Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Region 2 Headquarters
3201 Spurgin Road
Missoula, MT 59804-3101
Phone 406-542-5500

June 7, 2012

Dear Interested Parties:

Enclosed, you will find for your review the Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for a Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposal to implement a site development project at the Weigh Station Fishing Access Site (FAS) near the town of Bonner in Missoula County. The project would include improving the highway approach and defining a parking area with up to 30 parking spaces, replacing the pioneered boat ramp with a concrete boat ramp, and installing a concrete vault latrine. The purpose of the proposed project is to accommodate public recreational use of the FAS and to prevent further degradation along this stretch of the Blackfoot River. The proposed improvements would continue to provide for the site's additional use as a seasonal big game check station during the general deer/elk hunting season.

The EA may also be obtained by: mailing to the address above; phoning 406-542-5500; emailing shrose@mt.gov; or viewing FWP's Internet website http://fwp.mt.gov ("Public Notices," beginning June 8).

Comments should be submitted to Chet Crowser at FWP by: mailing to the address above, emailing ccrowser@mt.gov, or phoning 406-542-5562. Comments on this Draft EA and proposal must be received by FWP no later than 5:00 pm on July 9, 2012.

As part of the decision making process under MEPA, I expect to issue the Decision Notice for this EA soon after the end of the comment period.

Sincerely,

Mack Long
Regional Supervisor

ML/sr

Draft
Environmental Assessment

WEIGH STATION FAS
SITE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

June 2012

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Weigh Station FAS Site Development 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) proposes a site development project at the Weigh Station Fishing Access Site (FAS) including Improving the highway approach and defining a parking area with up to 30 parking spaces, replacing the pioneered boat ramp with a concrete boat ramp, and installing a concrete vault latrine. The proposed work would provide designated parking, improve sanitation, and restore use of the boat ramp while protecting riparian vegetation. The purpose of the proposed project is to accommodate public recreational use of the FAS and to prevent further degradation along this stretch of river. The proposed improvements would continue to provide for the site's additional use as a seasonal big game check station during the general deer/elk hunting season.

2. **Agency authority for the proposed action:** The 1977 Montana Legislature enacted statute 87-1-605, Montana Code Annotated (MCA), which directs FWP to acquire, develop and operate a system of fishing accesses. FWP has the authority to develop outdoor recreational resources in the state per 23-2-101, MCA: "f*or the purpose of conserving the scenic, historic, archaeologic, scientific, and recreational resources of the state and providing their use and enjoyment, thereby contributing to the cultural, recreational, and economic life of the people and their health."*

   Furthermore, state statute 23-1-110, MCA and Administrative Rule Montana (ARM) 12.2.433 guide public involvement and comment for the improvements at state parks and fishing access sites, which this document provides. ARM 12.8.602 requires the Department to consider the wishes of users and the public, the capacity of the site for development, environmental impacts, long-range maintenance, protection of natural features and impacts on tourism as these elements relate to development or improvement to fishing access sites or state parks. This document would illuminate the facets of the proposed project in relation to this rule. See Appendix A for HB 495 qualification.

3. **Name of project:** Weigh Station FAS Site Development Project

4. **Project sponsor:** Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Region 2
   3201 Spurgin Road
   Missoula, MT 59804
   406-542-5500

5. **Anticipated Timeline:**

Estimated Construction/Commencement Date:	Summer/Fall 2012
Estimated Completion Date:	Fall 2012
Current Status of Project Design (% complete):	10%

6. **Location:** Weigh Station FAS is located along the Blackfoot River, approximately ½-mile northeast of Bonner on Montana Highway 200 (Figure 1). The physical address is 10517 HWY 200, Bonner, MT 59823. Weigh Station is at Blackfoot river mile 2.0. The legal description of the Weigh Station tract is: Township 13 North, Range 18 West, Missoula County, Montana; portions of Government Lot 1 of Section 15 and Government Lot 1 of Section 22 lying northwesterly of the centerline of State Highway No. 200 and easterly of the easterly low water mark of the Blackfoot River; approximately 6 acres in size. Weigh Station is a narrow parcel (200 feet at its widest) and includes approximately 2000 feet of river frontage (Figures 2, 3).

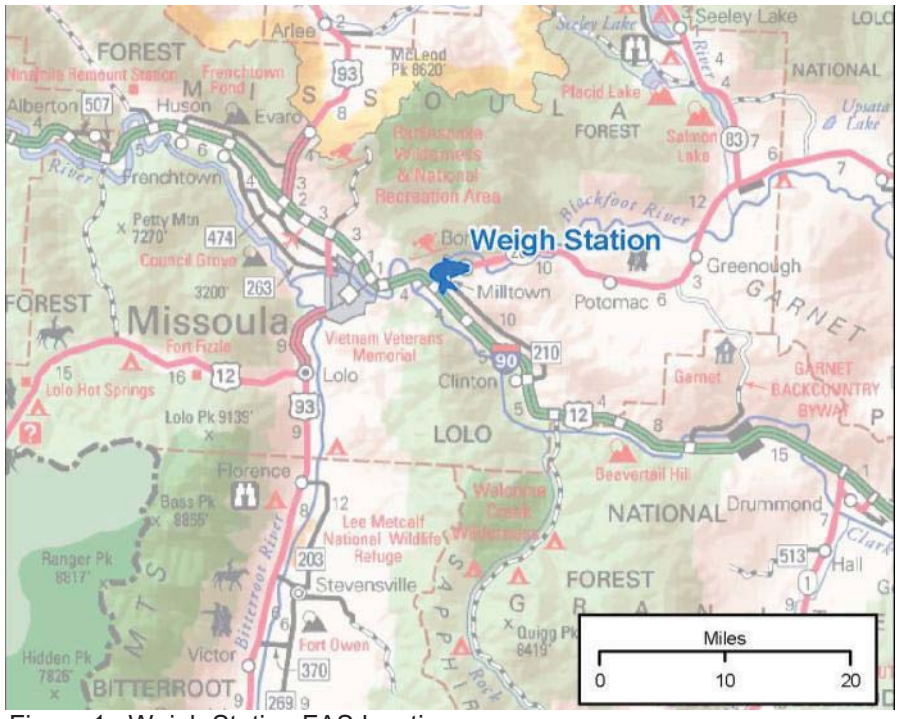

Figure 1. Weigh Station FAS location map

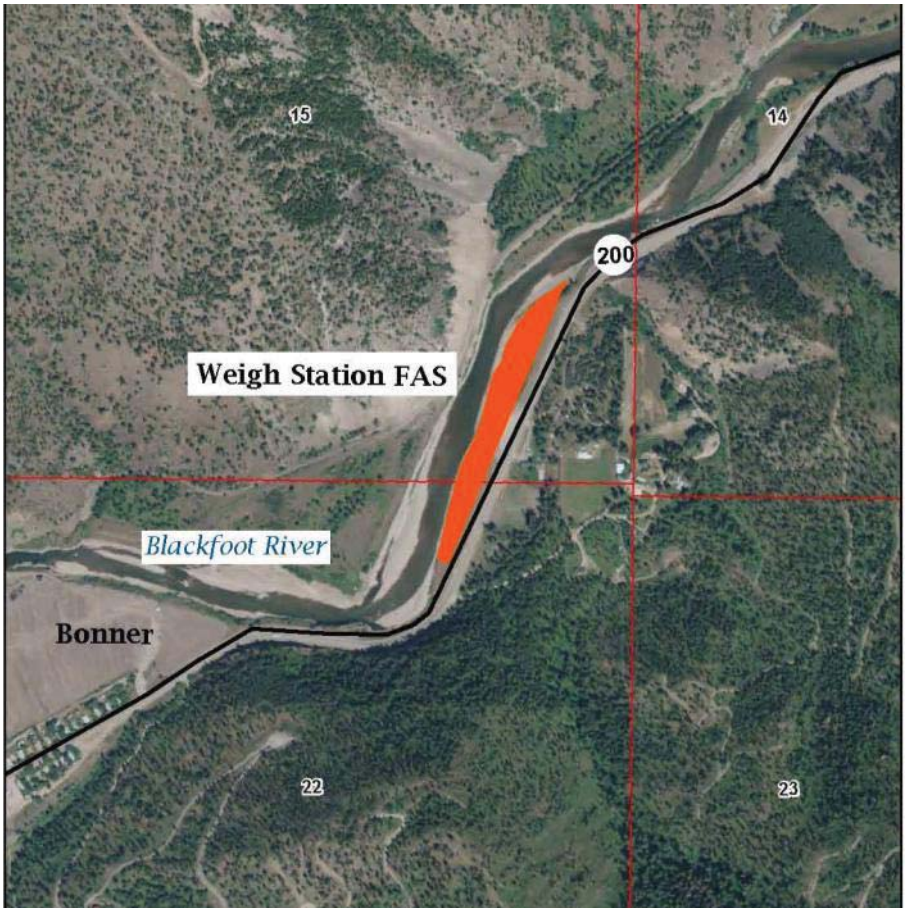

Figure 2. Weigh Station FAS aerial map

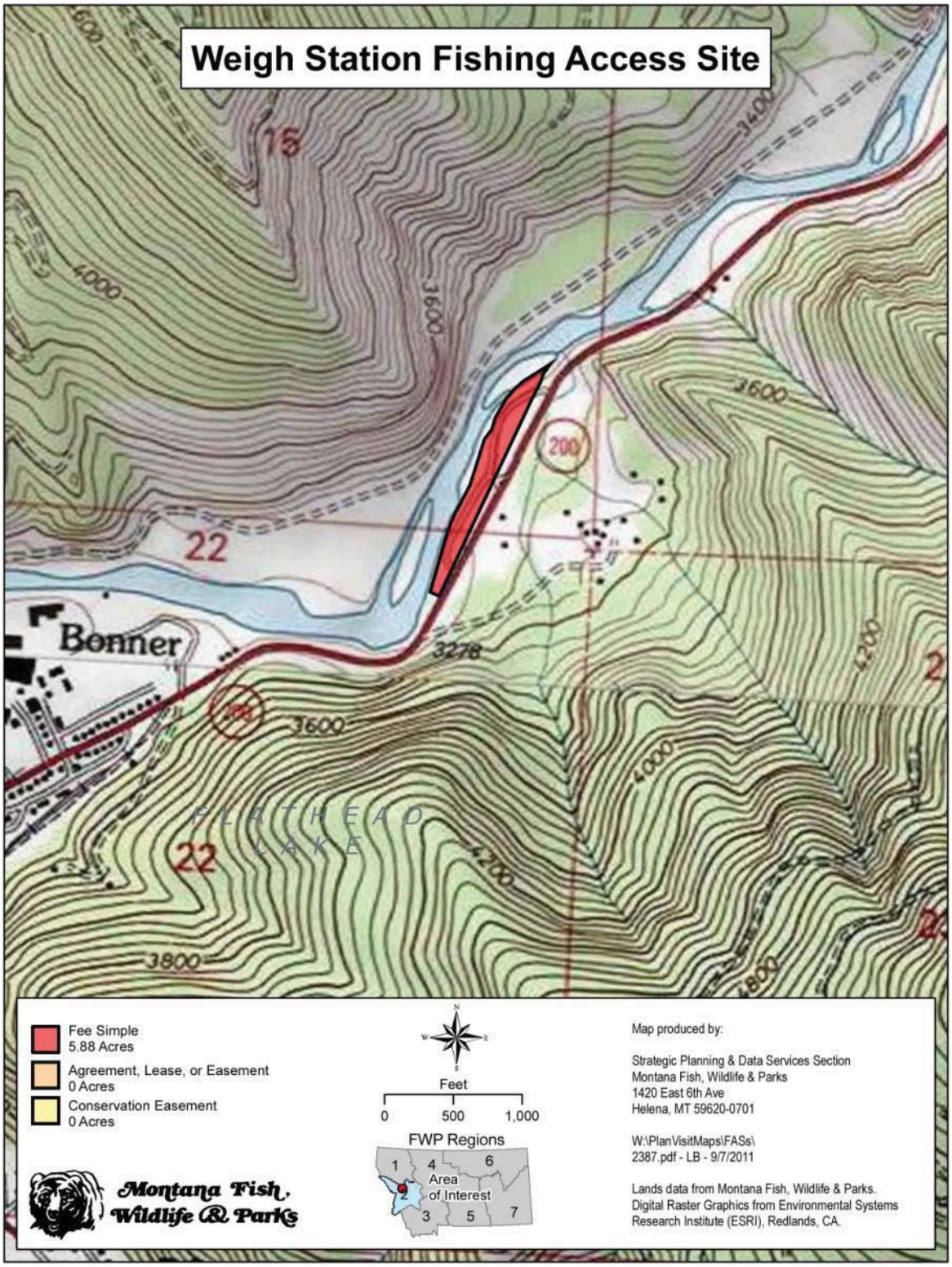

Figure 3.Weigh Station FAS topographic map

7. Project size:

	Acres		Acres
(a) Developed:		(d) Floodplain/Riparian	**< 1**
Residential	0		
Industrial	0	(e) Productive:	
		Irrigated cropland	0
(b) Open Space/Woodlands/Recreation	**1**	Dry cropland	0
		Forestry	0
(c) Riparian Wetlands Areas	**<1**	Rangeland	0
		Other	0

8. Local, State or Federal agencies with overlapping or additional jurisdiction:

a) Permits: Permits would be filed 60 days prior to work

Agency Name	Permit
FWP	124 MT Stream Protection Act
Montana Dept. of Environmental Quality	318 Short Term Water Quality Standard for Turbidity
US Corps of Engineers	404 Federal Clean Water Act
Missoula County	Floodplain, Septic, and Building permits

b) Funding: $ 74, 500 – Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks FAS Development

c) Other Overlapping or Additional Jurisdictional Responsibilities:

Agency Name	Type of Responsibility
Natural Heritage Program	Species of Concern (Appendix B)
State Historic Preservation Office	Cultural Clearance
US Fish & Wildlife Service	Bald & Golden Eagle Protection Act
US Fish & Wildlife Service	Migratory Bird Treaty Act
Montana Bald Eagle Working Group	Montana Bald Eagle Management Plan
Missoula County Weed Board	Weed Management Plan Approval

9. Narrative summary of the proposed action:

This project proposes site improvements at Weigh Station FAS with the purpose of accommodating public recreational use of the site and associated vehicle traffic while reducing sanitation concerns, preserving native vegetation, reducing the spread of noxious weeds and preventing further degradation of the bank along this stretch of river. The proposed improvements include improving the highway approach and defining the gravel-parking area to improve traffic flow (with approximately 15 parking spaces for trucks with trailers and 15 single-vehicle spaces), improve safety and reduce indiscriminate parking. A concrete boat ramp would be installed to replace the existing pioneered launch to provide adequate access for launching and retrieving boats. A precast vault latrine would be installed to address concerns related to human waste and sanitation.

The proposed work would begin in late summer with the project being completed in the fall of 2012. The exact timing of the work would depend on the design, bidding, river flows and weather

conditions. FWP would attempt to provide continued public access to area anglers, floaters, and recreationists during construction.

Weigh Station FAS serves as a popular access to anglers as well as a take-out for floaters in the lower Blackfoot due to its close proximity to Missoula and other fishing access sites along the Blackfoot River. Furthermore, this FAS is the last public take-out on the Blackfoot River upstream of the Milltown restoration closure area on the Clark Fork River. This river closure[1], which prohibits recreation to ensure public safety, is in place through June of 2013 while final Milltown area restoration work and construction activities are completed. Once the river is opened to recreation, Weigh Station FAS would likely be used as a put-in location as well as a take-out.

This section of the Blackfoot River provides opportunities for angling, rafting, canoeing, kayaking and inner tubing. Seasonal whitewater and angling opportunities attract both private and commercial user groups throughout the year. The Blackfoot Special Recreation Permit (SRP) program (which provides for commercial, competitive and organized group events) as well as the FWP Commercial Use Rules, would continue to apply to commercial outfitters who use the site and the Blackfoot River.

Recent surveys conducted by FWP show that the Blackfoot River supports over 57,000 angler days per year, with an average of over 23,000 angler days per year in the stretch from the confluence with the Clark Fork River to the mouth of the Clearwater River, where Weigh Station FAS is located. This stretch of river is considered a blue ribbon stream, and game fish opportunities in the river include brown trout, mountain whitefish, rainbow trout, and westslope cutthroat trout.

Weigh Station FAS is also used as a game check station during the general deer/elk hunting season and proposed improvements would continue to accommodate that use. This site is also a popular wildlife viewing and picnic area. The cliffs across the Blackfoot River from the Weigh Station FAS are used as a bighorn sheep nursery and sheep can often be seen from the FAS. Peregrine falcons, bald eagles and other raptors frequent this river corridor. Other species in the area include black bear, mountain lion, elk, white-tailed and mule deer, and waterfowl.

10. Alternatives:

Alternative A: No Action

If no action is taken, users of this site would likely continue to park haphazardly causing degradation of current vegetation. Without an established footprint for parking, pioneered areas would likely continue to be expanded over time, and could increase the spread of noxious weeds. Without a latrine, sanitation concerns would likely continue. Without improvements to the boat ramp, there would be inadequate access for launching and retrieving boats. Watercraft that could be carried to the water may continue to access the river, but the potential erosion of the bank could make accessibility difficult and potentially unsafe.

Alternative B (Preferred): Define Parking, Install Boat Ramp, and Latrine

The preferred alternative would develop a parking area with approximately 15 truck/trailer and 15 single-vehicle designated parking spaces. A concrete boat ramp would be installed to provide adequate access for boat launching and retrieval. A precast concrete vault latrine would be installed to eliminate sanitation concerns. See Appendix E for the preliminary concept plan for this preferred alternative.

[1] On the Blackfoot River, the closure is from Weigh Station FAS downstream to its junction with the Clark Fork River, and the Clark Fork is closed from about ½ mile below the old Milltown Dam site (at the railroad bridge) to three miles upstream from the bridge.

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

No bald eagle nests are located on the Weigh Station FAS parcel but bald and golden eagles are seen in the area foraging along the Blackfoot River. While bald eagles were officially delisted in 2007, the US Fish and Wildlife Service has jurisdiction protecting this species under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act (BGEPA) and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA). At the state level, the Montana Bald Eagle Working Group was formed in 1982 and is composed of representatives from federal and state agencies, tribes, universities, conservation groups, and private industry. In 1994 the group developed a "Montana Bald Eagle Management Plan" to provide information and guide landowners and resource managers in conserving eagle habitat. An Addendum to that document followed in 2010.

The cliffs across from the FAS are used as a bighorn sheep nursery from the end of April through July, and there is a peregrine falcon nest on the cliffs across from the FAS which is used in June and July. To reduce activity in the area that may deter the bighorn ewes from moving into their historical lambing habitat, or impact the peregrine nesting period, construction dates would be set to minimize disturbance in the area.

Control measures associated with the proposed actions for decreasing the impacts of the construction work during the ramp construction include timing the earthwork to coincide with low water flows on the Blackfoot River. This would minimize bed-load transport of redistributed bank materials and of channel materials during the ramp construction. Construction during low flow means that any materials mobilized into the stream channel would have minimum energy for transport. Thus, while sediment would be mobilized, only the silt, clay, and fine sand sized particles would move any distance downstream, and it is unlikely these particles would travel more than 200-300 yards before dropping out.

PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW CHECKLIST

Evaluation of the impacts of the Proposed Alternatives including secondary and cumulative impacts on the Physical and Human Environment.

A. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

1. LAND RESOURCES Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. **Soil instability or changes in geologic substructure?			X			1a.
b. Disruption, displacement, erosion, compaction, moisture loss, or over-covering of soil, which would reduce productivity or fertility?			X		YES Positive	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		YES Positive	1d.
e. Exposure of people or property to earthquakes, landslides, ground failure, or other natural hazard?		X				

1a. Soil and geologic substructure would remain stable during and after the proposed work. There would be some temporary disturbance to the topsoil during construction.

1b. Current use of the site has led to pioneered parking and use of an inadequate boat launch to access the river. This use is degrading upland vegetation, compacting soil, contributing to erosion and in turn, could contribute sediment to the river. Preferred Alternative B is intended to reduce the potential for site degradation, erosion and sediment delivery into the river by appropriately directing recreational use within a defined site footprint.

1d. Replacing the existing boat ramp with a concrete boat ramp would likely have a positive impact on the current erosion at the site and decrease the potential for sediment transfer into the Blackfoot River.

* 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 *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. **Emission of air pollutants or deterioration of ambient air quality? (Also see 13 (c).)			X		YES	2a.
b. Creation of objectionable odors?			X		YES	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.)		NA				

2a. During the construction work in the Preferred Alternative B, temporary amounts of dust may be generated during the soil excavation and construction. See Appendix E for the preliminary concept site plan for the Preferred Alternative B. FWP follows the Best Management Practices (BMPs) during all phases of construction to minimize risks and reduce dust. See Appendix D for the BMPs.

2b. A concrete vault latrine would be installed and maintained regularly to avoid offensive odors. A county septic permit would be obtained prior to installation. Placement of a vault latrine at this FAS would decrease public health concerns resulting from user pioneered primitive toilet areas.

* 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.

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

3a. Providing a hardened boat launch for recreational use would help protect riparian vegetation, reduce erosion and minimize sediment transfer to the river. Prior to placing the latrine, all applicable County permits would be obtained. The ramp work in Preferred Alternative B would cause temporary and minor amounts of turbidity during construction. Ramp construction would be planned during low flows to minimize impact.

3b. Converting the pioneered access roads and boat ramp to a designed and hardened access area would provide for improved drainage within the site and adjacent to the river. FWP follows the Best Management Practices to provide for appropriate drainage. See Appendix D for the BMPs.

3h. Operation of heavy equipment proximal to a surface water body during construction presents a temporary potential risk of fuel or lubricating oil release into the surface water for Alternative B. Contractors would have on site absorbent materials to minimize any hydrocarbon releases, as well as conduct startup inspection of all hydraulic lines and cylinder seals daily to reduce the potential for a release. FWP would follow the Best Management Practices during all phases of construction to minimize risks. See Appendix D for BMPs.

* 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.

4. VEGETATION Will the proposed action result in?	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Changes in the diversity, productivity or abundance of plant species (including trees, shrubs, grass, crops, and aquatic plants)?			X		YES Positive	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?		NA				

4a. Under Alternative B some upland grassland vegetation may be removed from the parking area during construction, but overall the project would positively impact vegetation by restricting parking to designated areas. This would prevent the haphazard indiscriminate parking that takes place currently. Additionally, revegetation of the riverbank may require seeding which could alter the diversity of the plant community on the site. Any plant additions such as grasses and willows would improve the present mix of native and introduced species. If no action is taken (Alternative A) the indiscriminate haphazard parking would likely continue to degrade vegetation in the area and is more likely to increase the spread of noxious weeds.

4b. This area is characterized by open prairie vegetation but includes a few trees and shrubs as well. Mixed grasses and a variety of shrubs, including ninebark and willows, dominate the prairie vegetation. Along the river wetlands there are various willow species, wild roses, sedges and grasses. Above the wetlands there are evergreens including ponderosa pine, Douglas fir, and Rocky Mountain juniper. Various grasses and spotted knapweed are also seen throughout. Other noxious weeds identified during the site visit included Canada thistle, Dalmatian toadflax, houndstongue, oxeye daisy, and sulfur cinquefoil with diverse clusters of infestations formed along the bank with leafy spurge, common tansy and knapweed. Because the public already uses the property, the proposed work should not significantly impact the plant community and should help protect the existing ground cover. Preferred alternative B should improve the vegetation through site protection measures such as signage and designated parking.

4c. A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program's (MNHP) species of concern database found no vascular or non-vascular plants of significance within the boundaries of the Weigh Station FAS. Howell's Gumweed (Grinelia howellii) was identified in the report in this general area, but not on the property (see Appendix B for the Species of Concern report) and is considered sensitive status by USFS and BLM. Statewide it is ranked potentially at risk because of limited and/or potentially declining numbers, range, and/or habitat, making it vulnerable to global extinction or extirpation in the state, even though it is abundant in some areas in the Ovando valley.

4e. This property currently has infestations of spotted knapweed, leafy spurge, and common tansy along the bank, with some Canada thistle, Dalmatian toadflax, houndstongue, oxeye daisy and sulfur cinquefoil. Less than 10% of the site is estimated to be infested with noxious weeds. FWP utilizes the Statewide Integrated Noxious Weed Management Plan to control the noxious weeds on the property by using chemical, biological and mechanical methods approved by the Missoula County Weed District. An aggressive weed management program would facilitate the restoration of native vegetation. Adding designated parking spaces would help deter motorized vehicles from using the open space for parking, which can disturb the natural vegetation and result in the spread of weeds. FWP would continue existing weed control efforts under either of the two proposed alternatives.

* 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.

** 5. FISH/WILDLIFE Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Deterioration of critical fish or wildlife habitat?			X			5a.
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				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.)		NA				
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.)		NA				

5a. All of the Blackfoot River is considered critical habitat for Bull Trout by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. There may be localized short-term impacts during the ramp construction, but they would be minor and temporary, and once completed should not have negative impacts to fish habitat. For Preferred Alternative B the improvements planned for Weigh Station FAS are designed and constructed to minimize impacts to wildlife habitat.

5b/c. No change in the diversity or abundance of game animals, nongame animals or bird species is expected for either Alternatives A or B. Peregrine falcons, bald eagles and other raptors frequent this river corridor. Other species in the area include black bear, mountain lion, white-tailed and mule deer, bighorn sheep and waterfowl. Riparian areas provide critical habitat for many species of songbirds and support a higher density and diversity of birds than any other habitat. While wildlife may pass through this parcel, it is not used heavily due to the traffic and close proximity to people.

5f. A search of the Natural Resources Information System provided by the Montana Natural Heritage Program showed that no endangered species are in the vicinity of the property. However, the property is potential habitat for bull trout (federally classified as threatened) and westslope cutthroat trout, bald eagle, great blue heron, Peregrine falcon, veery, western skink, A millipede, fisher, wolverine, and Canada lynx (classified threatened federally). It is unlikely that the fisher, wolverine (both classified sensitive) and Canada lynx (classified threatened) pass through this parcel, as it is not likely habitat.

FWP Wolf Management Specialist Liz Bradley identified three wolf packs in the Blackfoot valley at least 20 miles upstream, though she notes wolves from these packs have never been located on Weigh Station FAS. The gray wolf may use this parcel as a travel corridor but it is unlikely they reside on the property.

* 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.

There may be localized short-term impacts to fish during the ramp construction, but they would be minor and temporary, and once completed should not impact the fishery.

Please see Appendix B Montana Natural History Program (MNHP) Native Species Report for more information on these species.

5g. The proposed work should not increase negative conditions that stress wildlife populations and should have a neutral impact on the fishery. Construction dates would be set to best minimize disturbance of wildlife in the area.

* 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.

B. HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

6. NOISE/ELECTRICAL EFFECTS Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
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				

6a. Construction equipment would cause a temporary increase in noise levels at this site for Preferred Alternative B.

6b. Nuisance noise levels may exist during construction. FWP would follow the Best Management Practices during all phases of construction to minimize risks. See Appendix D for BMPs.

7. LAND USE Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Alteration of or interference with the productivity or profitability of the existing land use of an area?		X				
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				

For Preferred Alternative B the proposed improvements would not alter or interfere with the productivity or profitability of the existing land use. There may be a temporary inconvenience to recreationists during construction of proposed improvements in Preferred Alternative B. FWP would attempt to provide continued public access to area anglers, floaters, and recreationists during construction.

* 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.

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

8a. FWP currently follows the Statewide Integrated Noxious Weed Management Plan for controlling noxious weeds on fishing access sites. Use of herbicides as part of the weed management program would be in compliance with application guidelines and applied by people trained in safe handling techniques. Weeds would also be controlled using mechanical or biological means in certain areas to reduce the risk of chemical spills or water contamination. FWP works with Missoula County Weed District for approval of the Weed Management Plan. The proposed project includes revegetation in disturbed areas to reduce the spreading of noxious weeds. Weed management would continue for both Alternatives A and B, but if no action is taken, the indiscriminate parking could increase the spread of the noxious weeds, requiring more weed management than the Preferred Alternative B.

Operation of heavy equipment proximal to a surface water body presents a temporary potential risk of fuel or lubricating oil release into the surface water for Alternative B. Contractors would have on site absorbent materials to minimize any hydrocarbon releases, as well as conduct startup inspection of all hydraulic lines and cylinder seals daily to reduce the potential for a release. FWP would follow the Best Management Practices during all phases of construction to minimize risks. See Appendix D for BMPs.

8c. The proposed work would provide for improved highway ingress/egress, designated parking, concrete vault latrine and adequate boat launch. As a result, public health and human safety concerns related to traffic safety, access to the river and human waste would be minimized for many of the current recreational users of the site.

* 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.

9. COMMUNITY IMPACT Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Alteration of the location, distribution, density, or growth rate of the human population of an area?		X				
b. Alteration of the social structure of a community?		X				
c. Alteration of the level or distribution of employment or community or personal income?		X				
d. Changes in industrial or commercial activity?		X				
e. Increased traffic hazards or effects on existing transportation facilities or patterns of movement of people and goods?			X		YES Positive	9e.

9e. Under Preferred Alternative B, improving ingress/egress from Highway 200, improving traffic flow and defining parking should reduce potential hazards for vehicles coming in and out of the FAS as well as those using the site.

* 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 *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
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				10b.
c. Will the proposed action result in a need for new facilities or substantial alterations of any of the following utilities: electric power, natural gas, other fuel supply or distribution systems, or communications?		X				
d. Will the proposed action result in increased use of any energy source?		X				
e. **Define projected revenue sources		X				
f. **Define projected maintenance costs.						10f.

10a. The development of the site and addition of a latrine under Preferred Alternative B would require slightly more effort by existing maintenance staff to keep the area clean and sanitary. Existing staff would be capable of incorporating these additional tasks into their existing work routines. Costs associated with additional maintenance efforts can be accommodated with existing budgets.

10b. No change in tax base as FWP pays property taxes in an amount equal to that of a private individual.

10f. The maintenance costs for this property are approximately $3,000 annually and includes about $500 in weed control costs every other year. No additional costs are budgeted at this time for on-going maintenance and weed control costs may change over time once improved with designated parking areas.

* 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.

** 11. AESTHETICS/RECREATION Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Alteration of any scenic vista or creation of an aesthetically offensive site or effect that is open to public view?			X		YES	11a.
b. Alteration of the aesthetic character of a community or neighborhood?		X				
c. **Alteration of the quality or quantity of recreational/tourism opportunities and settings? (Attach Tourism Report.)		X				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.)		NA				

11a. For Preferred Alternative B, the proposed work would be in public view from users of the site at that time, from highway and some from the river. The proposed parking areas are at a higher elevation than river, in a currently undeveloped upland area, that has been historically used for public parking. The impact is temporary during the construction.

11c. The property would continue to be a destination for water-based recreation including fishing, boating, rafting, canoeing, kayaking, inner tubing and swimming as well as wildlife viewing, picnicking, hiking and walking, relaxation, and as a game check station during the general deer/elk hunting season. See Appendix C for the Department of Commerce Tourism Report.

During construction, there would be a temporary inconvenience to the general public using the site. Furthermore, after the work is completed, the users of the site are expected to benefit from the designated parking areas, concrete boat ramp that provides adequate access for launching and retrieval of watercraft, and a precast concrete vault latrine to reduce sanitation concerns.

* 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 *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. **Destruction or alteration of any site, structure or object of prehistoric, historic, or paleontological importance?		X				
b. Physical change that would affect unique cultural values?		X				
c. Effects on existing religious or sacred uses of a site or area?		X				
d. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project affect historic or cultural resources? Attach SHPO letter of clearance. (Also see 12.a.)		NA				

A cultural resource inventory has not yet been completed for the Weigh Station FAS. If cultural materials are discovered during the project, work would cease and SHPO would be contacted for a more in depth investigation. SHPO letter of clearance would be obtained prior to beginning the work.

* 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 *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
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					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.)		X				
g. ****For P-R/D-J, list any federal or state permits required.		X				

13a. Preferred Alternative B would improve accessibility with designated parking and replacement of the pioneered boat ramp that no longer reaches the water with a new concrete boat ramp to access the Blackfoot River.

The cumulative effects are unclear. The proposed work should have a neutral effect on the fishery. The public would have access to the parcel regardless of this project, but the access to the water is limited to hand launching since the existing ramp no longer provides adequate access for launching and retrieval of watercraft. This project, on balance, does not improve aquatic habitat, but could improve conditions associated with the riparian habitat. Riparian habitat provides critical habitat for many species of songbirds and any improvement in riparian habitat would positively impact non-game species. The project improves sanitation concerns and establishes a designated footprint to reduce haphazard indiscriminate parking to improve the impact to native vegetation and to reduce the spread of weeds. Construction dates would be set to best minimize disturbance of wildlife in the area.

* 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.

PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

The proposed work would have no negative cumulative effects on the physical and human environments. When considered over the long-term, the proposed improvements provide for the public's continued access of a scenic recreation area along the Blackfoot River. The proposed work in Preferred Alternative B provides for protecting natural resources at the Weigh Station FAS, helping to assure visitor safety and providing for continued quality river recreation opportunities.

The minor impacts that were identified in the previous section are small in scale and would not influence the overall environment of the immediate area. The natural environment would continue to exist and provide habitat to migratory and permanent wildlife species. Weigh Station FAS would continue to be open to the public for access to the river for bank fishing, floating and boating activities. The design of the improvements in Preferred Alternative B develops designated parking to better meet the demands of current use, without necessarily increasing capacity and should reduce dust and eliminate indiscriminate haphazard parking and degradation of native vegetation. As a result, this should help to reduce the spread of weeds and improve the habitat for some species in the area. The design would accommodate use of the site as a big game check station during the general deer/elk hunting season, and the concrete boat ramp would restore boat launching and retrieval to the Blackfoot river at this site. The addition of the latrine would reduce sanitation concerns at this site.

A search of the Natural Resources Information System provided by the Montana Natural Heritage Program showed that no endangered species are in the vicinity of the property (Appendix B). However, the property is potential habitat for bull trout (federally classified as threatened) and westslope cutthroat trout, bald eagle, great blue heron, peregrine falcon, veery, western skink, a millipede (*Austrotyla montani*), fisher, wolverine, and Canada lynx (federally classified as threatened).

It is unlikely that the fisher, wolverine and Canada Lynx pass through this parcel as it is not likely habitat. There are three wolf packs that inhabit the Blackfoot valley upstream of Weigh Station FAS but none of these packs have ever been located on the FAS and no known den or rendezvous sites are in the vicinity. The gray wolf may use this parcel as a travel corridor, but it is unlikely they reside on the property.

The Blackfoot River supports several species of fish: bull trout (federally threatened species), westslope cutthroat trout, mountain whitefish, pigmy whitefish, northern pikeminnow, peamouth, redside shiner, and longnose dace. Non-native species include rainbow trout, brown trout, brook trout, and white sucker. There may be minor short-term impacts to the fish, but those impacts would be minor and temporary. Once construction is completed, the ramp should have a neutral impact on the fishery.

PART IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

1. **Public Involvement:**
   The public would be notified by way of legal notices in the *Independent Record* (Helena) and *Missoulian* newspapers, in addition to a statewide press release. The Public Notice and the EA will also be posted on the FWP webpage: **http://fwp.mt.gov/news/publicNotices/**. A direct mailing (and/or email notification) will be sent to adjacent landowners and interested parties. Additionally,

copies will be available at FWP Region 2 Headquarters. This level of public notice and participation is appropriate for a project of this scope having few and only minor impacts.

If requested within the comment period, the department may arrange a public meeting.

2. **Duration of comment period.**
A 30-day comment period is proposed as appropriate for the scale of this project. The comment period will extend for 30 days following publication of the second legal notice in area newspapers. Comments will be accepted until 5:00 p.m. on July 9, 2012. Comments should be:

Mailed to: Weigh Station FAS Development Project
Region 2 FWP
3201 Spurgin Road
Missoula MT 59804

Emailed to: ccrowser@mt.gov

Phoned to: Chet Crowser (406) 542-5562

PART V. EA PREPARATION

1. **Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required?** No.
If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action.

Based upon the above assessment, which has identified a limited number of minor impacts from the proposed action and no significant negative impacts from the proposed action, an Environmental Impact Statement is not required and an environmental assessment is the appropriate level of review. We conclude from this review that the proposed activities would have positive impacts on the physical and human environment. Positive impacts associated with Preferred Alternative B include:

- Designated parking to improve safety, reduce dust, eliminate indiscriminate haphazard parking and degradation of native vegetation, and reduce the spread of weeds.
- Restored boat launching and retrieval by installing a concrete boat ramp.
- Improved sanitation through installation of a pre-cast concrete vault latrine.

2. **Person(s) responsible for preparing the EA:**

Chet Crowser
FWP Region 2 FAS Program Coordinator
3201 Spurgin Road
Missoula MT 59804
ccrowser@mt.gov
406-542-5562

Pam Boggs
FWP EA Coordinator
PO Box 200701
Helena MT 59620-0701
pboggs@mt.gov

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

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

Montana Department of Commerce – Tourism
Montana Natural Heritage Program – Natural Resources Information System (NRIS)
Missoula County Flood Plain Office
Missoula County Weed District

Appendices

A. HB 495 Project Qualification Checklist (FWP)

B. Sensitive Plants and Animals in the River Junction FAS Area (Montana Natural Heritage Program [MNHP] Native Species Report)

C. Tourism Report (Montana Department of Commerce)

D. Best Management Practices for Fishing Access Sites (FWP)

E. Draft FWP Preliminary Concept Plan for Weigh Station FAS (Preferred Alternative B)

APPENDIX A

HB 495

PROJECT QUALIFICATION CHECKLIST

Date June 29, 2011 **Person Reviewing** Pam Boggs

Project Location: Weigh Station FAS is along the Blackfoot River ½ mile east of Bonner on Highway 200. Physical Address is 10517 HWY 200 Bonner MT 58823. Legal description is within Township 13 North, Range 18 West, Sections 15 and 22 in Missoula County.

Description of Proposed Work: Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks proposes to add a parking lot and concrete boat ramp on the Blackfoot River at Weigh Station FAS and install a latrine.

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.)

[Y] A. New roadway or trail built over undisturbed land?
Comments: No new roadways or trails for preferred Alternative B.

[ ] B. New building construction (buildings <100 sf and vault latrines exempt)?
Comments: Pre-cast concrete vault latrine.

[Y] C. Any excavation of 20 c.y. or greater?
Comments: Excavation during creation of new parking area, concrete boat ramp and latrine.

[Y] D. New parking lots built over undisturbed land or expansion of existing lot that increases parking capacity by 25% or more?
Comments: There is currently no designated parking area so visitors park haphazardly, damaging vegetation. A designated parking lot would be developed to accommodate up to 30 parking spaces. This amount is intended to correspond with current use levels at the site.

[ ] E. Any new shoreline alteration that exceeds a doublewide boat ramp or handicapped fishing station?
Comments: Replace pioneered ramp with a new concrete boat ramp.

[Y] F. Any new construction into lakes, reservoirs, or streams?
Comments: Replace pioneered boat ramp with a concrete boat ramp.

[ ] G. Any new construction in an area with National Registry quality cultural artifacts (as determined by State Historical Preservation Office)?
Comments: SHPO concurrence letter would be obtained prior to the work beginning. If artifacts are discovered in areas excavated, work would cease and SHPO would be contacted.

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

[ ] I. Any increase or decrease in campsites of 25% or more of an existing number of campsites?
Comments: Currently there are no campsites and no camping is proposed.

[ ] J. Proposed project significantly changes the existing features or use pattern; including effects of a series of individual projects?
Comments: The proposed work would eliminate the haphazard indiscriminate parking at the site, reduce sanitation concerns and restore boat access to the Blackfoot River at this site.

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 B

SENSITIVE PLANTS AND ANIMALS IN THE WEIGH STATION FAS AREA

Species of Concern Terms and Definitions

A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program (MNHP) element occurrence database (http://nris.mt.gov) indicates no known occurrences of federally listed threatened, endangered, or proposed threatened or endangered plant species in the proposed project site although Howell's Gumweed was identified near this area. The search did indicate the project area is within habitat for 12 species of concern including Great Blue Heron, Bald Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, Veery, Westslope Cutthroat Trout, Bull Trout, Fisher, Wolverine, Canada Lynx, Western Skink and A Millipede. Please see the next page for more information on these species.

Montana Species of Concern. The term **"Species of Concern"** includes taxa that are at-risk or potentially at-risk due to rarity, restricted distribution, habitat loss, and/or other factors. The term also encompasses species that have a special designation by organizations or land management agencies in Montana, including: Bureau of Land Management Special Status and Watch species; U.S. Forest Service Sensitive and Watch species; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Threatened, Endangered and Candidate species.

Status Ranks (Global and State)

The international network of Natural Heritage Programs employs a standardized ranking system to denote global (**G** -- range-wide) and state status (**S**) (Nature Serve 2003). Species are assigned numeric ranks ranging from 1 (critically imperiled) to 5 (demonstrably secure), reflecting the relative degree to which they are "at-risk". Rank definitions are given below. A number of factors are considered in assigning ranks -- the number, size and distribution of known "occurrences" or populations, population trends (if known), habitat sensitivity, and threat. Factors in a species' life history that make it especially vulnerable are also considered (e.g., dependence on a specific pollinator).

Status Ranks	
Code	**Definition**
G1 **S1**	At high risk because of extremely limited and/or rapidly declining numbers, range, and/or habitat, making it highly vulnerable to global extinction or extirpation in the state.
G2 **S2**	At risk because of very limited and/or declining numbers, range, and/or habitat, making it vulnerable to global extinction or extirpation in the state.
G3 **S3**	Potentially at risk because of limited and/or declining numbers, range, and/or habitat, even though it may be abundant in some areas.
G4 **S4**	Uncommon but not rare (although it may be rare in parts of its range), and usually widespread. Apparently not vulnerable in most of its range, but possibly cause for long-term concern.
G5 **S5**	Common, widespread, and abundant (although it may be rare in parts of its range). Not vulnerable in most of its range.

MFWP Conservation Need. Under Montana's Comprehensive Fish and Wildlife Conservation Strategy of 2005, individual animal species are assigned levels of conservation need as follows:

Tier I. Greatest conservation need. Montana FWP has a clear obligation to use its resources to implement conservation actions that provide direct benefit to these species, communities and focus areas.

Tier II. Moderate conservation need. Montana FWP could use its resources to implement conservation actions that provide direct benefit to these species communities and focus areas.

Tier III. Lower conservation need. Although important to Montana's wildlife diversity, these species, communities and focus areas are either abundant or widespread or are believed to have adequate conservation already in place.

Tier IV. Species that are non-native, incidental or on the periphery of their range and are either expanding or very common in adjacent states.

Sensitive Plants and Animals in the vicinity of River Junction FAS along the Blackfoot River

1. Ardea herodias (Great Blue Heron)

Natural Heritage Ranks:	Federal Agency Status:
State: **S3**	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:
Global: **G5**	U.S. Forest Service:
	U.S. Bureau of Land Management:

FWP CFWCS Tier: 3

One Element Occurrence of the great blue heron was reported in the proximate area of this parcel in 2009.

2. Haliaeetus leucocephalus (Bald Eagle)

Natural Heritage Ranks:	Federal Agency Status:
State: **S3**	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: **DM**
Global: **G5**	U.S. Forest Service: **Threatened**
	U.S. Bureau of Land Management: **Sensitive**

FWP CFWCS Tier: 1

Six Element Occurrence data reported of bald eagle in the proximate area of this parcel. Last observation date was 2007.

3. Falco peregrinus (Peregrine Falcon)

Natural Heritage Ranks:	Federal Agency Status:
State: **S3**	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: **DM**
Global: **G4**	U.S. Forest Service: **Sensitive**
	U.S. Bureau of Land Management: **Sensitive**

FWP CFWCS Tier: 2

One Element Occurrence data reported of Peregrine Falcon in the proximate area across the river in the cliffs across from this parcel.

4. Catharus fuscescens (Veery)

Natural Heritage Ranks:	Federal Agency Status:
State: **S3B**	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:
Global: **G5**	U.S. Forest Service:
	U.S. Bureau of Land Management:

FWP CFWCS Tier: 2

One Element Occurrence data reported in 1990 of veery in the proximate area, southwest of this parcel.

5. Oncorhynchus clarkii lewisi (Westslope Cutthroat Trout)

Natural Heritage Ranks:	Federal Agency Status:
State: **S2**	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:
Global: **G4T3**	U.S. Forest Service: **Sensitive**
	U.S. Bureau of Land Management: **Sensitive**

FWP CFWCS Tier: 1

Four Element Occurrence data reported of westslope cutthroat trout in the proximate area of this parcel.

6. Salvelinus confluentus (Bull Trout)

Natural Heritage Ranks:	Federal Agency Status:
State: **S2**	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: **LT**
Global: **G3**	U.S. Forest Service: **Threatened**
	U.S. Bureau of Land Management: **Special Status**

FWP CFWCS Tier: 1

Four Element Occurrence data reported of bull trout in the proximate area of this parcel.

7. Martes pennanti (Fisher)

Natural Heritage Ranks:	Federal Agency Status:
State: **S3**	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:
Global: **G5**	U.S. Forest Service: **Sensitive**
	U.S. Bureau of Land Management: **Sensitive**

FWP CFWCS Tier: 2

The Swan and Garnet Mountain Ranges have relatively continuous habitat for this species.
two Element Occurrence data reported in 2005 for the fisher in the proximate area west of this parcel.

8. Gulo gulo (Wolverine)

Natural Heritage Ranks:	Federal Agency Status:
State: **S3**	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:
Global: **G4**	U.S. Forest Service: **Sensitive**
	U.S. Bureau of Land Management: **Sensitive**

FWP CFWCS Tier: 2

The Swan and Garnet Mountain Ranges have relatively continuous habitat for this species, preferring boreal and alpine habitats. Two Element Occurrence data recorded in 2007 and 2004 for the wolverine west of this parcel.

9. Lynx canadensis (Canada Lynx)

Natural Heritage Ranks:	Federal Agency Status:
State: **S3**	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: **LT**
Global: **G5**	U.S. Forest Service: **Threatened**
	U.S. Bureau of Land Management: **Special Status**

FWP CFWCS Tier: 1

The Swan and Garnet mountain ranges have relatively continuous habitat for this species, preferring subalpine conifer forest habitat. The Element Occurrence shows two observations in 2006 and 1998 for Canada lynx west of this parcel.

10. Eumeces skiltonianus (Western Skink)

Natural Heritage Ranks:	Federal Agency Status:
State: **S3**	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:
Global: **G5**	U.S. Forest Service:
	U.S. Bureau of Land Management:

FWP CFWCS Tier: 2

One Element Occurrence data reported in 1956 of western skink in the proximate area, west of this parcel.

11. Austrotyla montani (A Millipede)

Natural Heritage Ranks:	Federal Agency Status:
State: **S1S3**	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:
Global: **G1G3**	U.S. Forest Service:
	U.S. Bureau of Land Management:

FWP CFWCS Tier:

Two Element Occurrence data reported in 1956 of a millipede in the proximate area, north of this parcel.

12. Grindelia howellii (Howell's Gumweed)

Natural Heritage Ranks:	Federal Agency Status:
State: **S2S3**	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:
Global: **G3**	U.S. Forest Service: **Sensitive**
	U.S. Bureau of Land Management: **Sensitive**

FWP CFWCS Tier:

Vascular plant in the Ovando valley. Last observation date 1983, northeast of this parcel, but not located on this parcel. Howell's gumweed general habitat is vernally moist sites in open low-elevation. This plant is a species of concern in Montana but is not listed as a threatened species.

Species of Concern are native taxa that are at-risk due to declining population trends, threats to their habitats, restricted distribution, and/or other factors. Designation as a Montana Species of Concern or Potential Species of Concern is based on the Montana Status Rank, and is not a statutory or regulatory classification. Rather, these designations provide information that helps resource managers make proactive decisions regarding species conservation and data collection priorities.

Information courtesy of Montana Natural Heritage Program.

NOTE: This appendix is information provided by the Montana Natural Heritage Program from their database of the Natural Resources Information System. FWP Biologists have addressed the species identified in this appendix in this EA in PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW CHECKLIST in section 5. Fish/Wildlife. The proposed work should improve the habitat for species in the area. FWP R2 Biologists have no concerns with the project impacting wildlife in the area. The FWP Biologists note it is unlikely that most of these species pass through this parcel with the proximity of the proximity to the Blackfoot Clearwater Wildlife Management Area near the FAS, so it is not likely habitat. This stretch of the Blackfoot is not considered critical fish habitat and the fish species identified in this appendix above may pass through this reach of river.

APPENDIX C

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: Weigh Station Fishing Access Site Development

Project Description: Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes site improvements at the Weigh Station Fishing Access Site (FAS) including a gravel parking area for approximately 15 trucks with trailers and 15 single vehicles. Proposed improvements also include a concrete boat ramp and a precast concrete vault latrine. Removal of Milltown Dam has resulted in the steep erosion of the bank so the ramp currently is not accessible. The site is also used as a game check station during the general deer/elk season and design would accommodate that use. Weigh Station FAS is located along the Blackfoot River, ½ mile northeast of Bonner on State Highway 200. Weigh Station FAS is located in Sections 15 and 22 of Township 13 North, Range 18 West, in Missoula County, Montana.

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 if properly maintained. We are assuming the agency has determined it has necessary funding for the on-going operations and maintenance once this project is complete.

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 quality and quantity of tourism and recreational opportunities if properly maintained. We are assuming the agency has determined it has necessary funding for the on-going operations and maintenance once this project is complete.

Signature Carol Crockett, Visitor Services Manager Date September 12, 2011

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APPENDIX D

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE AND PARKS
BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES FOR FISHING ACCESS SITES

Updated May 1, 2008

I. ROADS

A. Road Planning and location

1. Minimize the number of roads constructed at the FAS through comprehensive road planning, recognizing foreseeable future uses.
   a. Use existing roads, unless use of such roads would cause or aggravate an erosion problem.
2. Fit the road to the topography by locating roads on natural benches and following natural contours. Avoid long, steep road grades and narrow canyons.
3. Locate roads on stable geology, including well-drained soils and rock formations that tend to dip into the slope. Avoid slumps and slide-prone areas characterized by steep slopes, highly weathered bedrock, clay beds, concave slopes, hummocky topography, and rock layers that dip parallel to the slope. Avoid wet areas, including seeps, wetlands, wet meadows, and natural drainage channels.
4. Minimize the number of stream crossings.
   a. Choose stable stream crossing sites. "Stable" refers to streambanks with erosion-resistant materials and in hydrologically safe spots.

B. Road Design

1. Design roads to the minimum standard necessary to accommodate anticipated use and equipment. The need for higher engineering standards can be alleviated through proper road-use management. "Standard" refers to road width.
2. Design roads to minimize disruption of natural drainage patterns. Vary road grades to reduce concentrated flow in road drainage ditches, culverts, and on fill slopes and road surfaces.

C. Drainage from Road Surface

1. Provide adequate drainage from the surface of all permanent and temporary roads. Use outsloped, insloped or crowned roads, installing proper drainage features. Space road drainage features so peak flow on road surface or in ditches will not exceed their capacity.
   a. Outsloped roads provide means of dispersing water in a low-energy flow from the road surface. Outsloped roads are appropriate when fill slopes are stable, drainage will not flow directly into stream channels, and transportation safety can be met.
   b. For insloped roads, plan ditch gradients steep enough, generally greater than 2%, but less than 8%, to prevent sediment deposition and ditch erosion. The steeper gradients may be suitable for more stable soils; use the lower gradients for less stable soils.
   c. Design and install road surface drainage features at adequate spacing to control erosion; steeper gradients require more frequent drainage features. Properly constructed drain dips can be an economical method of road surface drainage. Construct drain dips deep enough into the sub-grade so that traffic will not obliterate them.
2. For ditch relief/culverts, construct stable catch basins at stable angles. Protect the inflow end of cross-drain culverts from plugging and armor if in erodible soil. Skewing ditch relief culverts 20 to 30 degrees toward the inflow from the ditch will improve inlet efficiency.
3. Provide energy dissipators (rock piles, slash, log chunks, etc.) where necessary to reduce erosion at outlet of drainage features. Cross-drains, culverts, water bars, dips, and other drainage structures should not discharge onto erodible soils or fill slopes without outfall protection.

4. Route road drainage through adequate filtration zones, or other sediment-settling structures. Install road drainage features above stream crossings to route discharge into filtration zones before entering a stream.

D. Construction/Reconstruction

1. Stabilize erodible, exposed soils by seeding, compacting, riprapping, benching, mulching, or other suitable means.
2. At the toe of potentially erodible fill slopes, particularly near stream channels, pile slash in a row parallel to the road to trap sediment. When done concurrently with road construction, this is one method to effectively control sediment movement and it also provides an economical way of disposing of roadway slash. Limit the height, width and length of these "slash filter windrows" so not to impede wildlife movement. Sediment fabric fences or other methods may be used if effective.
3. Construct cut and fill slopes at stable angles to prevent sloughing and subsequent erosion.
4. Avoid incorporating potentially unstable woody debris in the fill portion of the road prism. Where possible, leave existing rooted trees or shrubs at the toe of the fill slope to stabilize the fill.
5. Place debris, overburden, and other waste materials associated with construction and maintenance activities in a location to avoid entry into streams. Include these waste areas in soil stabilization planning for the road.
6. When using existing roads, reconstruct only to the extent necessary to provide adequate drainage and safety; avoid disturbing stable road surfaces. Consider abandoning existing roads when their use would aggravate erosion.

E. Road Maintenance

1. Grade road surfaces only as often as necessary to maintain a stable running surface and to retain the original surface drainage.
2. Maintain erosion control features through periodic inspection and maintenance, including cleaning dips and cross-drains, repairing ditches, marking culvert inlets to aid in location, and clearing debris from culverts.
3. Avoid cutting the toe of cut slopes when grading roads, pulling ditches, or plowing snow.
4. Avoid using roads during wet periods if such use would likely damage the road drainage features. Consider gates, barricades or signs to limit use of roads during wet periods.

II. RECREATIONAL FACILITIES (parking areas, campsites, trails, ramps, restrooms)

A. Site Design

1. Design a site that best fits the topography, soil type, and stream character, while minimizing soil disturbance and economically accomplishing recreational objectives. Keep roads and parking lots at least 50 feet from water; if closer, mitigate with vegetative buffers as necessary.
2. Locate foot trails to avoid concentrating runoff and provide breaks in grade as needed. Locate trails and parking areas away from natural drainage systems and divert runoff to stable areas. Limit the grade of trails on unstable, saturated, highly erosive, or easily compacted soils
3. Scale the number of boat ramps, campsites, parking areas, bathroom facilities, etc. to be commensurate with existing and anticipated needs. Facilities should not invite such use that natural features will be degraded.
4. Provide adequate barriers to minimize off-road vehicle use.

B. Maintenance: Soil Disturbance and Drainage

1. Maintenance operations minimize soil disturbance around parking lots, swimming areas and campsites, through proper placement and dispersal of such facilities or by reseeding disturbed ground. Drainage from such facilities should be promoted through proper grading.

2. Maintain adequate drainage for ramps by keeping side drains functional or by maintaining drainage of road surface above ramps or by crowning (on natural surfaces).
3. Maintain adequate drainage for trails. Use mitigating measures, such as water bars, wood chips, and grass seeding, to reduce erosion on trails.
4. When roads are abandoned during reconstruction or to implement site-control, they must be reseeded and provided with adequate drainage so that periodic maintenance is not required.

III. RAMPS AND STREAM CROSSINGS

A. Legal Requirements

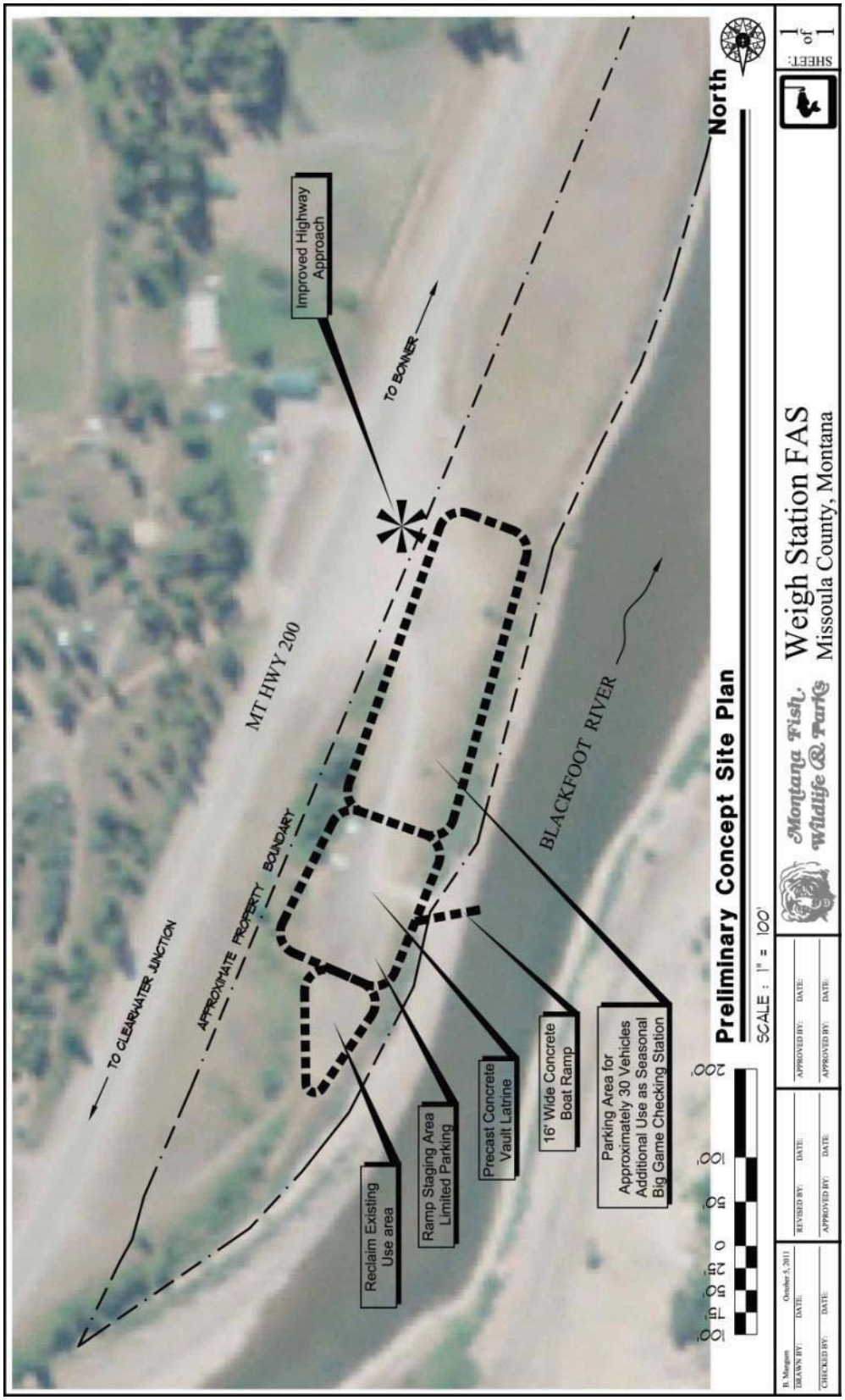
1. Relevant permits must be obtained prior to building bridges across streams or boat ramps. Such permits include the SPA 124 permit, the COE 404 permit, and the DNRC Floodplain Development Permit.

B. Design Considerations

1. Placement of boat ramp should be such that boats can load and unload with out difficulty and the notch in the bank where the ramp was placed does not encourage bank erosion. Extensions of boat ramps beyond the natural bank can also encourage erosion.
2. Adjust the road grade or provide drainage features (e.g. rubber flaps) to reduce the concentration of road drainage to stream crossings and boat ramps. Direct drainage flow through an adequate filtration zone and away from the ramp or crossing through the use of gravel side-drains, crowning (on natural surfaces) or 30-degree angled grooves on concrete ramps.
3. Avoid unimproved stream crossings on permanent streams. On ephemeral streams, when a culvert or bridge is not feasible, locate drive-throughs on a stable, rocky portion of the stream channel.
4. Unimproved (non-concrete) ramps should only be used when the native soils are sufficiently gravelly or rocky to withstand the use at the site and to resist erosion.

C. Installation of Stream Crossings and Ramps

1. Minimize stream channel disturbances and related sediment problems during construction of road and installation of stream crossing structures. Do not place erodible material into stream channels. Remove stockpiled material from high water zones. Locate temporary construction bypass roads in locations where the stream course will have a minimal disturbance. Time the construction activities to protect fisheries and water quality.
2. Where ramps enter the stream channel, they should follow the natural streambed in order to avoid changing stream hydraulics and to optimize use of boat trailers.
3. Use culverts with a minimum diameter of 15 inches for permanent stream crossings and cross drains. Proper sizing of culverts may dictate a larger pipe and should be based on a 50-year flow recurrence interval. Install culverts to conform to the natural streambed and slope on all perennial streams and on intermittent streams that support fish or that provide seasonal fish passage. Place culverts slightly below normal stream grade to avoid culvert outfall barriers. Do not alter stream channels upstream from culverts, unless necessary to protect fill or to prevent culvert blockage. Armor the inlet and/or outlet with rock or other suitable material where needed.
4. Prevent erosion of boat ramps and the affected streambank through proper placement (so as to not catch the stream current) and hardening (riprap or erosion resistant woody vegetation).
5. Maintain a 1-foot minimum cover for culverts 18-36 inches in diameter, and a cover of one-third diameter for larger culverts to prevent crushing by traffic.

APPENDIX E

Draft FWP Preliminary Concept Plan for Weigh Station FAS
(Preferred Alternative B)