Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

2300 Lake Elmo Drive
Billings MT 59105
April 19, 2010

TO: Environmental Quality Council
Director's Office, Dept. of Environmental Quality
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks*
Director's Office
Parks Division
Fisheries Division
Wildlife Division
Lands Section
Design & Construction Unit
Legal
Regional Supervisors
Mike Volesky, Governor's Office *
Sarah Elliott, Press Agent, Governor's Office*

Montana Historical Society, State Preservation Office
Janet Ellis, Montana Audubon Council
Montana Wildlife Federation
Montana State Library
George Ochenski
Montana Environmental Information Center
Wayne Hirst, Montana State Parks Foundation
FWP Commissioner Shane Colton*
Montana Parks Association/Our Montana (land acquisition projects)
David Moore, DNRC Area Manager, Southern Land Office
County Commissioners
Other Local Interested People or Groups
* (Sent electronically)

Dear Interested Parties:

We are extending the comment period on our Environmental Assessment for proposed improvements to the Yellowstone River State Park through **May 7, 2010**. We will also be holding a public meeting on **May 4th, 2010, at 7:00 pm at the Fish, Wildlife and Parks Regional Office** at 2300 Lake Elmo Drive in Billings.

If you have questions, need additional copies of the draft EA, and to submit comments, please contact Terri Walters, Park Manager at Fish, Wildlife & Parks, 2300 Lake Elmo Drive, Billings, MT 59105; by telephone at 247-2955 or by email to twalters@mt.gov.

Thanks you for your interest in this proposal.

Doug Habermann
Region 5 Parks Manager

Enclosures

Draft
Environmental Assessment

Yellowstone River State Park Campground Project

March 15, 2010

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

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

PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

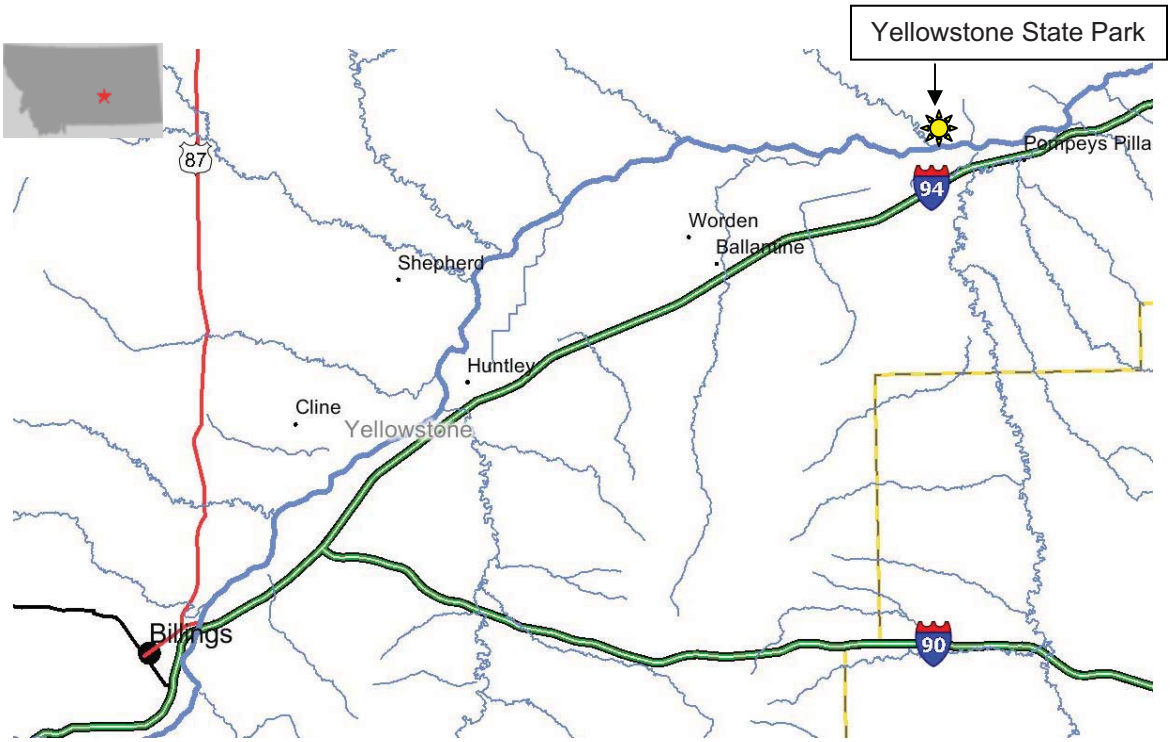
1. Proposed state action: Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes to embark on the initial development of the facilities at the new Yellowstone River State Park. This effort would include the construction of a campground and associated infrastructure improvements (water and electricity) and construction of a new access road to the campground. The development of an overlook area on the bluff above the campground would also be initiated if funding were available.

2. Agency authority for the proposed action:
FWP has the authority to develop outdoor recreational resources in the state per state statute 23-2-101 (Montana Code Annotated (MCA)).

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

3. Estimated Schedule of Events:
Estimated Construction/Commencement Date: Spring 2010
Estimated Completion Date: Summer 2010
Current Status of Project Design (% complete): 10%

4. Location:
Yellowstone County, 30 miles east-northeast of Billings, Montana
Section 13, T3N, R29E



Pompeys Pillar National Monument is approximately 5.25 river miles downstream from the eastern boundary of the park.

See *Appendix C* for maps of the state park and locations of the campground and overlook areas within the Park.

5. Project size:

	Acres		Acres
(a) Developed:		(d) Floodplain	0
Residential	0		
Industrial	0	(e) Productive:	
		Irrigated cropland	0
(b) Open Space/ Woodlands/Recreation	5	Dry cropland	5
		Forestry	0
(c) Wetlands/Riparian Areas	0	Rangeland	0
		Other	0

6. Listing of any other Local, State or Federal agency that has overlapping or additional jurisdiction.

(a) Permits: the contractor will obtain all permits (electrical, water well, sanitarian, etc.) prior to any implementation activities.

(b) Funding:
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks $ 450,000.00

(c) Other Overlapping or Additional Jurisdictional Responsibilities:

Montana State Historical Preservation Office	Archeological & Cultural Site Protection
Yellowstone County Planning Department	Subdivision Review

7. Narrative summary of the proposed action:

Background
In 2008, FWP acquired approximately 4,600 acres (3,976 deeded, 621 leased state school trust, and 69 acres leased from BLM) that encompasses the Yellowstone River State Park and Wildlife Management Area. The property was formally known as the Circle R Ranch. Of the 4,600 acres, 200 acres is designated as the state park and accessible by all types of vehicles with the remaining portion managed as the wildlife management area (WMA) and only accessible by non-motorized traffic.

This environmental assessment will only focus on the proposed improvements that are within the state park portion of the property.

Existing Improvements
Currently, there are no buildings on the property and very little development, other than a center pivot sprinkler, fences, and stock watering facilities.

Proposed Improvements

Initial Campground Development

Preliminary development plans for the campground area encompasses new access roads to the campground from the Bozeman Trail Road and to four campground loops that tentatively would accommodate approximately 35 campsites, four vault latrines, and a campground host site. Additional infrastructure and facilities that may be initiated if funding is available is the installation of an irrigation system, construction of a comfort/shower building, and placement of a playground.

Electricity would be extended in to the campground area from an existing power line that is already powering the pivot sprinkler system. FWP anticipates that with the extension of electricity, a centralized transformer box would be required within the campground.

Water for the irrigation of the food plot is provided from the Yellowstone River through a pump approximately 0.4 mile from the proposed campground. In addition to the pump, there is a water well beyond the food plots that was used for stock watering by the previous owners. However in order to provide water for the campground, FWP proposes to drill a well for a source of water closer to the campsites to provide potable water for campground hosts, campground visitors, irrigation for campground landscaping, and future development plans.

Initial plans for the campground have campsites dispersed between four camp loops. The graveled campground loop roads will provide access to pull-through and back-in style campsite parking. Standard to all campsites would included a picnic table and fire ring, as well as electrical hookups (pedestals) for those visitors who want the opportunity to use electricity instead of personal generators to power camper comforts (medical equipment, appliances, TV, etc.). The access road connecting the campground loops would be designed to accommodate two-way traffic. Latrines would be provided in each campground loop for basic sanitary services. A possible future comfort station would provide flush toilets and pay showers for visitors. The playground would provide an additional activity for children at the park. Access to the Yellowstone River would be by foot trail for fishing and hand launching of watercraft.

Campground Access Road

The location of the proposed campground is only accessible from Bundy Road, then west to the property boundary via the Bozeman Trail Road. FWP intends to upgrade the existing roads from the east property boundary into the proposed campground location.

The preliminary design off the graveled access roads would be a 24’ width to accommodate passing vehicles.

Overlook Facilities

Although the overlook area would be the final funded component of the Park’s initial development, the site’s panoramic view over the Yellowstone River, the rim rocks above the campground, and views of the grasslands north of the overlook site provides visitors an exceptional location for day-use recreation activities.

The facilities proposed for the overlook area include a parking lot, vault latrine, paths to observation points, and interpretive signage.

Subdivision Review Process

As this FWP project involves the initial development of a campground facility, the proposed project will be subject to the established Yellowstone County Subdivision Review process. FWP will work closely with Yellowstone County on all aspects of the proposed project as it progresses from the initial stages to completion. The review will take into consideration, but will not be limited to safety,

convenience and effectiveness for users. The proposed roads shall also enable emergency service providers to protect life and property under severe emergency situations.

A component of the initial planning efforts will include a formal Road Evaluation Study (RES) on the existing county access routes to the site via the Bundy Road and the Bozeman Trail Roads. FWP will retain a local private engineering consultant to conduct the RES. The RES results will be shared with Yellowstone County. Any proposed improvements recommended by the RES will be discussed as an integral part of the on-going subdivision review process for the project.

Operation

State park facilities will be operated under standard Fish, Wildlife and Parks rules and regulations. These include, but are not limited to no off road travel (including OHV's), no discharge of firearms in developed areas, and fires must be within designated fire rings. Non-resident park patrons are responsible for paying day use fees. All campers are responsible to follow fee rules and regulations.

Yellowstone River State Park will be managed from the R-5 FWP in Billings. An on-site park host will reside at YRSP during the main season of use.

Description of Existing Natural Resources

The three primary habitat types on this property are riparian river bottom, sagebrush grassland, and ponderosa pine savannah. There are components of all three habitat types within the state park's boundaries.

The riparian habitat is very high quality with extensive stands of cottonwoods, intermixed with willow, buffaloberry, and other shrubs. There are several islands bordering the property, which are surrounded by old river channels and sloughs creating ideal waterfowl roosting areas.

Riparian and wetland communities support the highest concentration of plants and animals in Montana. The multi-layered plant canopy provided along the Yellowstone River corridor provides a variety of nesting, resting, and foraging areas for wildlife. In Montana, riparian habitats provide breeding and nesting areas for at least 134 (55%) of Montana's 245 species of breeding birds, as well as much-needed food and resting areas for migrating birds. There are 17 Tier I Species of Greatest Conservation Need that rely on riparian and wetland habitat for breeding and/or survival. Within the park area, there is no lentic habitat appropriate for amphibian breeding.

The sagebrush-grassland habitat in the uplands is extensive and high quality. Low intensity managed grazing has resulted in range conditions that are good to excellent. The primary species are bluebunch wheatgrass and big sagebrush.

Uplands consist of "breaks" interspersed with open benchlands. Ponderosa pine savannahs are scattered throughout the uplands along the several rough canyons that occur on the property. Most of the ridge tops and canyon walls contain stands of ponderosa pine. Ponderosa pine savannahs are intermingled with sagebrush-grasslands.

There are over 300 terrestrial vertebrate species that are found within the grasslands community type. The Comprehensive Fish and Wildlife Conservation Strategy (CFWCS) lists the following Tier I Species of Greatest Conservation Need that may be found in mixed shrub and grassland communities: northern leopard frog, western hog-nosed snake, milk snake, greater sage-grouse, mountain plover, long-billed curlew, burrowing owl, spotted bat, Townsend's big-eared bat, pallid bat, black-tailed prairie dog, and meadow jumping mouse (FWP 2005).

Rocky outcrops carved by the Yellowstone River provide unique finite habitat resources for many bats (little brown bat, big brown bat, hoary bat, silver-haired bat, and spotted bat), birds, and reptiles, including Townsend's big-eared bat, Northern myotis, milk snake, greater short-horned lizard, prairie rattlesnake, and common sagebrush lizards. Confirmation of these species at FWP's property was completed during August 2009 by a diversity monitoring team.

A survey of the bird species at Yellowstone River State Park and Yellowstone WMA was completed in June 2009. Sixty-four species were recorded from the different habitat areas represented with FWP's property. Those species that are likely to use the rimrocks area near the proposed campground are: white-throated swift, rock wren, northern rough-winged swallow, turkey vulture, golden eagle, and violet-green swallow. In addition to the bird species documented on the property, there are several bald eagle (federally protected species) territories both upper stream and downstream from the location of the state park along the Yellowstone River, but there are no known eagle nests within FWP's property. Downstream and adjacent to the proposed campground location there is an active great blue heron rookery (Montana Species of Concern).

8. Alternatives:

Alternative A: No Action, FWP does not initiate improvements at the Park
FWP would not embark on any of the proposed development elements within the new state park. The park would remain in its current condition. Camping activities would continue to be prohibited. Access to the river bottom would be accessible by the existing road system and the overlook area would not be accessible by vehicle. FWP would continue to manage the area for wildlife habitat and allow public access for day-use recreation activities under the guidance of the Circle R Property Management Plan (encompasses Yellowstone River State Park and Yellowstone Wildlife Management Area).

Alternative B: FWP proceeds with basic development of the campground, access road, and overlook areas within Yellowstone River State Park (Proposed Action)
FWP would implement the proposed development actions for the establishment of a formal campground within the park and overlook facilities as previously described.

Alternative C: FWP proceeds with the developments of the campground area and the access road
Under this scenario, FWP would postpone the construction of the overlook facilities until additional funding became available but would proceed with the development of the campground and the construction of the campground access road as described.

Anticipated impacts to the physical and human resources are expected to the similar to those described for Alternative B – Proposed Action at the location of the campground and access road on the following pages.

PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW CHECKLIST

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/d. The predominant soil types present at the location of the proposed campground are Haverson silty clay loam Lohmiller silty clay, and McRae Loam. At the location of the proposed overlook, the soil present is Worland fine sandy loam (USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Web Soil Survey). Elevations in the target area range from approximately 3,150' at the overlook to 2,900' above sea level at the location of the campground. None of the proposed improvements are located near the river channel or its minor waterways.

Areas that are disturbed by the proposed construction activities will be reseeded with local native grasses and energy dissipators (hay tubes, rocks, etc.) will be place in drainage features to decrease the potential for new erosion patterns from becoming established and preserve over-covering soils.

* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.

** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

*** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

**** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

2. 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 13 (c).)			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 regulations? (Also see 2a.)		N/A				

2a/b. The proposed construction of a new access road to the campground, campground facilities, and overlook facilities would require the use of large equipment to move soils and excavate locations for roads and latrines. Such activities are expected to temporarily generate dust in the immediate area and deteriorate the ambient air quality during the construction period.

After the construction period is completed, ambient air quality is expected to return to near normal levels. However, visitors driving on the graveled roads within the park would likely generate some dust. The Bozeman Trail Road passes by two ranch compounds and dust from the road may travel into those areas during peak visitation times. FWP would investigate options for dust abatement to decrease inconveniences to neighboring residences and implement necessary dust control as funding allows.

The installation of the vault latrines within the campground and at the overlook parking area would provide visitors with public restrooms that will be maintained by FWP staff to ensure efficiency and reduce the potential soil contamination problems. The latrine's design is effective at venting and dispersing odors.

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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			3g
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.)		N/A				
m. ***For P-R/D-J, will the project result in any discharge that will affect federal or state water quality regulations? (Also see 3a.)		N/A				

3b. FWP anticipates some of the disturbed areas near the new access road, campground, and overlook would affect some existing drainage patterns. FWP may minimize the rate of surface runoff in ditches by the placement of energy dissipaters. Areas adjacent to disturbed by the proposed construction efforts would be reseeded with native grasses or shrubs to decrease the potential for soil movement when the public uses the improved areas.

3g. With the acquisition of the property in 2008, FWP received the water rights to the property that included one well and the extraction of water from the Yellowstone River for irrigation and stock watering purposes. The location of the existing well is too far away from the proposed campground area to be a practical source of water and its construction makes it unfit for potential uses. The current depth of the existing well is 33' per the Montana Department of Natural Resources Water Rights database.

As part of the development efforts, FWP proposes to drill another water well in close proximity to the campground area to provide a source of water for visitors and campground landscaping. The exact location and depth for the new well is unknown at this time. The establishment of a new well is not expected to negatively affect overall ground water levels or the Yellowstone River.

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The location of the proposed campground is not located on a floodplain per FEMA map 3001420750A effective 11/18/81.

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			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		Yes	4e
f. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project affect wetlands, or prime and unique farmland?		N/A				

4a/b. The proposed action would not change the diversity of the existing native plant species on this portion of the property since the remainder of the property is considered the wildlife management area where access is only by non-motorized vehicles or by foot. The proposed improvements would impact approximately 5% of the 200-acre designated state park property.

4c. A search of the Montana Natural Heritage database on 9/1/08 revealed no occurrences of designated species of concern, threatened or endangered species within the property.

4e. Dennis Yurian, Habitat Specialist, has treated 16 acres for Spotted Knapweed, Bind Weed and Canada Thistle. Management activity will be directed towards reducing the potential for the spread of weeds. FWP has already implemented its Statewide Integrated Noxious Weed Management Plan to manage the existing infestations and would continue to address any new noxious weeds occurrences per the Plan's guidance. The Plan advocates the use of mechanical, chemical, biological, and manual method to control noxious weeds on FWP-owned properties. Regional FWP staff will cooperate with the County Weed District office to establish a cooperative agreement for weed management efforts for the park. Vegetation management activities including weed control and planting of desirable grasses has already occurred on the park site.

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** 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				
g. Increase in conditions that stress wildlife populations or limit abundance (including harassment, legal or illegal harvest or other human activity)?			X			5g
h. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project be performed in any area in which T&E species are present, and will the project affect any T&E species or their habitat? (Also see 5f.)		N/A				
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.)		N/A				

5f/h. A search of the Montana Natural Heritage database revealed two sensitive species known to be in the vicinity of Yellowstone River State Park. Those are the spotted bat and spiny soft-shelled turtle. In August 2009, a limited survey of Species of Concern was completed with the property. During the survey, 150 bat calls were recorded. As of this environmental assessment, the analysis of those bats calls has not been finished to determine if calls of the spotted bat were captured. Substantial bat activity (unknown species) can be confirmed for the area. The 2009 survey did not focus on aquatic species, but the soft-shelled turtle is present in the area and uses the waterways bordering the proposed campground area.

5g. The diversity and abundance of wildlife species within the Park are not expected to measurably change. However, some individual animals that use the designated area for the proposed campground and overall facilities will likely move to quieter spots within the Park and adjacent WMA. In addition to the potential new facilities, the increase in human activities will also be an incentive for some wildlife to move to different areas for forage and nesting.

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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		Yes	6a
b. Exposure of people to serve or nuisance noise levels?		X				
c. Creation of electrostatic or electromagnetic effects that could be detrimental to human health or property?		X				
d. Interference with radio or television reception and operation?		X				

6a. There would be an increase in noise levels at Yellowstone River State Park due to the installation equipment and contracting staff working at the site. After the completion of the project, noise levels are expected to remain above pre-installation levels because the area would have become more accessible to the public for recreational activities and be open for overnight camping.

By installing the electrical hookups (pedestals) at each campsite, FWP hopes many campground visitors requiring power for their camping units would choose to use the pedestals over using their individual generators. In choosing the pedestals, campers would assist in the reduction of nuisance noise within the campground. The campground would be staffed with a campground host during the primary season. Along with dedicated parks and enforcement staff, use regulations would be enforced to minimize any public disturbances.

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			7a
b. Conflicted with a designated natural area or area of unusual scientific or educational importance?		X				
c. Conflict with any existing land use whose presence would constrain or potentially prohibit the proposed action?		X				
d. Adverse effects on or relocation of residences?	X					7d

7a. The construction of the proposed campground would increase the profitability of the state park portion of the property. Upon the completion of the campground, FWP would have the ability to charge overnight camping fees to users, which is an opportunity not available to FWP currently. The presence of the campground in close proximity to Pompey's Pillar National Historic Landmark and Billings should increase tourism spending in the area.

7d. A traffic counter was installed at the site entrance in April. This captures all use of the site since this is the only vehicle entrance. Counts indicate approximately 400- 600 visits per month. FWP would anticipate an increase in

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use with the park developments. FWP will continue to address the primary problem of road dust through ongoing cooperative efforts with Yellowstone County.

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		Yes	8b
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)		N/A				

8a. Chemical spraying is part of FWP's weed management plan to limit the infestation of noxious weeds within the park, which is traditionally completed by the Yellowstone County Weed District. Licensed professionals would conduct weed treatment and storage and mixing of the chemicals, this would be in accordance with standard operating procedures. Storage of chemicals would be in very small volumes. Regional FWP employees are also certified and trained to perform weed control properly and as needed to manage weed populations.

8b. Upon the completion of the proposed improvements, FWP would coordinate with local emergency response agencies to ensure visitors to the park can receive necessary care if an emergency should occur.

8c. Rattlesnakes have been observed at the proposed location for the overlook facilities. To inform the public of the snakes' presence, FWP would install signage at the overlook area and within the campground to decrease the occurrences of hazardous interactions. Park staff will also interact with visitors to enhance awareness and safety. Additionally, park staff will be trained on how to safely remove snakes from areas used by visitors.

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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			9c.
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			9e

9 c/d. There are five privately-owned campgrounds within a 40-mile radius of Yellowstone River State Park. One is 26 miles east of the park in Custer and the others 40 miles west in Billings.

The Fort Custer Restaurant and Campground offers 12 campsites with full hookups. This campground also has a casino, bar, and sewer facilities.

The campgrounds in Billings include the Billings KOA, Eastwood Estates, Trailer Village, and Yellowstone River RV & Campground. The two larger campgrounds, KOA and Yellowstone River, have a variety of services and facilities available for guests that include playgrounds, full hookups, sewer, pool, and laundry. Rates at these two campgrounds range from $32 for tent camping to $46 for RV. The KOA is open April –October and the Yellowstone River RV campground is open year round. The smaller campgrounds, Eastwood and Trailer Village, are both open year round and offer full hook ups and sewer. Their rates are approximately $31 per night.

University of Montana's Institute of Tourism and Recreation Research survey of traveler characteristics based from December 2006 reflected a slightly higher percentage of the respondents stayed overnight in private campgrounds versus public ones when visiting Custer Country, which includes Yellowstone County.

If campers want a higher level of service or additional amenities, park staff would refer those visitors to private campgrounds in the area. The opportunity to camp close to Pompey's Pillar National Historic Landmark has the potential to retain visitors for a longer period in the local are with economic benefits to local businesses.

Through the competitive bidding process for services, it is probable that locally owned businesses could be chose for the project, which would support the local economy and residents of the area.

9e. Once the new campground and overlook areas are completed, FWP anticipates some additional traffic levels on the existing county roads, Bozeman Trail and Bundy Road, which will provide access to the state park.

* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.

** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

*** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

**** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

10. PUBLIC SERVICES/TAXES/UTILITIES Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	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			10a
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		No	10c
d. Will the proposed action result in increased use of any energy source?			X		No	10d
e. **Define projected revenue sources						10e
f. **Define projected maintenance costs.						10f

10a. FWP will work with local fire services and police to coordinate appropriate site protection and ensure the public's safety for proper emergency response if the need arises.

10c. The proposed action would require a new connection to nearby electrical power sources and to install the necessary electrical infrastructures (i.e. transformers, circuit box, etc.) to support the underground electrical conduit lines for new outlet pedestals at each campsite and at the host pad location. The new electrical system would be designed to accommodate any future electrical needs within the campground.

10d. The proposed electrification of the campsites at Yellowstone River State Park would increase the park's consumption of electricity since the opportunity for power within the park is new and most camping visitors at the electrified campsite would likely be using hard-sided camping units. The convenience of the camp-side outlets would provide visitors the opportunity to use camper comforts (medical equipment, appliances) and recharge cell phones and other electronic equipment.

10e. If the proposed development plans of the park were implemented the park could expect to generate some revenue from camping fees. The following chart shows the revenue estimates based on predicted occupancy:

Total campsites = 35, initially planned
Number of campsites proposed for electrification: All
Season: open year round, but use would be less during winter and shoulder seasons

Assumes an initial average occupancy rate of 25% over the entire season.

Occupancy (#of days x # of campsites x camp fee with hook up)		Less Cost of Electricity per night *	Gross Revenue
20%	(365 days)(35 sites)($20/night) = $51,100	-$ 10,220	$40,900

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

10f. Maintenance costs of the electrical pedestals would be minimal since they are designed to by self-contained. FWP would provide routine maintenance to guarantee the pedestals are safe for campers to use and are working

* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.

** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

*** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

**** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

properly. A budget of $2500 has been established for the park. Support from the regional administrative budget will be used until a final budget for the park can be established for the developed park unit.

** 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			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			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.)		N/A				

11a. Although there is an existing gravel road from the Bozeman Trail Road into the property, the proposed campground access road's path, campground loops, and the road into the overlook areas would be new. There is an existing unimproved dirt road to the proposed campground area.

11c. The establishment of a new public recreation area is predicted to add to the quantity of recreational opportunities in south central Montana. The proposed access road improvements would provide the public with a route to a new area for hiking, hunting, wildlife viewing, camping, and photography. Furthermore, hunters may appreciate the opportunity to camp within the park while hunting in the adjacent Yellowstone Wildlife Management Area. An initial operations and personnel budget of $17,247 has been established for the park. This budget will be adjusted to address the costs of operating any new facilities. See *Appendix D* for the Tourism Report.

* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.

** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

*** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

**** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

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					12a
b. Physical change that would affect unique cultural values?		X				
c. Effects on existing religious or sacred uses of a site or area?	X					12c
d. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project affect historic or cultural resources? Attach SHPO letter of clearance. (Also see 12.a.)		N/A				

12a/c. The Yellowstone River State Park is within the historic territory of the Crow Indians before it was ceded away from the Tribe through a 1906 treaty with the US Government.

The sandstone bluff called Pompeys Pillar is 5.25 river miles downstream from the eastern boundary of the state park. It bears the only remaining physical evidence of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, which appears on the trail today as it did 200 years ago. On the face of the 150-foot butte, Captain William Clark carved his name on July 25, 1806, during his return to the United States through the beautiful Yellowstone Valley. The Crow people called the pillar "the place where the mountain lion lies" because the north face of sandstone formation resembles a mountain lion's head. Native Americans used the site to hunt for buffalo, shelter along the river, and participate in vision quests. (Pompeys Pillar Historical Association) It is a designated National Historic Landmark and managed for day use by the Bureau of Land Management. Development of a campground at Yellowstone River State Park would support and compliment the operation of this important and heavily visited cultural site.

Since the sites for the proposed campground and outlook are in a region historically used by native peoples, an inventory would be conducted prior to the implementation of a construction effort to ensure no unrecorded historic or culturally sites or artifacts are disturbed by the proposed construction activities. Consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office would be ongoing and as needed, if any sensitive resources were discovered.

* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.

** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

*** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

**** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

13. SUMMARY EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE Will the proposed action, considered as a whole:	IMPACT *					
	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.)						13a
b. Involve potential risks or adverse effects, which are uncertain but extremely hazardous if they were to occur?		X				
c. Potentially conflict with the substantive requirements of any local, state, or federal law, regulation, standard or formal plan?		X				
d. Establish a precedent or likelihood that future actions with significant environmental impacts will be proposed?		X				
e. Generate substantial debate or controversy about the nature of the impacts that would be created?		X				
f. ***For P-R/D-J, is the project expected to have organized opposition or generate substantial public controversy? (Also see 13e.)		N/A				
g. ****For P-R/D-J, list any federal or state permits required.		N/A				

13a. If completed, the proposed initial development of Yellowstone River State Park will visually alter some of the existing physical attributes of the site in order to expand the recreational opportunities offered to the public. The construction and installation of the proposed campground, access road, and the overlook facilities requires the movement of soils and vegetative cover in the immediate area. Cumulative effects to these resources is anticipated to be moderate but not to a point that geologic features are affected or the diversity of plant species within the park is effected.

Since the actual level of usage of the park by the public is unknown, potential cumulative effects to other physical and human resources are difficult to completely predict and analyze in this assessment. However, it is likely with moderate use; the presence of some wildlife species in the immediate of the campground may decline as they move to quieter portions of the property where human activities are at a minimum. Additionally, the availability of overnight camping may give rise to the exploration and recreational use of the Wildlife Management Area of the property by camping visitors. There may be some impact on residents along Bozeman Trail and Bundy Road. Expansion of benefits to the local tourism economy and a significant increase in recreational opportunity will be benefits of the project.

* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.

** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

*** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

**** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

2. 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 would be developed by the state appointed engineering consultant in conjunction with FWP engineering staff. All state and federal permits would be obtained by FWP. A private contractor selected through the State's competitive bid process would complete construction. Final inspection would be the responsibility of the FWP Design and Construction Bureau.

State pesticide use laws and regulations would be followed. Application records would be submitted to the Montana Department of Agriculture as required every five-years and these records would 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 or water pipes, FWP's cultural resource specialist would work with SHPO to discuss alternatives to the design of the electrical and water systems to ensure culturally sensitive areas are not disturbed.

PART III. 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* and *Billings Gazette;*
- One press release;
- Public notice on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks web page: *http://fwp.mt.gov*.

Copies of this environmental assessment will be distributed to the neighboring landowners and interested parties to ensure their knowledge of the proposed project. If requested, FWP would schedule a public meeting during the public comment period of this assessment.

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 until April 19, 2010 5:00p.m.and can be mailed to the address below:

Yellowstone River State Park Development Project
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Region 5 Headquarters
2300 Lake Elmo Drive
Billings, MT 59105

Or email comments to: twalters@mt.gov

PART IV. 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 scope of the proposed development plans of the facilities at Yellowstone River State Park and the mitigation processes FWP intends to use to reduce the project's effects on the resources below significance, an EIS is not necessary and an EA is the appropriate level of analysis at this time. If new information or a redesign of the proposed action were required, FWP would review the analysis completed in this document to ensure it is still accurate and complete. FWP would complete an additional analysis if the current analysis were found incomplete at that time.

2. Persons responsible for preparing the EA:

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

Terri Walters
Park Manager
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
2300 Lake Elmo Dr.
Billings, MT 59105
406-247-2951

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

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

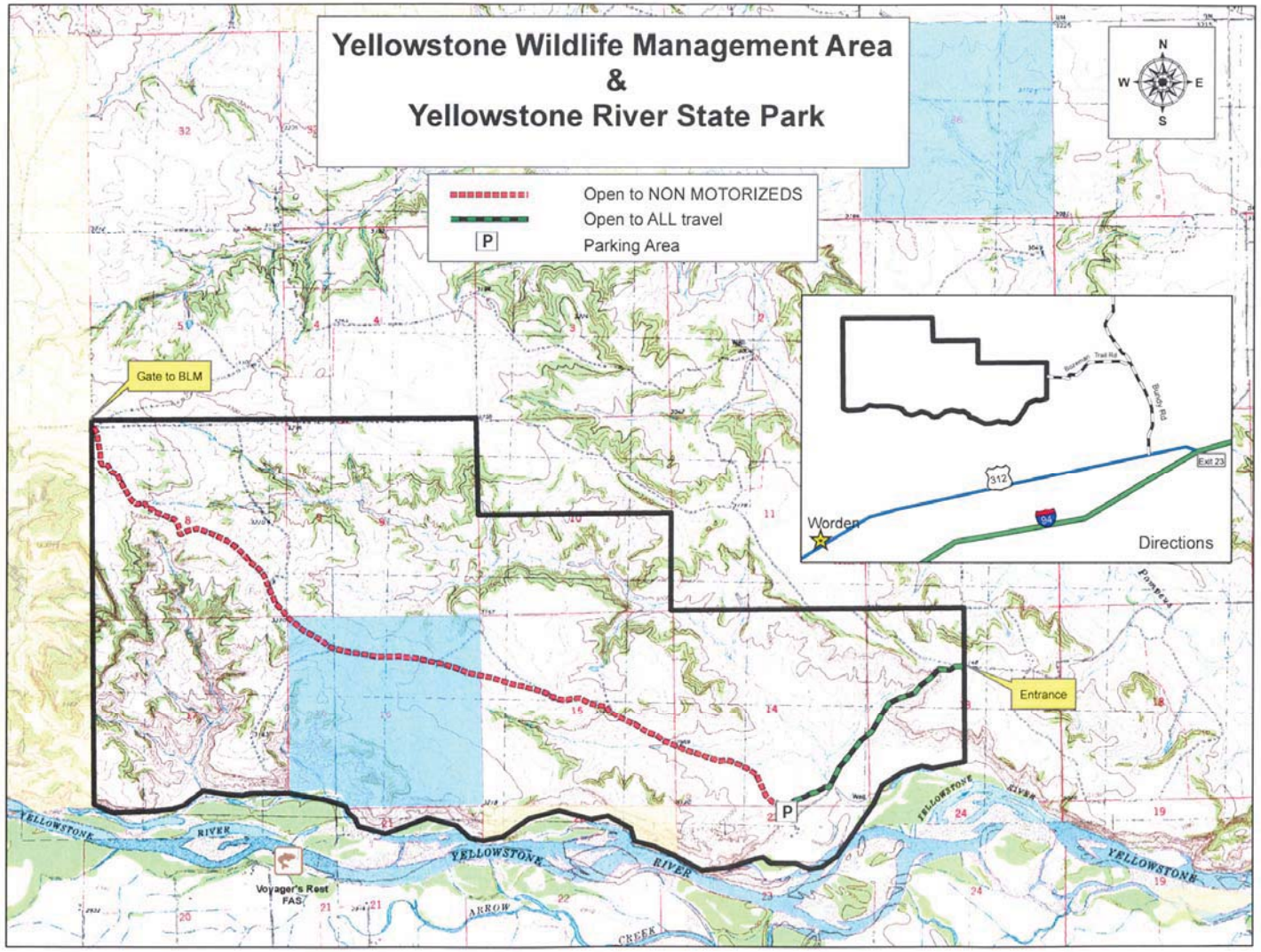
Montana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)
Montana Department of Commerce – Tourism
Montana Natural Heritage Program – Natural Resources Information System (NRIS)
Pompey's Pillar Historical Association
University of Montana – Institute of Tourism and Recreation Research

APPENDICES

A. Property Map
B. State Park and WMA Boundary Map
C. Aerial Maps of Yellowstone River State Park Proposed Improvements
D. Department of Commerce - Tourism Report
E. HB495 Project Qualification Checklist
F. Campground Development Site Plan
G. Overlook Site Plan

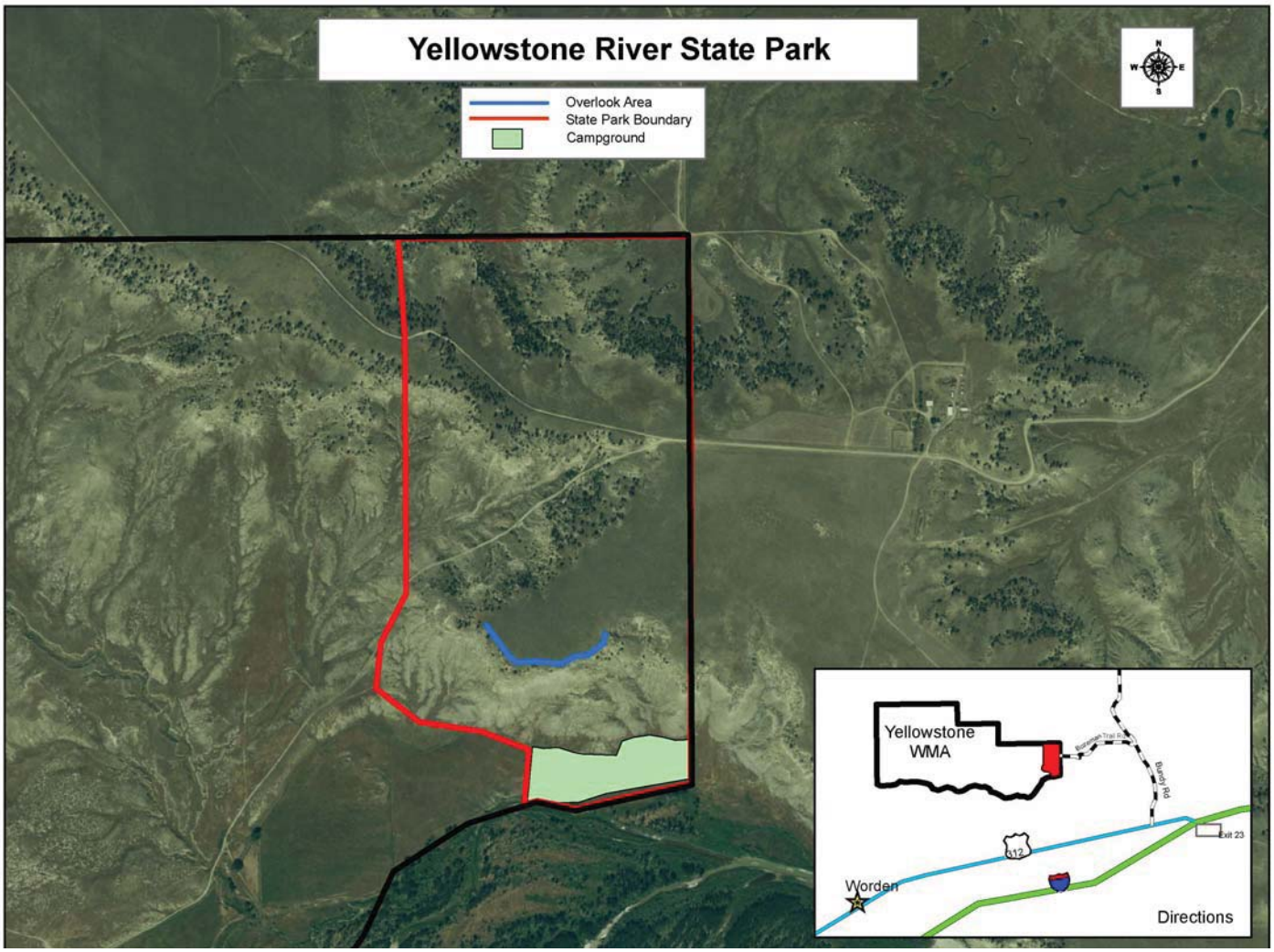
APPENDIX A

Yellowstone River State Park Map



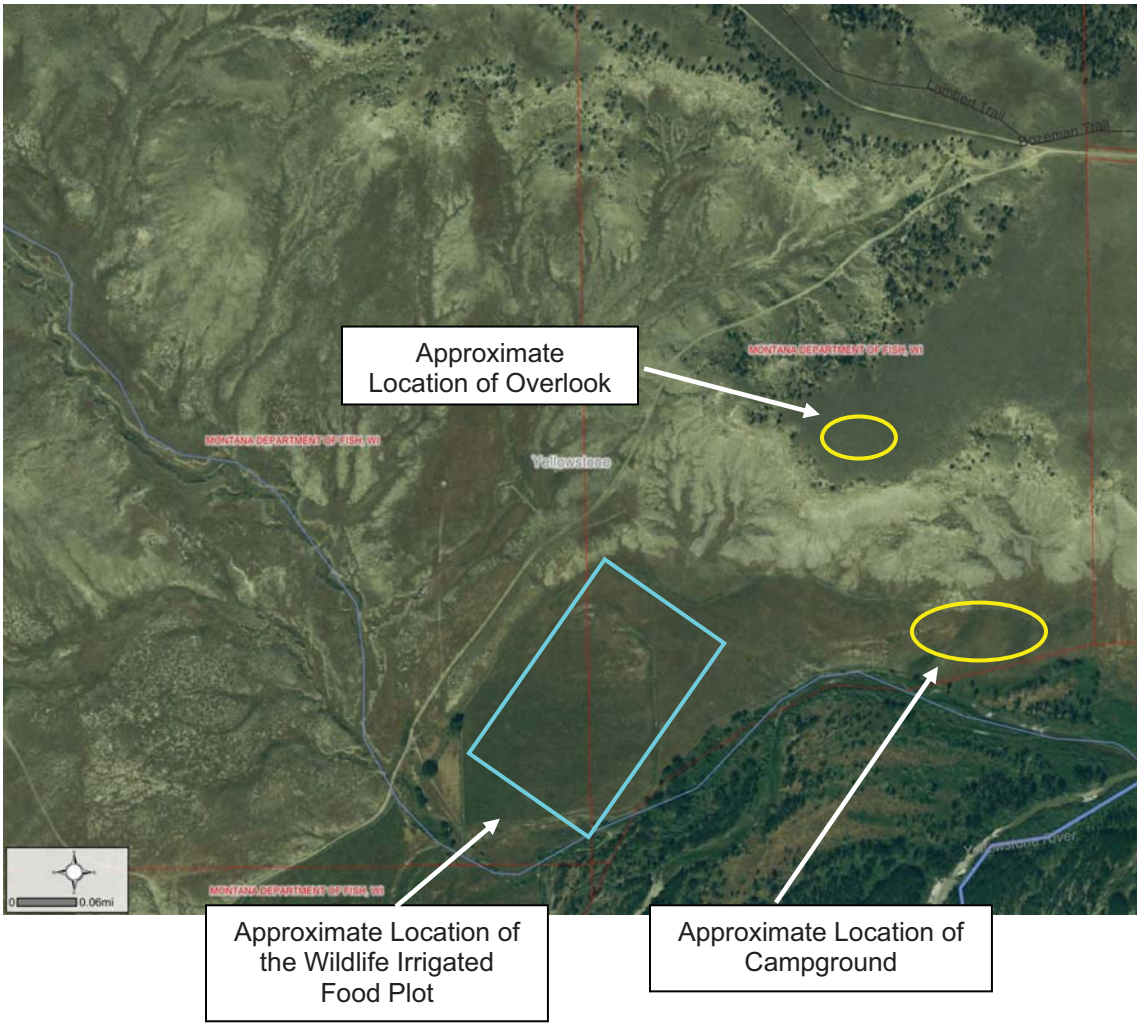
APPENDIX B

State Park and Wildlife Management Area Boundary Map



APPENDIX C

Aerial Map of Locations of the Proposed Improvements



APPENDIX D

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, Visitor Services Manager
Travel Montana-Department of Commerce
301 S. Park Ave.
Helena, MT 59601

Project Name: Yellowstone River State Park Campground and Overlook Development

Project Description: Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes to embark on the initial development of the new Yellowstone River State Park. This effort would include the construction of a campground and associated infrastructure improvements (water and electricity) and construction of a new access road to the campground. The development of an overlook area on the bluff above the campground may be implemented if funding is available.

Proposed facilities within the campground includes: tentatively 4 loops with 35 campsites with electrical hookups, latrines, host pad area, new access road to campground, and water well.

The proposed development of the overlook area would include parking area, latrine, information kiosk, and gravel paths to observation points.

The property was acquired in 2008 of which, the majority is designated a wildlife management area and the remainder is the state park. The area where the park is encompasses river bottom that had been used for crops, sandstone bluffs that look out at the Yellowstone River, and native grass prairie above the bluff.

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 8/28/2009

APPENDIX E

HB495
PROJECT QUALIFICATION CHECKLIST

Date September 1, 2009 **Person Reviewing** Rebecca Cooper

Project Location: Yellowstone County, 30 miles east-northeast of Billings, Montana
Section 13, T3N, R29E

Description of Proposed Work: Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes to embark on the initial development of the new Yellowstone River State Park. This effort would include the construction of a campground and associated infrastructure improvements (water and electricity) and construction of a new access road to the campground. The development of an overlook area on the bluff above the campground may be initiated if funding is available.

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 design plans for the Park calls for new access road be developed to provide a more direct route from the Bozeman Trail Road to the campground area. The length of the access road is likely to be under 50'.*

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

[X] C. Any excavation of 20 c.y. or greater?
Comments: *Possibly but the exact amount of soil to be excavated for the latrines, buried electrical conduits, and for the access road is unknown at this time.*

[X] D. New parking lots built over undisturbed land or expansion of existing lot that increases parking capacity by 25% or more?
Comments: *Yes, since there are no existing parking areas. The proposed action does include the establishment of a parking area at the overlook in addition to all the improvements for vehicles within the campground.*

[ ] 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*

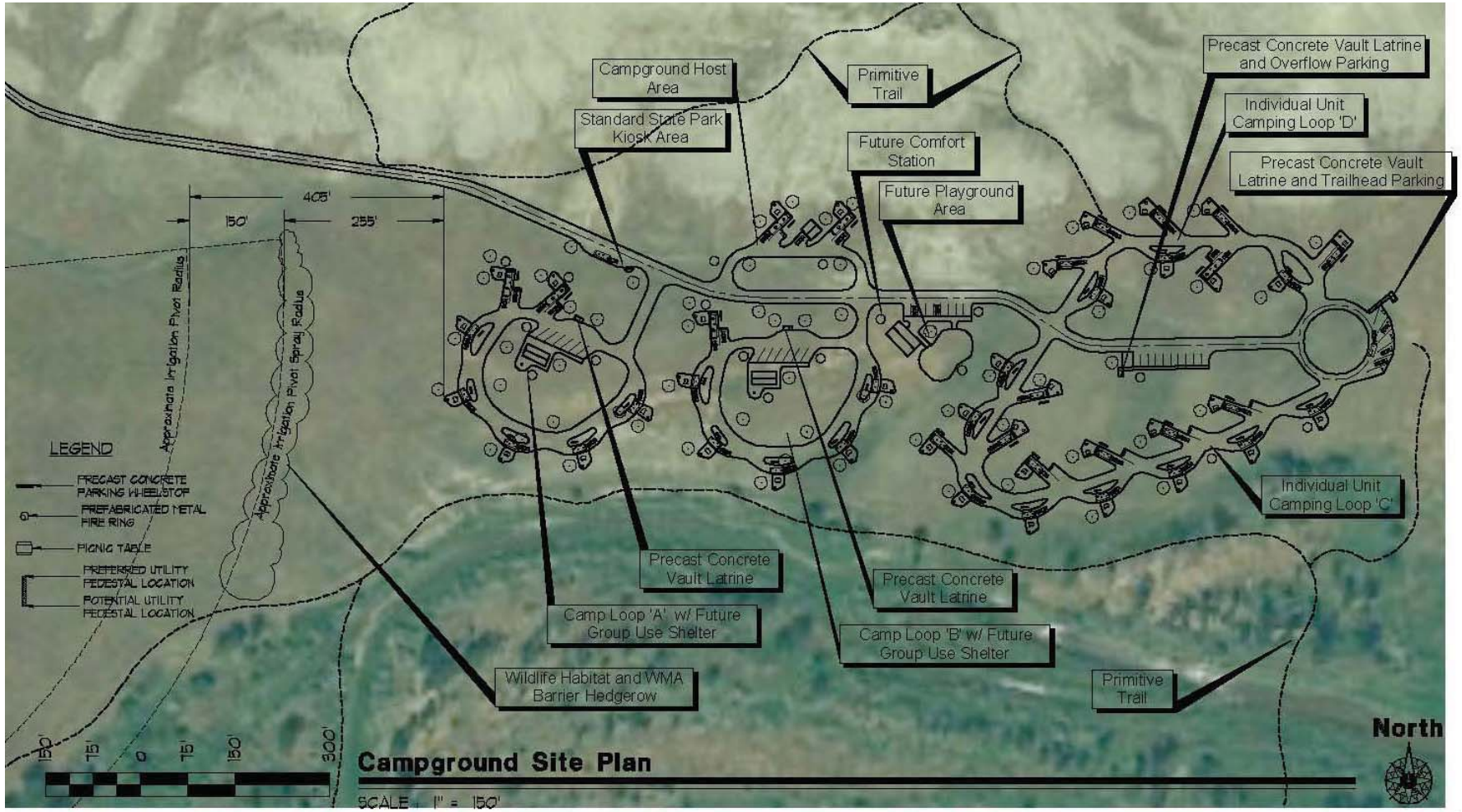
[X] H. Any new above ground utility lines?
Comments: *Some new electrical lines are anticipated between the existing power source and a new transformer in the campground area. All extensions of electricity from the transformer to campsite pedestals and miscellaneous sockets would be buried.*

[X] I. Any increase or decrease in campsites of 25% or more of an existing number of campsites?
Comments: *Yes, the proposed action includes the establishment of an entirely new campground that would potentially have 35 campsites.*

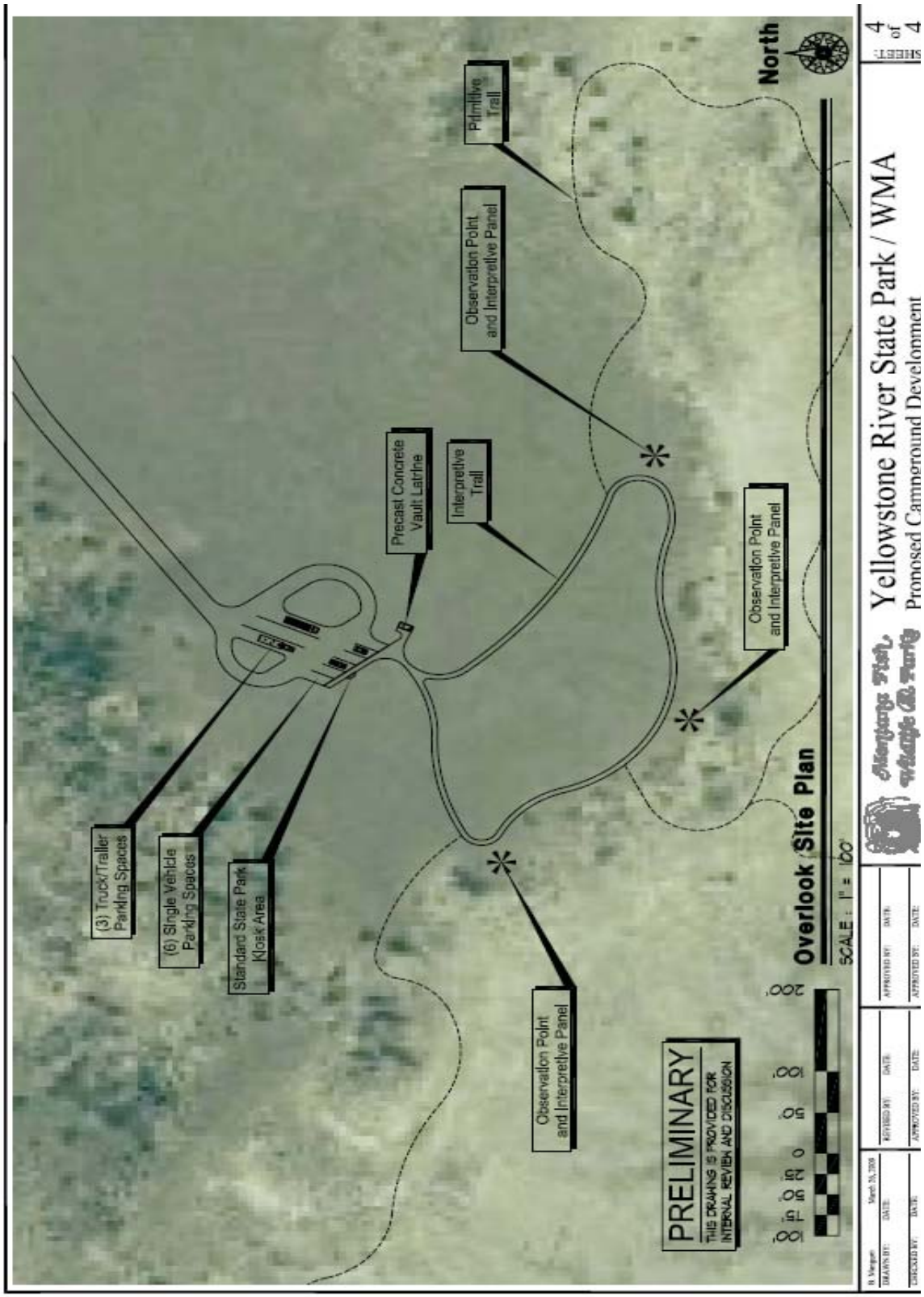
[X] J. Proposed project significantly changes the existing features or use pattern; including effects of a series of individual projects?
Comments: *Yes*

If any of the above are checked, HB 495 rules apply to this proposed work and should be documented on the MEPA/HB495 CHECKLIST. Refer to MEPA/HB495 Cross Reference Summary for further assistance.

Appendix F


Campground Host Area
Standard State Park Kiosk Area
Primitive Trail
Future Comfort Station
Future Playground Area
Precast Concrete Vault Latrine and Overflow Parking
Individual Unit Camping Loop 'D'
Precast Concrete Vault Latrine and Trailhead Parking
Individual Unit Camping Loop 'C'
Precast Concrete Vault Latrine
Precast Concrete Vault Latrine
Camp Loop 'A' w/ Future Group Use Shelter
Camp Loop 'B' w/ Future Group Use Shelter
Wildlife Habitat and WMA Barrier Hedgerow
Primitive Trail
405'
150'
255'
Approximate Irrigation Pivot Radius
Approximate Irrigation Pivot Spray Radius
LEGEND
PRECAST CONCRETE PARKING WHEELSTOP
PREFABRICATED METAL FIRE RING
PICNIC TABLE
PREFERRED UTILITY PEDESTAL LOCATION
POTENTIAL UTILITY PEDESTAL LOCATION
150' 75' 0 75' 150' 300'
Campground Site Plan
SCALE: 1" = 150'
North

Appendix G


(3) Truck/Trailer Parking Spaces
(6) Single Vehicle Parking Spaces
Standard State Park Kiosk Area
Precast Concrete Vault Latrine
Interpretive Trail
Primitive Trail
Observation Point and Interpretive Panel
Observation Point and Interpretive Panel
Observation Point and Interpretive Panel
North
PRELIMINARY
THIS DRAWING IS PROVIDED FOR INTERNAL REVIEW AND DISCUSSION
Overlook Site Plan
SCALE: 1" = 100'
Yellowstone River State Park / WMA
Proposed Campground Development
SHEET: 4 of 4