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Decision Notice:
Painted Rocks State Park Campground
Host Site Project
Montana State Parks – Region 2
3201 Spurgin Road
Missoula MT 59804
(406) 542-5500

Description of Proposed Project:

Montana State Parks, a Division of Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks proposes to install a campground host site at Painted Rocks State Park. The proposed campground host site would be located on the west side of the loop road, immediately after the road forks just inside the campground entrance. This location would provide easy access and close monitoring of the boat ramp area, the most heavily used area of the park. This location is also centrally located to all the campsites in the park, making it highly visible and easy for visitors to find if they need assistance or information. The campground host site would include a graveled vehicle pull-out and pad with space for an RV and additional single vehicle parking, electricity with hook-ups and a septic tank with drain field. Construction of water & electrical service lines would come from an existing well & utilities approximately 150 yards away.

Campground hosts are typically private citizens who volunteer to serve in private and public campgrounds nationwide. These hosts fulfill a wide range of duties, including helping visitors find suitable campsites; explaining park policies, regulations, and attractions; monitoring the park and its guests, serving as first responders in emergencies and providing routine site clean up and maintenance and serving as ambassadors for the park system. In exchange for providing the services, volunteer campground hosts receive free camping in the park and are provided a rewarding opportunity to serve as ambassadors and stewards of Montana State Parks. With a volunteer campground host on site, Montana State Parks would be better positioned to provide quality visitor services, protect natural resources and enforce park rules.

Additionally, a small parking area would be created to access the picnic area adjacent to the campground host site. This would consist of a graveled pad with parking for up to 4 vehicles and would be reserved for people using the day-use picnic shelter.

In summary, park managers believe that the addition of a campground host site to Painted Rocks State Park will greatly increase site protection and stewardship of the park and service to park visitors. Volunteer campground host(s) will help monitor visitors, thereby greatly reducing incidents involving vandalism, littering, drug and alcohol abuse, and destruction of natural resources within the park. Campground hosts will alert park managers or law enforcement officials to any serious problems, but usually the mere presence of a campground host deters most common park violations. Campground hosts also assist visitors by providing information about the Park, the region, and the state as a whole and serve

as ambassadors for the Montana State Park system. The project would have no significant environmental effects and will help to increase public enjoyment of Painted Rocks State Park.

Alternatives Considered:

Alternative 1. No Action
Under the no action alternative, Montana State Parks would not install the campground host site or provide a volunteer on site to provide services to the public or remind visitors of park rules and state regulations. The status quo would prevail.

Alternative 2. *Preferred Alternative.* Develop a host site for a campground host at Painted Rocks State Park.
Under this alternative, Montana State Parks would install the campground host site as described in this document. This would provide a regular summer season presence at Painted Rocks State Park, assisting in fee compliance, visitor services, rule compliance, and site maintenance.

Public Process:

Montana State Parks is required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) to assess the potential impacts of its proposed actions to the human and physical environments, evaluate those impacts through an interdisciplinary approach, including public input, and make a decision based on this information. In compliance with MEPA, an Environmental Assessment (EA) was completed for the proposed project by Montana State Parks and released for public comment on June 4, 2012.

Legal notice of the Painted Rocks Campground Host Site Project and EA was published twice each in the following newspapers: *Bitterroot Star* (Stevensville; June 6, 13), *Independent Record* (Helena; June 4, 5), *Missoulian* (June 4, 5), and *Ravalli Republic* (Hamilton; June 6, 7). Montana State Parks issued a state-wide news release regarding this proposal, and posted it on FWP's web site (http://fwp.mt.gov/, "News"), on June 4.

Montana State Parks mailed 17 copies of the EA (and approximately 41 email notifications of the EA's availability) to adjacent landowners and interested individuals, groups and non-FWP agencies. The EA was available for public review and comment on FWP's web site (http://fwp.mt.gov/, "Public Notices") from June 4 through July 5, 2012.

Summary of Public Comment:

The proposed project received 13 comments from individuals, 2 from organizations (Ravalli County Off Road Users Association and Our Montana) and 1 government agency (Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation). All comments that directly addressed the proposed project supported establishing a campground host site at Painted Rocks State Park. Specific comments, concerns and recommendations are addressed below.

1. There were two comments directed toward charging camping fees at Painted Rocks State Park.

Montana State Parks Response: *Camping fees at Montana State Parks is authorized by Montana Code Annotated 23-1-105 and the fee is established by the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission through the Parks Biennial Fee Rule Process. The fee issue directly related to the Painted Rocks EA would need to be addressed via a separate Parks Biennial Fee Rule process which will come up for review later in the fall of 2012 and will afford the public an opportunity to make comments. However, it should be noted that Montana State Parks receives no funding from state general fund revenues or the sale of hunting & fishing licenses, so park fees are important to providing services and maintenance at all 54 State Parks, including Painted Rocks State Park..*

2. One comment asked Montana State Parks to address three issues: 1) lowering camping fees to $8 (please see above discussion of the Biennial Fee process); 2) providing a public water supply; 3) providing an RV dump station.

Montana State Parks Response: *We agree that a public water supply would be a benefit to the public at Painted Rocks State Park. Providing a public water supply would be a substantial increase in operations because of the requirement for daily chlorine testing of the well. The State Parks budget cannot absorb that cost and the lack of a daily presence prevents us from providing this service at this time. However, we will ensure that the pump and distribution system are adequate to develop a public water supply in the future.*

Because RV effluent is considered high strength waste, it is doubtful that a drainfield permit would be issued for a project so close to the lake. Therefore, a tank system (instead of the proposed drainfield) would need to be established. Additionally, this type of an RV dump station would need to be pumped regularly, adding additional operational costs to the Park budget. As with the public water supply, we are not opposed to the concept of an RV dump station at Painted Rocks State Park, but it is not feasible at this time and would require an additional EA to address the potential impacts.

3. Montana DNRC, owners of the site, also requested to be provided with copies of all necessary permits.

Montana State Parks Response: *The Design and Construction Bureau for Montana State Parks will communicate directly with DNRC to assure all necessary administrative procedures are completed and applicable laws and rules are followed.*

The remaining comments enthusiastically support establishing a campground host site at Painted Rocks State Park and providing an on-site management presence to enforce park rules, protect natural resources and to provide a quality experience for all users. A sampling of those comments reveals that many members of the public have been displaced from Painted Rocks because of the behavior of some campers over the years:

"Behavioral traits of some people are inconsistent with the solitude of the site."

"We used to camp there, but other campers behavior made us leave. Someone with authority would help."

"Presently I feel it is unsafe to utilize this campground and its recreational opportunities. It should be available to ALL of us without fear of intimidation or injury from drunken individuals shooting off firearms for recreation or recklessly dominating the water."

"We have tried to camp at this beautiful spot many times only to leave in disgust at the wild, drunk and reckless behavior exhibited by many of the people camped out in this great facility."

Decision

Based on the Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) and the applicable laws, regulations and policies, I have determined that the proposed actions will not have significant negative effects on the human and physical environments associated with the proposed acquisition and trail development. Therefore, I conclude that the EA is the appropriate level of analysis and the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is unnecessary.

By this notification, the draft EA is made the final EA with this Decision Notice, since very minimal changes (noted in the Montana State Park responses above) are required to the draft document. It is my decision to recommend that the FWP Commission approve Montana State Parks' proposed action – to install a campground host site at Painted Rocks State Park.

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, Helena, MT 59620.

Lee Bastian

Lee Bastian
Montana State Parks Regional Park Manager

7/13/2012
Date