Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

DECISION NOTICE:
Weigh Station Fishing Access Site (FAS) Development Project

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Region 2 Office
3201 Spurgin Road, Missoula, MT 59804
(406) 542-5500

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED PROJECT

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes a development project at the Weigh Station Fishing Access Site (FAS) along the Blackfoot River in Missoula County near Bonner, MT to accommodate public recreational use and to prevent further degradation along this stretch of river. Proposed development includes an improved highway approach, a designated parking area for up to 30 vehicles, a concrete vault latrine and a concrete boat launch. 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.

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.

Preferred Alternative B: Proposed Action

FWP proposes to develop the Weigh Station FAS. Development would include an improved highway approach, a designated parking area with approximately 15 truck/trailer and 15 single-vehicle parking spaces, a concrete boat ramp, and a precast concrete vault latrine. (See Appendix E in the Draft EA for the preliminary concept plan for this preferred alternative.)

PUBLIC PROCESS AND COMMENT

A Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for the proposed project was made available for public review and comment from June 8, 2012 through July 9, 2012. Legal notices were published in the *Missoulian*, and the *Helena Independent Record* newspapers. FWP distributed 14 copies of the EA, and 13 postcard and 27 email-notifications of the EA's availability to adjacent landowners and interested individuals, groups and agencies. The EA was available for public review on FWP's web site (http://fwp.mt.gov/), under "Recent Public Notices" beginning June 8. A statewide news release was also sent out and posted on FWP's website on June 8.

FWP received six comments, with five in support of the proposed project, none in opposition, and one that was neither in support nor opposition of the proposed project. Two comments included suggestions for

consideration during the development project. The following is a summary of comments received and response from FWP where applicable.

1. **The majority of comments indicated general support for the proposed project. The following are representative:**

   - "I look forward to the completion of these tasks. I think this will be a good thing for the Bonner area."
   - "Great idea, I'm all for it and it is sorely needed by all who use that portion of the Blackfoot corridor.!!! YES!"
   - "I am a local Missoula resident who frequents the Blackfoot River for both canoeing and rafting. The existing Weigh Station boat ramp is difficult to access, dangerous and is condusive to erosion. I am in support of improvements to this ramp to mitigate these issues."

2. **Two comments included suggestions for development. Those suggestions included:**

   - "... supports improving the Weigh Station FAS with a paved parking area, a toilet, and a concrete boat ramp." ..."... strongly recommends re-vegetating the degraded riverbanks with native shrubs in addition to the proposed reseeding of disturbed areas once the parking area and boat ramp are complete. We also urge FWP to install temporary fencing to allow the planted and seeded areas to recover. Since construction at this site will introduce even more noxious weeds at this already infested site, we also request that FWP consider active weed treatments to allow native riparian re-vegetation to reach its ecological potential – this likely means increasing the $500 budget for annual weed control costs for Weigh Station FAS."

     <u>FWP Response:</u> The proposed development project did not include a paved parking area. Adding a paved parking area to the design would be cost prohibitive to the overall project. Developing a concrete latrine and concrete boat launch were part of the proposal and will be included in the development site plan. FWP will keep your suggestions for re-vegetation and noxious weed control in mind as this project proceeds. Healthy riparian areas and continued attention to controlling noxious weeds are of high importance to FWP's management of fishing access sites.

   - "I think you should consider carry-in access"

     <u>FWP Response:</u> The majority of comments received during the comment period were in support of a boat launch being developed at Weigh Station FAS. Due to this, and the steepness of the bank leading to the river, a concrete ramp will be necessary to provide for a safe boat launch that minimizes erosion potential.

DECISION

Based on the analysis in the Draft Environmental Assessment (EA), along with the public comments and the applicable laws, regulations and policies, it is my decision to proceed with the proposed action in preferred alternative B that includes an improved highway approach, a designated parking area with approximately 15 truck/trailer and 15 single-vehicle parking spaces, a concrete boat ramp, and a precast concrete vault latrine.

I have determined that the decision to proceed with the proposed action will not have a significant effect on the natural or human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement will not be

prepared. By notification of this Decision Notice, the draft EA is hereby made the final EA. The draft EA with Decision Notice may be viewed at or obtained from Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks at the address on page 1. The EA is still available for review on FWP's web site (http://fwp.mt.gov/) under "Recent Public Notices" (enter "Weigh Station" in Search Public Notices).

In accordance with FWP policy, an appeal may be made by any person who has either commented in writing to the department on the proposed project, or who has registered or commented orally at a public meeting held by the department on the proposed project, or who can provide new evidence that would otherwise change the proposed plan. An appeal must be submitted to the Director of FWP in writing and must be postmarked or received within 30 days of this decision notice. The appeal must describe the basis for the appeal, how the appellant has previously commented to the department or participated in the decision-making process, and how the department can provide relief. The appeal should be mailed to: Director, Fish, Wildlife & Parks, 1420 East 6th Avenue, P.O. Box 200701 Helena, MT 59620-0701.

Paul Spencer for Mack Long 7/31/12

Mack Long **Date**
Regional Supervisor