DECISION NOTICE:
BEAVERTAIL HILL STATE PARK CAMPGROUND
IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
3201 Spurgin Road
Missoula, MT 59804
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Proposed Action
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes to install campsite electrical pedestals at the 28 campsites at Beavertail Hill State Park.

Montana Environmental Policy Act
The Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) requires Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks to assess significant potential impacts of a proposed action to the human and physical environment. In compliance with MEPA, an Environmental Assessment (EA) was completed for the proposed project by FWP and released for public comment on July 10, 2009.

Public Process and Comment
The EA was sent out and the public comment period began July 10, 2009, and ran through August 10, 2009. Legal notices were published in the Missoulian, the Helena Independent Record and the Seeley Swan Pathfinder. There were 12 full copies, 5 electronic versions, and 31 postcard notes about the EA sent to interested parties consisting of neighbors, friends, conservation groups, Montana state legislators, county and state departments or agencies, and federal agencies. Also, there was a statewide press release and a posting on the FWP website. The EA is still available for review at http://fwp.mt.gov/publicnotices/notice_2117.aspx.

Alternative A: No Action
If FWP chooses not to improve the existing campsites with electrical pedestals, park staff will continue to receive requests from RVers and other hard-sided campers for such improvements in the future. Furthermore, if the campground is not improved to accommodate these types of campers, visitors may choose to recreate elsewhere and/or may choose to utilize noisy generators in lieu of electrical pedestals.

Alternative B: Electrification of the 28 campsites – Preferred Action
The proposed enhancement to the campground at Beavertail Hill State Park with the electrification of 28 campsites would provide an additional service for camper comforts (e.g., medical equipment, kitchen appliances, TV, air conditioning, heater, etc.). The availability of hookups throughout the park's campground will help to disperse campers evenly throughout the park and improve camper satisfaction and customer service. Furthermore, the new pedestals will reduce the need for visitors to rely on generators that might contribute to user conflicts.

Summary of Public Comment
A total of 17 responses were received regarding this proposal. There was 1 postcard directly received from the public recreating at the park, 10 e-mails received at the R2 FWP headquarters, and 6 comments received by phone, mail or in person. The proposed development within Beavertail Hill State Park consisted of electrifying 28 campsites.

A.) <u>Comments in support of electrifying campsites.</u> For electrifying campsites, 9 of the 17 responses were in favor of the proposal. The most frequently mentioned positive outcomes of the

installation of electrical service included: reducing generator use, thus creating a “quieter, natural experience”; a needed improvement for tourism and travelers to Montana; and, health benefits from the ability to run medical equipment.

Excerpts from comments received for Beavertail Hill State Park:

“Yes, yes, yes, I am in favor of putting electricity in our state parks. Electricity is less polluting, quieter, and safer than using generators. Out state parks should be for all citizens, not just those who don’t want electricity. I don’t see it as being in competition with private campgrounds but as an in-between accommodation, with commercial campgrounds also offering on site water and sewer.

I have traveled throughout the western states and our parks are pitiful next to other states. Twenty years ago Oregon state parks offered electricity and I noticed the "tenters" enjoying it too, using it for an electric shaver or blow dryer or a frying pan or lighting. For several years a choice has been made as to whether or not to pay a $4 yearly fee when paying vehicle taxes. I have chosen to pay the fee in the hopes that our state parks would be upgraded. I am totally in favor of your proposal and hope that you will begin with the parks currently under consideration and expand to include more. I would very much like to see our new Lincoln Ranch State Park become one of the electrified choices.”

“ ‘a quiet campground’? Ha! Unless it’s off road there is no such thing. There is no camping experience worse than being next to a generator, usually a loud one because they’re cheapest.”

“I believe electricity would be of benefit not only to those with RV’s but to those who say they want a quieter, natural like experience. I think if electricity was available there would virtually no noise from generators.

I have camped in Oregon State Parks (they have electricity) on numerous occasions and you just don't hear generators. We also camp at the BLM Campgrounds on Holter Lake and you can hear generators almost anytime.

I am willing to pay the extra $5 fee for electricity.

I also think there is no need to install street-lights. Keep the dark night sky as much as possible.

As far as the state competing with private facilities, there are no private facilities at many of the lakes and parks. I think it is almost a non-issue and certain Legislators make comments just to protect specific individuals at the expense of the vast majority of Montanans.”

“I would like to comment on the proposed addition of electrical pedestals to Placid Lake, Salmon Lake and Beavertail Hill State Parks. From a tourism perspective this is an important and much needed improvement to our State Parks. Travel and tourism has changed immensely over just the last ten years. Although people are coming to Montana in order to get away, the largest demographic of travel, and the group that will only continue to grow and dominate the tourism industry, are baby boomers. They are a demographic that enjoys adventure and getting away from their busy lives, but also have expectations of a level of service no matter where they go. It is the beginning of the generations that are connected no matter where they are in the world, through cell phones and computers. Their idea of getting away has changed from tent camping to a fully equipped travel trailer. They want the amenities of home, away from home and because

of this electricity in campgrounds is an expectation. State Parks is an integral partner in Montana's tourism industry – an industry that is being hit hard by our current economic crisis. People are looking for places to go that are affordable and family friendly and Montana fits perfectly into that scenario, but in truth so do many of the Rocky Mountain States. If Montana State Parks cannot, or will not, offer the same amenities that travelers can find in other State Parks across the West, they will not choose Montana. The two complaints that we hear in the visitor center from tourists about our State Parks are no electricity and no reservation system. The addition of the electrical pedestals at these State Parks will go a long way in the right direction toward alleviating one of these issues.

Thank you for your time. If you have any questions or need further information, please do not hesitate to contact me."

"Support electrical improvements to Salmon, Placid and Beavertail Hill State Parks"

"Yes, to electrical improvements to all three parks. Many of today's campers are set up to have electric hook-ups."

"Definitely supports the proposal for electricity at Beavertail Hill, last time camping there it was 100 degrees and really needed to have the air-conditioning on. Other users need oxygen machines."

"Need electric sites for RV's"

"We have had the opportunity to review the DRAFT EA for Beavertail Hill State Park Campground Improvement Project and offer the following comments. 1. The plan to add electric pedestals to the 28 sites would be outstanding. 2. As RV's with medical, the addition of electric would be appreciated. 3. We and many RV's would prefer to camp at state or federal campgrounds rather than private facilities. The opportunity to be in Montana nature would be most preferred. 4. This would eliminate generator noise and offer peace and quiet which most campers are seeking. It is a fact that camping ways have advanced so much further than even 20 years ago. All or most campers and motor homes are now equipped with many electrical appliances. 5. We have camped in other states where electricity & water were provided and we noticed the parks were usually full. Some even included showers. 6. We doubt that if electricity were added it would have an adverse effect on private campgrounds as most RV's to state & federal parks are seeking to avoid formal private RV settings with all the extra amenities. 7. A dump station would be beneficial even at an additional charge as too often we see people dumping their gray water tanks in the parks while camping. 8. We would most willing to pay an increased fee for opportunity to have electricity."

FWP Response: *So noted for above supportive comments. A dump station at Beavertail Hill is outside the scope of this EA. However, years ago FWP had looked into putting one at this park and was unable to get the appropriate permits.*

B.) Comments in opposition to electrifying campsites. For not electrifying campsites, 8 of the 17 were opposed to the proposal. Common themes mentioned were: competition with private campgrounds, cost to taxpayers and wastefulness in current economic

times, and the belief that the use or presence of electrical pedestals at campsites does not present a true camping experience.

Excerpts from comments received for Beavertail Hill State Park:

"Please don't electrify our state parks"

FWP Response: *So noted.*

"If FWP wanted to put in a few electrified campsites, for some specific justification or need, maybe OK. But don't see the reason or need. It raises the cost of the campground/camping. Twenty dollars a night is a lot of money. This puts the cost out of reach for more people. Makes the campgrounds more like some main highway campgrounds. Takes away the spirit of camping."

FWP Response: *The EA clearly states our reason for electrifying campsites. Our 2006 visitor survey shows that already over 50% of the campers in our state parks are using motor-homes and full size hard-sided campers. Everyone's definition of "camping" is different. Montana State Parks does not discriminate between one type of camping or another.*

"This is in response to the EA's proposing electrification of campsites at West Shore, Beavertail Hill, Salmon Lake, Placid Lake, Black Sandy and Lewis & Clark Caverns State Parks prepared by the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks. I realize the deadline has passed for the latter two but still need to comment about those two parks. Preparing separate EA's for each park seems counterintuitive when each EA addresses the same issues and the same actions. At first glance this would seem to be an attempt for an end run around the process which is disappointing to see come from FWP. Having read the EA's I have several comments. Electrification of all these campsites would destroy the night skies and quiet solitude of each of these campsites. My family and I have used all these campsites over the years and light pollution and increased noise will definitely be a problem. These campgrounds are almost always full (especially Salmon and Placid Lakes) during the summer months, adding electricity will not generate more use of these campgrounds. Electrification of all these campsites runs counter to the very need to conserving energy and reducing our dependence on fossil fuels and reducing our carbon footprint. From my professional experience, FWP has greater needs than spending scarce dollars on programs which may or may not return revenue to the agency. FWP, and Montana sportsmen and women, would be better suited if you would take the $750,000 and spend it on backlogged maintenance at these parks instead. Finally, the EA's acknowledge a lack of hard data supporting the need for such action, citing only anecdotal evidence. Anecdotal evidence does not qualify as data necessary to determine an appropriate course of action. Anecdotal evidence does not belong in any assessment of any type; your agency needs to be taken to task for relying on such inadequate documentation. If you have any questions or need clarification, please feel free to contact me. Thanks you."

FWP Response: *We felt that it was necessary to prepare individual EAs for each state park, especially, since each park is located in different geographic areas of the state and may have different resource issues to address. Obviously, there are many similarities to each proposal; however, there are also some differences that we felt were important to point out. Electrification will not lead to the night skies being lit up any more than they are now when people camp. We*

are NOT proposing to install streetlights, only provide electrical pedestals that a camper could plug into to run appliances, various camping equipment, or health equipment without running their generators. Electricity is one of the more energy efficient forms of energy than the use of fossil fuels. The spending of state park dollars to provide this service to campers is meeting a need that will not only enhance tourism but also meet the emerging needs of today's "baby boomer" generation. Even comments from Missoula's Convention and Visitors Bureau indicate that the lack of electricity in our Montana State Parks is a very common complaint by tourists visiting Montana. Many anglers to our state parks rely on batteries to power their boats and fishing gear and have to run generators to charge them up. More and more of our camping public carry medical equipment needed for their health needs.

"I have received notification of improvements (electrification projects) for Beavertail Hill State Park, Placid Lake State Park, Salmon Lake State Park, Lewis & Clark Caverns State Park and Black Sandy State Park.
I am of the opinion that NONE of these projects may proceed without the approval of the Legislature. However, I was not active in the 2009 Legislature to know if you received approval in advance.
Please note that 23-1-126(4) MCA requires that "any development in state parks and fishing access sites beyond those defined as maintenance in 23-1-127 must be approved by the legislature. No where in 23-1-127 MCA is it permissible to electrify any or FAS.

Perhaps the 2009 legislature approved these projects in a bill I am unaware of. If so, please advise how I may find that action. If not, please advise how it is that your agency intends to get around this legal requirement.
Additionally, 23-1-110(2)(g) states "The department shall prepare a public report regarding any project that is subject to the provisions of subsection (1). The report must include conclusions relating to the following aspects of the proposal: (g) site-specific modifications as they relate to the park or fishing access site system as a whole." A purpose of this section of law is to insure that maintenance is up-to-date before additional development takes place. You have a noxious weed and/or noxious plant (Salt Cedar and Russian Olive) problem all across the park/FAS system and yet you are developing sites before this maintenance is addressed. Many sites need improved toilet facilities and improved toilet and trash maintenance. So, how does additional development at this time comply with the intent of the law?
When and where are the public meetings on the developments as provided for in 23-1-110?
Referenced statutes are copied below.
Please observe that I have copied this inquiry to the Attorney General, Governor, Hal Harper, FWP Commission members and others."

"No need for me to go beyond the above mentioned comments, which exactly echo my thoughts AGAINST the plan to electrify 5 Montana State Parks. We have worked for too many years, through too many fads, to not realize that this plan significantly increases the maintenance costs for state parks, destroys the natural setting, and caters to a dwindling, resource-consuming sector of the so-called "camping" populace. For all the reasons enunciated, I will go on record OPPOSING these five projects so that I can join in the inevitable appeal before the FWP Commission. Thank you for your time and consideration."

FWP Response: *After consulting with our legal bureau, and reviewing the analysis of the Legislative Services Division, the Department has in fact received the appropriate legislative*

approval for this project [Sec. 23-1-126(4)]. The Department adheres strictly to the Legislative process of getting authorization for capital improvements.

Draft environmental assessments (EA) represent the public involvement and reporting requirement specified in statute. The opportunity for public meetings was also presented and discussed in each EA. These EAs are the established forum for public comments for proposed projects. All public comments received are evaluated and considered.

Finally, should an individual be dissatisfied with the decision reached by the Department following the public comment period, the decision may be appealed to the Department Director and ultimately to the FWP Commission.

"It's a waste of taxpayers money to put power in campsites, not the camping experience."

"Want to go on public record that I am opposed to electricity at Placid, Salmon, and Beavertail Hill. It is a waste of taxpayer's money. Would suggest a more productive use of the money by cleaning out the trash fish in Placid, plant with Tiger Muskie"

FWP Response: *This project reflects the changing needs and values of state park visitors. Every recreational vehicle sold today has provision for electrical connections. Montana State Parks does not discriminate between one type of camping or another. Our 2006 visitor survey shows that already over 50% of the campers in our state parks are using motor-homes and full size hard-sided campers. Funds used for these projects are park user fees, not general fund tax dollars. FWP's philosophy is to manage fisheries resources for native species, not introduced species.*

"I am writing to oppose any proposal to add electrical outlets for campers at the MT Beavertail Hill State Park Campground.

There are plenty of places that 'campers' who drive around in RVs and want electricity to run their air-conditioners and Direct TVs and strings of holiday lights can spend the night.

Camping is supposed to be about getting back to nature. Being surrounded by people who can't bear to be away from every form of creature comfort destroy this concept, and they are not to be encouraged in our state parks. I camp in state parks and avoid private RV parks specifically for this reason. People in RVs may think that what they're doing is camping, but it's not, and people with my perspective rely on state parks without electrical service to avoid all the negatives RVs bring with.

This also a terrible idea from an economic standpoint. Since there's no mention of metering the use of electricity, the citizens of MT will wind up essentially subsidizing its use. How ironic that would be, paying RV users to come to natural settings so they can destroy the atmosphere of natural peace and quiet.

Moreover, providing this subsidized electricity will impact private businesses that are designed to serve this segment of 'campers' and put the state government in direct competition with them. That's not something our government should be doing. This was a terrible idea when it was first proposed over a year ago and it remains a terrible idea now. Please do not provide electrical hookups in this park."

FWP Response: *This project reflects the changing needs and values of state park visitors. Every recreational vehicle sold today has provision for electrical connections. Montana State*

Parks wants to attract campers that are desirous of camping in a state park setting. Beavertail Hill State Park has increased camping opportunities in an effort to make the park a destination site. This includes providing a range of camping experiences from full size hard-sided campers and RVs to tenters to campers with disabilities. Onsite staff and informational brochures direct travelers to the many local attractions in the vicinity in an effort to increase the number of days people stay in the area. This contributes to the local economy and helps small businesses. The added benefits of park visitors spending dollars in the local economy will be an asset that contributes positively to Montana's economy as a whole. Beavertail Hill should be for the whole public to enjoy.

Everyone's definition of "camping" is different. Montana State Parks does not discriminate between one type of camping or another. Our 2006 visitor survey shows that already over 50% of the campers in our state parks are using motor-homes and full size hard-sided campers.

Although FWP may incur costs for maintenance due to the addition of electrical services, the fees generated from use of electricity are anticipated to offset this cost. Electricity is one of the more energy efficient forms of energy than the use of fossil fuels. The spending of state park dollars to provide this service to campers is meeting a need that will not only enhance tourism but also meet the emerging needs of today's "baby boomer" generation. Even comments from Missoula's Convention and Visitors Bureau indicate that the lack of electricity in our Montana State Parks is a very common complaint by tourists visiting Montana.

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: Install electrical pedestals at 28 campsites. The Draft EA and this Decision Notice together will serve as the Final EA for this proposal.

In accordance with FWP policy, this project is subject to appeal, which 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 specifically describe the basis for the appeal, explain how the appellant has previously commented to the department or participated in the decision-making process, and lay out how FWP may address the concerns in the appeal. The appeal should be mailed to: Mr. Joe Maurier, Director, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, PO Box 200701, Helena, MT 59620-0701.

Lee Bastian

10/14/2009

Lee Bastian **Date**
Regional Parks Manager