Draft
Environmental Assessment

Lake Mary Ronan State Park Improvements Project

August 2009

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Lake Mary Ronan State Park Improvements 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) is proposing to complete various campground improvements at Lake Mary Ronan (LMR) State Park. The improvements primarily consist of:

1) Correcting the grade, elevations, and realignment of some existing campsites;
2) Paving the existing Lake Mary Ronan State Park camping area road, campsite spurs, and host sites;
3) Relocating the group use camping area to a site adjacent to the campground and then convert the present group use site to additional boat trailer parking;
4) Installing campsite electrical pedestals and electrical infrastructure improvements within the campground; and
5) Replacing an existing wooden vault latrine within the campground with a sealed concrete vault latrine (ADA accessible).

Depending upon the actual costs of the proposed improvements, some portions of the proposed improvements may be completed in phases as additional funding becomes available.

2. Agency authority for the proposed action:

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

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.

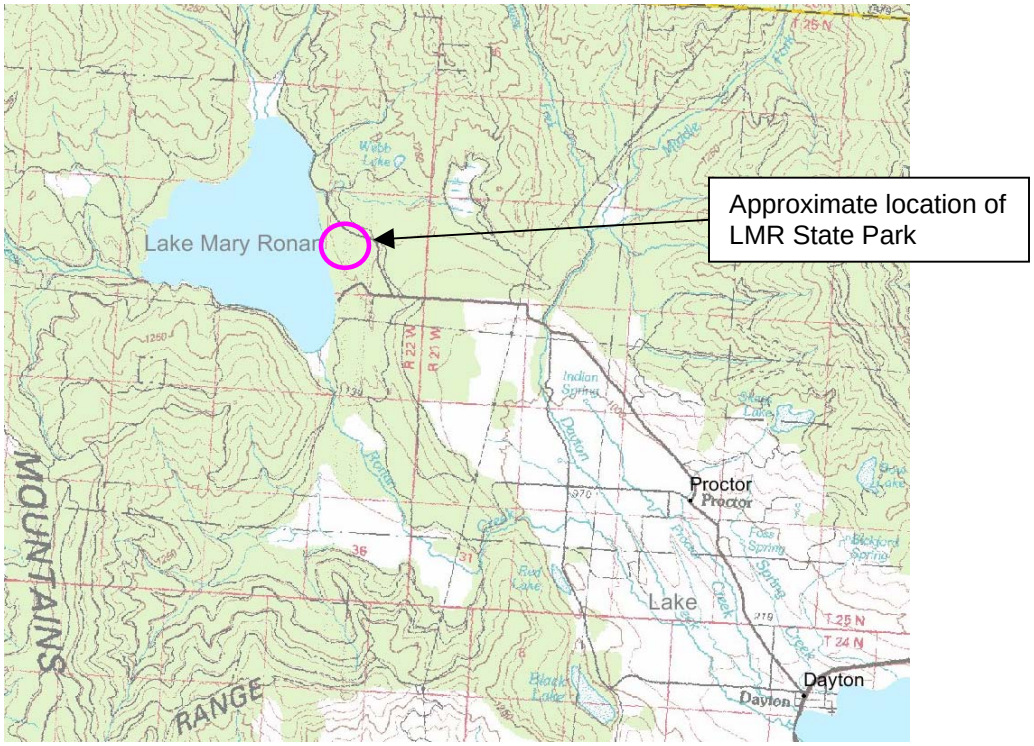
3. Approximate timetable:

Estimated construction/commencement date: Fall 2010
Estimated completion date: Fall 2010
Current status of project design (% complete): 10%

4. Location affected by proposed action:

Lake Mary Ronan State Park is approximately 7 miles northwest of Dayton, Montana, in Lake County. The park is specifically located in Section 13, Township 25 North, Range 22 West.


Lake Mary Ronan
93
Rollins
Proctor
Flathead Lake
Dayton
Elmo
Big Arm
Lake
2.85m


Approximate location of LMR State Park
Lake Mary Ronan
Proctor
Lake
Dayton
MOUNTAINS
RANGE

5. Project size:

	Acres		Acres
(a) Developed:		(d) Floodplain	0
Residential	0		
Industrial	0	(e) Productive:	
		Irrigated cropland	0
(b) Open Space/	10	Dry cropland	0
Woodlands/Recreation		Forestry	0
(c) Wetlands/Riparian	0	Rangeland	0
Areas		Other	0

6. Listing of any other local, state or federal agency that has overlapping or additional jurisdiction:

(a) Permits: State Electrical Permit secured by contractor.

(b) Funding: Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks $ 200,000

(c) Other overlapping or additional jurisdictional responsibilities:
Montana State Historical Preservation Office — Archeological & Cultural Site Protection

7. Narrative summary of the proposed action:

Lake Mary Ronan State Park (LMR) is located 7 miles west of the community of Dayton, which is 25 miles north of Polson, Montana, in Lake County. The park provides one of the few public access points to this 120-acre lake. Additional access is provided through a private resort with launching facilities and through private forestland. The lake itself affords some of the best kokanee salmon fishing in Northwest Montana, especially from late May to mid July.

The park provides boating, fishing, and camping opportunities to over 20,000 visitors annually. In 2008, approximately 68% of weekend visitors to the park came for camping. The campground improvements are expected to make the park more appealing to visitors who typically desire a higher level of development at a campground such as the opportunity to use electricity. FWP anticipates the proposed improvements will result in a higher number of overnight campers at the park, especially in the latter half of the summer. The proposed improvements consist of several components (see *Appendix A* for a map of the park's facilities) as described in the following sections.

Campsite Improvements – Grading and Reorientation

Since the campground's initial development in the 1980s, no large-scale improvement efforts have been implemented within the campground area. Over the past 20 years, FWP's standards for campgrounds have been reevaluated in response to changing visitor, vehicle, camping equipment, and public safety needs.

FWP is proposing changes to a portion of the campsites to reflect current campground standards and visitor expectations. Three of the pull-through campsites would be redesigned to accommodate traditional back-in-style sites and five existing back-in campsites would be relocated to improve traffic flow and site spacing along the campground loop road. Other sites would have gravel added to provide level parking. These changes are necessary to improve public safety, accommodate larger vehicles and towed camper units, and provide more space and vegetative buffering between sites.

At many of the existing gravel campsites, heavy use has resulted in erosion and/or drainage problems. This creates issues with water pooling and camping pads that are sloped. The addition of gravel and grading of the campsites will level and delineate the campsite area so that vehicles are not parking on nearby vegetation. Campsite parking spur delineation is not currently well defined. This has resulted in expansion of the sites, sloughing of material on the edges of current roads and parking spurs, and elimination of vegetation from the forest floor as soils are compacted by vehicle and pedestrian traffic. Wooden parking barriers have deteriorated, resulting in inconsistent parking patterns, where vehicles encroach into previously undisturbed areas. Additionally, campsite vehicle capacity limits are difficult to maintain when parking delineation is not well defined. The grading and graveling of campsites will help reduce these issues.

The park does not currently provide a campsite that meets the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards. One campsite would be renovated to meet ADA standards in order to provide necessary accommodations for those with disabilities.

Locations where relocated campsites existed prior to the improvements will be reclaimed and reseeded with local vegetation to blend disturbed areas with natural surroundings.

Interior Park Road and Camping Site Paving

The existing access road to the campground area is a graveled road, which results in excessive road dust and a high level of maintenance. Additionally the road is too narrow to permit two-way travel in some sections.

The paving of the campground loop road and the campsite spurs would eliminate further disturbances to nearby vegetation and result in a more efficient use of the space by vehicles at campsites. The paving of the loop road will also decrease the dust generated by traffic within the campground. Currently, dust abatement measures include the application of magnesium chloride (MgCl) to the road surface. In July and August when occupancy rates within the campground are high, clouds of dust from vehicle traffic are generated within the campground, and park staff often receive complaints from campers. Although the application of MgCl does minimize the amount of dust generated, leaching of the chemical into nearby soils can contribute to higher mortality of adjacent vegetation.

In 2007, FWP paved the interior roads at Placid Lake State Park south of Seeley Lake. Like Lake Mary Ronan State Park (LMR), Placid Lake State Park was plagued with dust generation within its campground by the movement of campers and other vehicles. The level of dust was often noted and the topic of complaints to park staff. After the completion of the road paving at Placid Lake State Park, overall visitor satisfaction was higher and park staff reported receiving numerous compliments from campers on FWP's paving project. FWP anticipates the same positive success if the proposed paving at LMR occurs.

Relocation of Group Use Area & Boat Trailer Parking

The relocation of the current group use area from the boat ramp area to south of the campground is necessary in order to provide a larger group use area and to provide additional day use parking. The existing 11 boat trailer parking sites are frequently full with boat trailers and towing vehicles parked along the main road to the boat ramp, creating congestion and traffic hazards. The original group use parking area would be converted into boat trailer parking area as it is in close proximity to the park's boat ramp.

Group use camping is in high demand, and there are limited public group camping facilities in the area. Only 3 other state parks have group use facilities in the general area, those being Big Arm, Thompson Falls, and Logan State Parks. Group camping at Big Arm is such that the site is 100% occupied on weekends from mid June to early September. There is also a demand for areas that can accommodate larger groups of 50 or more. Currently, the LMR group use site capacity is limited to 25 persons.

The proposed new group use camp area would accommodate up to 50 persons and 10 hard-bodied RV units, with a shared fire ring and benches. These multiple family campsites would also allow for a limited number of tents.

Electrical Pedestals

FWP proposes to install one electrical pedestal at each of the 26 campsites and the new camping sites in the group use area. Additionally, the proposed project will include electrical infrastructure improvements, such as a new transformer box and electrical panel to support the new pedestals.

Presently, only the campground hosts' area has electricity available. The lack of electricity means that many campers utilize generators for power resulting in higher noise levels and nuisance odors. Furthermore, since there is no electricity available, the campground does not have a designated ADA-compliant campsite.

The preliminary plan for the proposed project would require positioning of a new electrical conduit from the power source near the entrance to the campground to a new electrical panel to facilitate distribution of the electricity to the campground loop pedestals. This plan will be designed with all conduits underground (i.e., trenching) so that the natural environment of the park will be maintained. Ground-disturbing activities are required in order to bury the conduits, and some ground covering vegetation will be displaced. Efforts will be taken to limit effects to mature trees, and all disturbed areas will be reseeded with native vegetation.

FWP experiences from previous campground electrification efforts have shown that most campers do appreciate the opportunity to use campsite pedestals instead of individual generators. Prior to 2007, only one state park, Finley Point along Flathead Lake, provided campers the opportunity to utilize electricity for powering medical equipment, camper comforts, or recharging boating equipment. Feedback through visitor satisfaction surveys completed at the Cooney, Hell Creek, and Tongue River Reservoir State Parks in addition to visitor comment cards showed there was a significant contingent of campers that desired electricity within the campgrounds. After the pedestals were installed at Cooney, Hell Creek, and Tongue River Reservoir State Parks, comment cards and comments given directly to park staff reflected that many campers appreciated the campground improvements and the opportunity to plug in instead of using their own generators. Now, those electrified sites have become the preferred sites for many visitors. This success is also expected to be seen at this state park.

There is the potential, because of budgetary constraints, that not all campsites would have pedestals installed. The placement of PVC sleeves, where electrical lines are designed to pass under roads, would prevent FWP from having to cut through asphalt to place conduits at a later date.

Latrine Replacement

A final component of the proposed improvements would be the replacement of an old wooden vault latrine with the new concrete style similar to the other latrine currently utilized in the park. The wooden latrine is over 30 years old, does not meet ADA standards, and is difficult to maintain. The latrine becomes very odorous and is the cause of many complaints to park staff by campers during periods of high use and when the weather hot.

8. Alternatives:

Alternative A: No Action - FWP does not implement any campground improvements.

If FWP were to choose this alternative, the previously described improvements would not be implemented. Disadvantages of this scenario are the campsites and latrine would remain out of compliance with current FWP campground standards. Additionally, the sites and roadway would continue to deteriorate, negatively impacting the aesthetic values and vegetation within the park.

Public safety concerns will remain as they pertain to inadequate parking for visitors using the boat ramp and parking along the access road. Maintenance costs associated with dust abatement and road grading will remain as ongoing park expenses, and park staff will likely continue to receive complaints about dust clouds within the campground.

Alternative B: FWP proceeds with campground improvements as proposed.

The proposed enhancement to the campground at Lake Mary Ronan State Park would provide additional services to visitors, protect and improve vegetative resources, provide safer vehicle traffic flows, create additional boat trailer parking, and enhance group camping opportunities.

Realignment and grading of some of the campsites will improve the visitors' experience by providing traditional back-in camping spots that are level and well defined to reduce impacts to vegetation and mitigate public safety issues.

Paving of roads and campsite spurs will eliminate nuisance dust problems and potential health issues especially for visitors who have respiratory problems. It will eliminate the costs of dust abatement and road grading, thereby saving operations dollars for other park needs such as weed control and park maintenance. It will facilitate better site control by clearly delineating campsite parking and thus reducing the practice of parking on vegetative cover. It will enhance the convenience to visitors by ensuring level campsites for RVs.

Additional boat trailer parking through conversion of the current group use area will provide overflow parking during peak periods from late May to mid July. It will increase visitor safety by eliminating the need for boat trailers to be parked alongside the main roadway, which restricts two-way traffic.

Relocating and increasing the group camping capacity will provide an area capable of meeting the current demand by larger groups. The group area will remain part of the campground, yet still located a sufficient distance from individual sites to minimize disturbance. It will promote increased safety by locating the site away from the main traffic thoroughfare. It will include a

covered shelter, thereby providing a convenient gathering area for groups during inclement weather.

Addition of electrical pedestals will eliminate the need to use generators and provide power for medical equipment, recharging boating equipment, and camper comforts (A/C, TV, appliances). The reduction of the use of generators will improve the quality of the camping experience by reducing nuisance noises and associated odors. FWP anticipates the addition of the pedestals will enhance the attractiveness of the park as a destination.

Alternative C: Similar to Alternative B with only half (13) of the campsites electrified.
This alternative would provide the advantages of upgrading critical facilities within the park as outlined in Alternative B. This alternative would also retain some campsites for those not seeking electricity.

PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW CHECKLIST

If the No Action Alternative were chosen, FWP would continue to provide existing services and maintenance to the campground loop and associated areas. The campsite challenges, group use limitations, and safety issues noted on page 5 would persist, which could in time be reflected in a decline in the number of visitors to the park.

If Alternative C were implemented, the improvements to the roads and campground would likely increase visitor satisfaction, which would be reflected in additional new visitors to the park. Vegetation adjacent to campsites would be expected to recover since it would not be subjected to ongoing vehicle pressures and trampling since campsites would be level and spurs clearly designated. Further benefits to the park would be the same as the ones previously noted for the proposed action, but a portion of the sites would be maintained in a more primitive state without electricity.

1. Evaluation of the impacts of the Proposed Action.

A. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

1. LAND RESOURCES 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				1d
e. Exposure of people or property to earthquakes, landslides, ground failure, or other natural hazard?		X				

1b. The trenching that will be required for the proposed electrification of campground will disturb ground covering and related soils to an anticipated depth of 24". This will provide enough width and depth for the conduits and required fill materials. With the completion of the installation of the conduits, the disturbed areas will be reclaimed and reseeded with native vegetation to decrease the potential for erosion.

1d. Paving will require road surface preparation. This may include grading of the existing road and the addition of road base materials to bring the surface to the grade as specified in the design plan. There is little risk of sediment washing into water sources due to the distance from the lake and lack of continuous or intermittent streams in the immediate area. Erosion control barriers will be used if necessary to prevent sediment loss prior to paving.

2. AIR 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			2a
b. Creation of objectionable odors?			X			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.)		X				2e

2a/b. Minor and temporary dust and vehicle emissions would be created by construction equipment during road preparation and paving, trenching for electrical conduit and placement of new electrical panels and pedestals, and clearing and site preparation for new group use area.

After project's completion, the overall air quality within the park is expected to be improved with asphalt paving and improved traffic flow, as well as the reduction of personal generator use resulting in the reduction of generator fumes.

2e. The implementation of proposed project's components will not conflict with any state or federal air quality regulations.

3. WATER 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				3l
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				3m

3b. The proposed project is not expected to detrimentally alter any surface drainage patterns. Paving and proper road drainage design will eliminate the accumulation of large puddles on the road and the potential for runoff into camp areas. All disturbed areas will be reseeded with native vegetation to decrease the potential of different drainage patterns becoming established.

3l. The proposed projects are not within a designated floodplain per FEMA map 30047C0050B effective 12/17/87.

3m. The proposed enhancements to Lake Mary Ronan State Park are not expected to result in any discharge in to Lake Mary Ronan because the areas affected by the improvements are far away from the shoreline, and steps will be taken to reduce potential runoff into new areas (see 3b).

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				
b. Alteration of a plant community?			X		Yes	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		Yes	4e
f. For P-R/D-J, will the project affect wetlands, or prime and unique farmland?		X				4f

4b. FWP anticipates there will be a need to remove some trees and shrubs at the location of the proposed new group use camping site. FWP estimates 6 -8 mature fir trees will need to be removed to open up the new spot for the group use area. Corresponding forest floor vegetation will be lost to provide vehicle parking and for the establishment of the picnic shelter. Other vegetation may be adversely impacted by the location of the conduit trenches for electrical pedestals, requiring the removal of those individual plants. Efforts will be taken to limit impacts by routing lines near campsite spurs and the roadway so as not to require removal of mature trees. Because of the planned underground design of the conduits, surface vegetation will be displaced, but reseeding the disturbed areas with native plants will mitigate these influences to the overall plant community.

After the completion of the paving efforts, the use of magnesium chloride as a dust abatement tool will be unnecessary, and the health of vegetation adjacent to roads is expected to improve.

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.

4e. The proposed group use site relocation and installation of electrical enhancements will likely increase the possibility of noxious weeds becoming established within the campground loop since there are noxious weeds already present. Mitigating actions will include reseeding with native species and monitoring of growth of noxious weeds at disturbed areas. Any noxious weeds discovered will be eradicated using Integrated Weed Management (IWM) methods identified in the Region 1 Noxious Weed and Exotic Vegetation Management Plan.

4f. There is no designated prime farmland included in the areas to be improved per USDA Soil Survey database, http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/WebSoilSurvey.aspx 5/28/09. There are no designated wetlands within the park per USFWS Wetlands database, http://wetlandsfws.er.usgs.gov/imf/imf.jsp?site=NWI_CONUS 5/28/09.

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				5b
c. Changes in the diversity or abundance of nongame species?		X				5c
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				
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				5h
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				5i

5 b/c. Lake Mary Ronan State Park is used by a variety of wildlife including small mammals (squirrels, chipmunks, etc.) and small birds. Less frequently, mule and white-tailed deer, black bear, and mountain lions have been known to move through the park especially during the off-season.

Since construction is limited to the campground area, the impact to game and nongame species is not considered significant. Little forage and cover is available in the campground. Consequently the area is primarily a travel zone for larger animals. During the construction activities, some species travel patterns may be altered to avoid the campground. Some smaller nongame species may be affected by the removal of trees for the group use site. Overall, the impact to wildlife habitat will be minimal. Big game species are not likely to be affected in any way other than a temporary avoidance of the area during construction. Non-game species including small mammals and birds may be displaced to adjacent areas until the project is completed and reseeded areas have returned to preconstruction condition.

5f/h. A search of the Montana Natural Heritage database revealed no occurrences of species that is designated a species of concern, threatened, or endangered within the park. There is a gray wolf territory in the area, and it is possible members of the local pack move through the park during its off-season when human presence is at a minimum.

5i. No component of the proposed project will introduce any new species to the area.

B. HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

6. NOISE/ELECTRICAL EFFECTS 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			6a
b. Exposure of people to severe or nuisance noise levels?			X			6b
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				

6 a/b. There would be a temporary increase in noise levels due to the construction equipment during the course of the project. Most of the work will take place during the off-season in the fall when visitation low. This will limit the inconvenience to park visitors.

After the completion of the project, nuisance noise levels within the campground are expected to decrease since campers will have the opportunity to use the pedestals as a source of power instead of relying on individual generators.

Distances between the project area and nearest neighbors are such that noise from the implementation of the improvements will not be heard or affect them.

7. LAND USE 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				
b. Conflict 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				

The proposed enhancement to the campground will not change the existing use of the area.

8. RISK/HEALTH HAZARDS 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		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		Yes	8c
d. For P-R/D-J, will any chemical toxicants be used? (Also see 8a)			X			8d

8 a/d. Chemical spraying may be used to control the establishment and growth of noxious weeds in the proposed construction areas. Weed treatment will follow the guidelines of the Region 1 Weed Management Plan and only be applied by a trained professional or park staff.

8c. The new group use area will have bear-resistant containers to decrease the potential for bear-human conflicts by reducing the availability of attractants (food, trash) to area bears.

Group use camping site construction would improve visitor safety by relocating the site to an area away from the main roadway and the heaviest traffic flow.

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					9d
e. Increased traffic hazards or effects on existing transportation facilities or patterns of movement of people and goods?		X				

9d. The closest private campground is the Lake Mary Ronan Resort located 1 mile to the northwest of the park. The resort charges $25 per day for a site with electrical and water hookup and $30 a day for a site with full hookups (electrical, water and sewer). Additional amenities available at the resort include a restaurant and bar, boat rentals, and cabin rentals.

The other campground close to LMR State Park is in Elmo on Flathead Lake, which is about 15 miles southeast of the park. This private campgrounds charges $35 per night and offers additional services such as laundry, and sewer, and water hookups. FWP limits camper stays to 14 days within a 30-day period, whereas at the campgrounds at the resort and Elmo, patrons can choose to stay for longer periods.

University of Montana's Institute of Tourism and Recreation Research survey of traveler characteristics based from summer 2006 statistics reflected that the same percentage of respondents stayed overnight at private campgrounds compared to public campgrounds when visiting Lake and Flathead Counties. So, there appears to be no dominant preference by campers as to which type of campground they stay at. If campers want a higher level of service or additional amenities, park staff will continue to refer those visitors to private campgrounds in the area.

Through the competitive bidding process for services, it is possible that a local contractor could be a bidder for the project, which would support the local economy and residents of the area. The paving and electrical work will be in one contract package.

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

10c. The proposed action will require the establishment of new underground electrical conduit lines between existing or new electrical panels in order to provide electricity to individual campsite pedestals.

10d. The proposed installation of electric hookups for the campsites at Lake Mary Ronan State Park is expected to increase the park's consumption of electricity. Furthermore, the convenience of the pedestals will provide visitors the opportunity to recharge boating equipment, cell phones, medical equipment, and other electronic equipment.

10e. If Alternative A or B were completed, the park could expect an increase in revenue. The following chart shows the revenue estimates based on different levels of occupancy:

Total campsites at park = 26
Number of campsites proposed for electrification: 26
Season: ½ May, June July August, ½ September = 120 days

Occupancy (# of days x # of campsites x camp fee with hook up)		Less Cost of Electricity per night *	Net Revenue per season
75%	(75 days)(26 sites)($20/night) = $29,250	-$ 5,850	$23,400
50%	(45 days)(26 sites)($20/night) = $11,700	-$ 2,340	$ 9,360

* Assume $4 cost of electricity per site, per night, first year

10f. Small increases to current maintenance costs are expected by the proposed improvements. Electrical breaker switches may need to be replaced on occasion. Additional picnic tables at the group site will require staining every 3 years. Boat trailer parking area will require striping every 3-4 years. Average annual routine maintenance costs are anticipated to be less than $100 per year for the enhancements.

11. AESTHETICS/RECREATION 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		X	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	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				11d

11a. The anticipated design for the electrification project will have all conduits underground with only the pedestals and electrical panel visible. This design will minimize the effect on aesthetics at individual sites.

The proposed group use camping area will affect views to the east of the campground. The group parking area for RVs and the covered shelter will be visible from individual campsites on the east half of the campground. Although the results of the action are not out of place for a campground situation, the visual setting will be altered. Efforts will be made to design the area to best fit the location, with minimal trees removed and all disturbed areas reseeded. The design and materials used for the shelter will blend with the surroundings.

Paving will alter the look of the road system, but is not considered offensive and will eliminate health issues associated with road dust.

The conversion of the present group use area to boat trailer parking will have minimal effect on aesthetics as towing vehicles and trailers currently park in this location.

11c. There will be no impact on tourism opportunities at the site. See *Appendix C* for the Tourism Report.

During construction some sections of the campground loop may need to be closed to campers for a limited amount of time when paving and trenching, and for site preparation. Construction in the new group camping area and conversion of the old group area to boat trailer parking may also require temporary closures. When required, FWP will work with the contractor to schedule this project so that park visitors are the least inconvenienced. Most work will occur during the fall after Labor Day when visitation is low.

Once the project is completed, the effects on the quality of the recreation opportunities will be positive. Paving will eliminate potential heath issues associated with dust and more clearly define site parking and reduce resource damage. Additional boat trailer parking will reduce traffic and pedestrian safety concerns on the main roadway. A higher capacity group camp area with a shelter will provide additional amenities for users and meet the widespread demand for group sites in the region.

11d. The proposed project will not impact any federally designated wilderness or wild or scenic rivers.

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 12a.)	X					12d

12 d. A file search of the project area indicates that no cultural resource survey work has been conducted within the park boundaries. A historic trash dump was recorded along the access road to the park outside the park boundaries. The site, 24LK222, contains bottle fragments and tin cans. Lake Mary Ronan is outside the Flathead Indian Reservation, but is part of the ancestral homeland of the Salish, Pend d'Oreille and Kootenai Indian Tribes. Because these lands are ancestral to the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, they maintain an interest in how state and federal lands are managed and cared for in this region and how projects may affect traditionally used sites and resources, and will be contacted about the proposed action.

Based on the results of the field investigation on July 21, 2009, by Sara Scott, FWP Heritage Resources Program Manager, the campground expansion and facility upgrades should have no impact on cultural resource sites. In accordance with Montana Code Annotated (MCA) 22-3-435, if previously undiscovered archaeological or historic sites are discovered during project construction, construction should cease within the site area. FWP cultural resources staff or the Montana SHPO should be contacted and reasonable steps should be taken to ensure site preservation until cultural resource professionals can conduct an evaluation of site significance.

SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

13. SUMMARY EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE **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				
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				13g

13g. No federal permits are required for the project, but the contractor will obtain a state electrical permit prior to the installation of the pedestals.

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

Final plans and specifications for the project will be developed by the state-appointed engineering consultant in conjunction with FWP engineering staff. All state and federal permits will be obtained by FWP. Construction will be completed by a private contractor selected through the state's competitive bid process. Final inspection will be the responsibility of the FWP Design and Construction Bureau.

State pesticide use laws and regulations will 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.

If the cultural resource inventory identifies any previously unknown historic sites in the path of the underground conduits, FWP will work with SHPO and FWP's cultural resource specialist to discuss alternatives to the design of the conduit system to ensure culturally sensitive areas are not disturbed.

PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

The proposed installation of electrical hookups in the campground at Lake Mary Ronan State Park will meet the increasing needs of campers and boaters wanting to utilize electricity to charge batteries and power camping comforts and necessities, such as medical equipment, air conditioning, refrigerator, and TVs. FWP expects a significant decrease in nuisance noises and odors produced by individual generators within the campground area that will improve visitor satisfaction.

The paving of the campground road and campsite spurs will address nuisance and health issues related to dust from traffic during the summer months. Paving will also reduce road maintenance costs over the long term with the elimination of the need to grade and fill potholes. Campsite spur paving will clearly delineate parking and thus reduce the damage to vegetation from off-road parking attributed to the existing sloping campground pull-ins.

The conversion of the group camp area to boat trailer parking will improve safety by eliminating the need to park along the main road when the lakeside parking area is full. With only 11 boat trailer spaces currently, the addition of 8-10 more spaces would meet parking needs for the present and future demand during the high use season.

Because of the scope of the proposed improvements, it is expected there will be a limited number of impacts to the human and physical environment. However, most of these influences, which were previously noted, are expected to be for only a relatively short duration of the construction period with no lasting negative effects on the local environment. For those actions requiring minor mitigation, such as the trenching of the electrical system for the hookups and construction of the new group camping site, efforts will be taken to landscape and reseed disturbed areas. The reseeding of the affected areas will decrease the chance of noxious weeds being established and will limit erosion. Additionally, FWP's cultural survey of the project will ensure previously unknown historic areas are not affected by any ground disturbance.

Since there have been no major improvements to the campground or facilities in many years, the purpose of the project is to upgrade facilities and improve camping and boating opportunities. Boat parking is very limited and demand exceeds capacity during the peak

season. The need for group camping areas that accommodate larger groups is increasing. Current facilities are small, with limited capacity, and do not adequately protect natural resources. The project improvements are expected to mitigate resource impacts and improve camper satisfaction. This project also complies with the long-range goals of FWP to raise state park standards and meets the Parks Program outcome of protection and enhancement of resources.

PART IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

1. Public involvement:

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

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

Copies of this environmental assessment will be distributed to the neighboring landowners and interested parties to ensure their knowledge of the proposed project.

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. If requested, FWP will schedule a public meeting for the proposed improvements during the comment period.

2. Duration of comment period:

The public comment period will extend for (30) thirty days, from August 24 through September 23, 2009, following the publication of the second legal notice in area newspapers. Written comments will be accepted until 5:00 p.m., September 23, 2009, and can be mailed to the address below:

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

Or e-mail 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)? 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 will 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

Rebecca Cooper
MEPA Coordinator
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
1420 E. 6th Avenue
Helena, MT 59601
406-444-4756

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

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
- Parks Division
- Wildlife Division
- Fisheries Division
- Design & Construction Bureau
- Legal Bureau

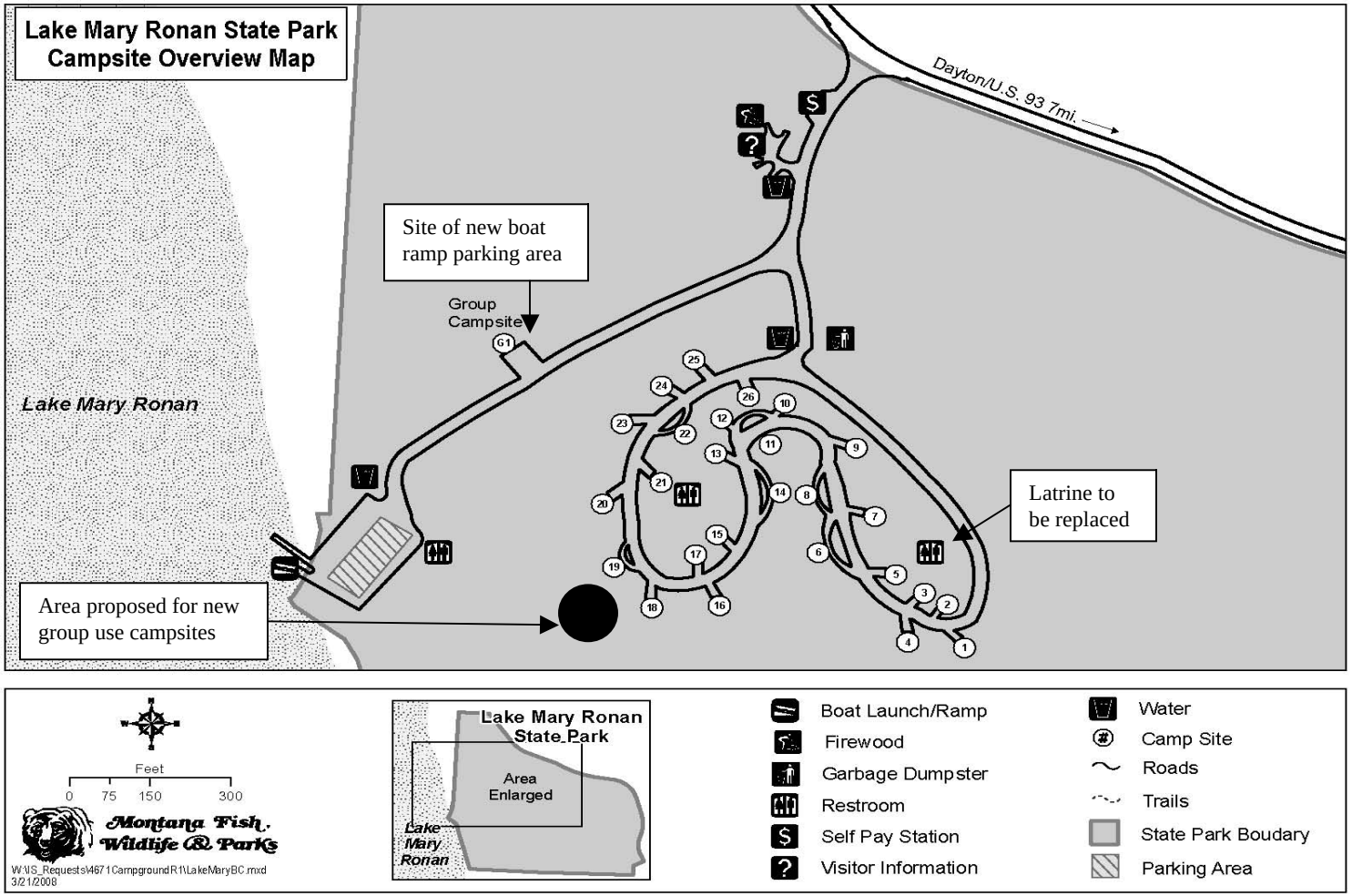
Montana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)
Montana Department of Commerce – Tourism
Montana Natural Heritage Program – Natural Resources Information System (NRIS)
University of Montana – Institute of Tourism and Recreation Research

APPENDICES

A. Lake Mary Park State Park Improvements Site Map
B. Department of Commerce - Tourism Report
C. HB495 Checklist

APPENDIX A

Lake Mary Ronan State Park Site Plan- Alternative B



APPENDIX B

TOURISM REPORT
MONTANA ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT (MEPA) & MCA 23-1-110

The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks has initiated the review process as mandated by MCA 23-1-110 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-Department of Commerce
301 S. Park Ave.
Helena, MT 59601

Project Name: Lake Mary Ronan State Park Improvement Project

Project Description: Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) is proposing to complete various campground improvements at Lake Mary Ronan (LMR) State Park west of Flathead Lake. The improvements consist of: 1) paving the existing Lake Mary Ronan State Park camping area road, campsite spurs, and host sites; 2) installing electrical pedestals and electrical infrastructure improvements at individual campsites; 3) re-locating the group use camp area to a site just east of the present campground and then convert the present group use site to boat trailer parking; and 4) replacing a wooden vault latrine within the campground with a sealed cement vault latrine.

Addition of electrical pedestals will give campers the opportunity to use electricity instead of relying on individual generators for power for medical equipment, recharging boating equipment, and camper comforts (A/C, TV, appliances). The reduction of the use of generators will improving the quality of the camping experience by reducing nuisance noises and associated odors. The pedestals enhance the attractiveness of the park as a destination for RV and hard-sided campers by providing improved amenities.

Paving of roads and campsite spurs will eliminate dust problems and potential health issues with visitors who have respiratory problems. It will eliminate costs of dust abatement and road grading thereby saving operations dollars for other park needs such as weed control and park maintenance. It will facilitate better site control by clearly delineating campsite parking and thus reduce the practice of parking on vegetative cover. It will enhance the convenience to visitors by ensuring level campsites for RVs.

Relocating and increasing the group camping capacity will provide an area capable of meeting the current demand by larger groups. It will make the group area part of the campground, yet still located a sufficient distance from individual sites to minimize disturbance. It will promote increased safety by locating the site away from the main traffic thoroughfare. It will include a covered shelter thereby providing a convenient gathering area for the group during rainy weather. Additional boat trailer parking through conversion of the current group use area will provide overflow parking during peak periods from late May to Mid-July. It will increase visitor safety by eliminating the need for boat trailers to be parked alongside the main roadway, which restricts 2-way traffic.

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

Yes, as described, the project has the potential to positively impact the tourism and 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:

Yes, as described, the project has the potential to improve the quality and quantity of tourism and recreational opportunities.

Signature Carol Crockett, Visitor Services Manager Date 5/28/09

APPENDIX C

HB495
PROJECT QUALIFICATION CHECKLIST

Date July 15, 2009 **Person Reviewing** Rebecca Cooper

Project Location: Lake Mary Ronan State Park. The project is more specifically located in Section 13, Township 25 North, Range 22 West.

Description of Proposed Work: Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes to numerous improvements to the Park's campground and group use areas within Lake May Ronan State Park.

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.)

[X] A. New roadway or trail built over undisturbed land?
Comments: *Yes, the proposed new group use camping loop will require the extension of the existing campground road to create access to the area. The extension and new campground loop are anticipated to be less than 600'.*

[ ] B. New building construction (buildings <100 sf and vault latrines exempt)?
Comments: *No*

[ ] C. Any excavation of 20 c.y. or greater?
Comments: *No*

[ ] D. New parking lots built over undisturbed land or expansion of existing lot that increases parking capacity by 25% or more?
Comments: *No*

[ ] E. Any new shoreline alteration that exceeds a double wide boat ramp or handicapped fishing station?
Comments: *No*

[ ] F. Any new construction into lakes, reservoirs, or streams?
Comments: *No*

[ ] G. Any new construction in an area with National Registry quality cultural artifacts (as determined by State Historical Preservation Office)?
Comments: *No, see page 17 for comments on cultural and historic resources.*

[ ] H. Any new above ground utility lines?
Comments: *No*

[ ] I. Any increase or decrease in campsites of 25% or more of an existing number of campsites?
Comments: *There will be an addition of 5 new campsites, which will increase the number of available campsites by 20%. Included in the sites will be two group use sites that will be able to accommodate four hard-sided campers at each site.*

[ ] J. Proposed project significantly changes the existing features or use pattern; including effects of a series of individual projects?
Comments: *No significant changes to the current use patterns within the park are expected. The designation of the current group use parking area will help to reduce visitors from parking on the access road to the boat ramp, thusly improving public safety and reducing vehicle hazards. The leveling and realignment of some of the campsites will not measurably change use of those sites, but will improved efficiency of public use space within the park and vegetative health of some previously disturbed areas.*

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.