees across the trail and to maintain water bars and limited signing. Anticipated annual cost, including labor, signage, and other maintenance-associated costs, is \$125.

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

- 11a. The hiking trail will be a visible impact on the view of the forest. This is considered an acceptable visual impact and not out of place for the setting. Constructed trail width will be minimal for single person traffic (approx. 24") to reduce visual distraction, and surfacing will be of natural materials. Wider skid or vehicle access trails created by timber thinning project will be allowed to grow into the standard constructed trail width.
- 11c. There will be no impact on tourism opportunities at the site. See *Appendix A* for the Tourism Report. Once the project is completed, the effects on the quality of the recreation opportunities will be positive. Hiking trails are known to provide social and physical benefits. Visitors will have increased opportunity to enjoy the park's resources.

12. CULTURAL/HISTORICAL RESOURCES Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
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.)		X				12d
e. Other:		X				

12d. No impacts to cultural or historical resources are anticipated.

State Historical Preservation Office (SHPO) records have not indicated any known sensitive areas within the park. See Appendix B for SHPO letter.

SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

13. <u>SUMMARY EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE</u> Will the proposed action, considered as a whole:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
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				
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				13e
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				

13 e. No significant public controversy is expected. Improvements to the park will further the Parks Division's goals to provide quality recreational experiences by improving hiking opportunities. The project will not create any cumulatively negative impacts that might affect the use of the park by visitors.

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

The hiking trail will be limited to foot travel with a tread width of approximately 24" to allow for single file travel. Water bars will be constructed where necessary to prevent erosion on slopes. Trail surfaces will be natural materials. Existing game and logging trails will be utilized in the loop where possible. Signage will be minimal to provide direction. Information boards may be placed at trailhead to reduce need for additional signing along the trail.

Construction will be completed by a Montana Conservation Corp trail crew under the direction of FWP staff.

If chemicals are needed for weed control, the FWP Region 1 Noxious Weed Control Plan will be followed. State pesticide use laws and regulations will also be followed. Application records will be submitted to the Montana Department of Agriculture as required every five years, and these records will be available to state investigators upon request.

PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

The area for the proposed hiking trail was thinned approximately 18 months ago to enhance forest health. A secondary benefit has been to open the forest to views of surrounding mountains and open meadows. Currently, there are no developed trails through the area, resulting in an underutilization of the park's recreational potential. A developed hiking trail system, for foot travel only, would allow access to the area, creating the alternative recreational opportunities that formal hiking trails typically provide. A developed trail system would be beneficial to visitors by presenting opportunities at the park other than fishing, boating, and camping. This is a project that would be attractive to both day users and campers alike and in the future could be further expanded to include self-guided interpretation amenities. The construction of a hiking trail system will have a positive impact to visitors by providing a relatively easy, maintained walking trail system with the typical associated benefits. The hiking trail will be a visible impact when viewing the forest landscape; however, this is considered an acceptable visual impact and not out of place for the setting. Constructed trail width will be minimal for single-person traffic to reduce visual distraction, and surfacing will be of natural materials. Wider skid or vehicle access trails created by the recent timber thinning project will be allowed to grow into the standard constructed trail width. Once the project is completed, the effects on the quality of the recreation opportunities will make the park more attractive to park users. Hiking trails are known to provide social and physical benefits, and visitors will have increased opportunity to enjoy the park's resources. This project also complies with the long-range goals of MFWP to raise state park standards and meets the Parks Program outcome of providing a variety of recreational opportunities.

PART IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

1. Public involvement:

The public will be notified in the following manners to comment on this draft EA, the proposed action, and alternatives:

- Two public notices in each of these papers: *Helena Independent Record*, *Daily Inter Lake*, and the *Lake County Leader*;
- One statewide press release; and
- Public notice on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks web site: <http://fwp.mt.gov>.

This level of public notice and participation is appropriate for a project of this scope, having few minor impacts, many of which can be mitigated.

2. Duration of comment period:

The public comment period will extend for (30) thirty days following the publication of the second legal notice in area newspapers. Written comments will be accepted through July 26, 2009, and can be mailed to the address below:

Lake Mary Ronan State Park Hiking Trail Project
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Region 1 Headquarters
490 N. Meridian Road
Kalispell, MT 59901

Or email comments to: jsawyer@mt.gov

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 the criteria provided by MEPA Model Rule III to assess if an EIS is required, this environmental review revealed no significant negative impacts would be created from the proposed action. Therefore, an EIS is not necessary, and an EA is the appropriate level of analysis.

2. Persons responsible for preparing the EA:

Jerry Sawyer , Park Manager
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
490 N. Meridian Road
Kalispell, MT 59405
406-751-4575
jsawyer@mt.gov

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

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Parks Division
Wildlife Division
Fisheries Division
Legal Bureau
Montana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)
Montana Department of Commerce - Tourism
Montana Natural Heritage Program - Natural Resources Information System (NRIS)
University of Montana - Institute of Tourism and Recreation Research

APPENDICES

- A. Department of Commerce - Tourism Report (pending)
- B. State Historic Preservation Office – Recommendation Letter
- C. Project Qualification Checklist

APPENDIX A – Tourism Report (pending)

No negative responses to proposal are anticipated.

APPENDIX B – State Historic Preservation Office letter

From: Murdo, Damon
Sent: Monday, June 08, 2009 9:33 AM
To: Ivy, Nancy
Subject: RE: File Search Request form
June 8, 2009

Jerry Sawyer
FWP
490 N. Meridian Rd
Kalispell MT 59901

RE: LAKE MARY RONAN STATE PARK TRAIL PROJECT. SHPO Project #:
2009060304

Dear Mr. Sawyer:

I have conducted a cultural resource file search for the above-cited project located in Section 13, T25N R22W. According to our records there have been no previously recorded sites within the designated search locales. The absence of cultural properties in the area does not mean that they do not exist but rather may reflect the absence of any previous cultural resource inventory in the area, as our records indicated none.

Based on the lack of previous inventory within the Lake Mary Ronan State Park and the ground disturbance required by this undertaking we feel that this project has the potential to impact cultural properties. We, therefore, recommend that a cultural resource inventory be conducted in order to determine whether or not sites exist and if they will be impacted.

If you have any further questions or comments you may contact me at (406) 444-7767 or by e-mail at dmurdo@mt.gov <<mailto:dmurdo@mt.gov>>. Thank you for consulting with us.

Sincerely,

Damon Murdo
Cultural Records Manager
State Historic Preservation Office

File: FWP/PARKS/2009

APPENDIX C

APPENDIX C 23-1-110 MCA PROJECT QUALIFICATION CHECKLIST

Date: June 16, 2009

Person Reviewing: Jerry Sawyer

Project Location: Lake Mary Ronan State Park

Description of Proposed Work: Hiking trail

The following checklist is intended to be a guide for determining whether a proposed development or improvement is of enough significance to fall under 23-1-110 rules. (Please check all that apply and comment as necessary.)

- A. New roadway or trail built over undisturbed land?
Comments: *Approximately ¾ mile of new tread trail will be constructed over undisturbed ground. Remaining trail will utilize existing game & skid trails.*
- B. New building construction (buildings <100 sf and vault latrines exempt)?
Comments:
- C. Any excavation of 20 c.y. or greater?
Comments:
- D. New parking lots built over undisturbed land or expansion of existing lot that increases parking capacity by 25% or more?
Comments:
- E. Any new shoreline alteration that exceeds a double wide boat ramp or handicapped fishing station?
Comments:
- 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:
- H. Any new above ground utility lines?
Comments:
- I. Any increase or decrease in campsites of 25% or more of an existing number of campsites?
Comments:
- J. Proposed project significantly changes the existing features or use pattern; including effects of a series of individual projects?
Comments: *New trail will affect visitor use patterns as the new trail will open up areas for visitor recreation.*

If any of the above are checked, 23-1-110 MCA 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.