

**Decision Notice
and
Finding of No Significant Impact
for
West Shore State Park Maintenance Project
Environmental Assessment**

**Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Region 1
490 N. Meridian Road
Kalispell, MT 59901**

January 3, 2007

Description of Proposed Action

The 2007 West Shore Maintenance Project is intended to complete the process that was begun in 2004 of updating park facilities. Several campsites that were nearest to residential dwellings in Camp Loop A have been moved to the park's interior, and these sites will be rehabilitated to a natural condition. Additionally road improvements in Loop A will restrict camping units to 22 feet so as to encourage tent camping and small camper use in this loop. Large RVs and towing units will be redirected to the camping opportunities within Loop B. This, combined with relocation and repaving of the camp loop road, is intended to improve safety and lessen the impacts on neighboring property owners.

Additional improvements include the replacement of three of the park's current four wood-sided latrines with precast concrete latrines. The old latrines are being replaced because of their age, outdated aesthetics, and for improved odor control. The new latrines will be better able to meet camper and visitor expectations for modern, clean, and handicapped- accessible restroom facilities at a state park.

A covered information and registration kiosk will replace the existing kiosk to provide additional comfort and convenience for park visitors during inclement weather. Finally, a new gate for the service access road will provide additional security and deter visitors from that area.

Improvements will include the following elements:

- Realignment of the Camp Loop A road and construction of a new intersection with the main West Shore access road;
- Clearing, grubbing, and construction of approximately 300 linear feet of new camp loop road;
- Obliteration and reclamation of approximately 500 linear feet of existing camp loop road and 4 campsites;
- Reconstruction and paving of approximately 2,400 linear feet of existing camp loop road;
- Replacement of 3 existing latrines with precast concrete latrines;
- Installation of gate across service road; and
- Installation of a covered information and registration kiosk.

Background

West Shore State Park is located south of the community of Lakeside on Flathead Lake. This state park unit is popular year-round since it provides convenient access to some of the better fishing opportunities on the lake. Annual visitation has averaged approximately 19,000 people over the past five years, with the bulk of those visiting for day-use activities. In 2004, after active public participation in the planning process, a project was completed to begin the process of bringing boat launching facilities, toilets, campsites, and parking up to current standards. Work included boat launch improvements, the installation of a handicapped-accessible dock, shoreline protection, wavebreak installation, boat trailer parking construction, and the replacement of three wooden latrines with handicapped-accessible vault toilets. The 2007 West Shore Maintenance Project completes the site design and improvements that were initiated in 2004. Project actions are intended to modernize basic park amenities while maintaining the natural appeal of West Shore State Park.

Alternatives

The following is brief description of the three alternatives that were developed in the EA:

Alternative A:

No Action

The four campsites identified as a concern by neighbors have been closed to public use, but are still visible and appear to be viable campsites for visitors to use. This will continue to cause issues with campers if all other sites are occupied and it is not clear why these sites are closed. If none of the proposed improvements were implemented, the close proximity between campers at the southern portion of Loop A (the road and campsites proposed for reclamation) and the neighbors' homes at the southern boundary of the state park would continue to raise concerns about privacy and noise levels between the two areas; large towing vehicles would continue to have difficulty navigating through Loop A; and drivers leaving the Loop A campground would continue to have limited visibility at the intersection with the main access road, and safety concerns about possible vehicle accidents would remain. Visitors registering for the camping areas would not have the added comfort of a covered information/registration kiosk during inclement weather. Visitors would continue to use the outdated latrines, and the condition of the camp loop road would continue to decline.

Alternative B:

Realignment, construction, and paving improvements to the camp loop road; reclamation of 4 campsites; installation of an information and registration kiosk and access road gate; and the replacement of the existing latrines with precast concrete latrines.

This alternative would improve the relations between West Shore State Park's neighbors and Parks staff by reducing the potential for conflict between campers

at the Loop A campground and the neighboring homeowners regarding privacy and noise levels. The proposed enhancements to the condition and orientation of the camp loop road are expected to increase vehicle safety in the campground area and reduce the possibility of collisions at the intersection of the loop and access roads.

The placement of new, precast concrete latrines would improve visitor satisfaction with the restroom facilities at the park. Also, they would reduce the possibility of odors emanating from latrine areas affecting nearby campers. The proposed new kiosk would provide a comfortable resource spot for park information and camping registration during inclement conditions. The final piece of this alternative is the installation of a gate accessing the service road from the camp loop road, which would provide added security to that area by deterring visitor traffic.

Alternative C:

Reclaim 4 campsites that are part of Loop A; replace the three older latrines with precast concrete latrines; no realignment, repaving, or intervention at the intersection of the camp loop road; no replacement of the existing information kiosk with a covered kiosk; and no addition of a gate across the service road.

This alternative would allow for the rehabilitation of the closed campsites and would alleviate concerns about privacy and noise levels between the property owners on the southern boundary, campers, and FWP staff. The replacement of the existing older latrines with precast concrete ones will reduce possibility of objectionable odors and improve the aesthetics of the park.

Traffic issues pertaining to RVs and towing vehicles traveling around Loop A would continue, and the pavement would continue to deteriorate from annual use. The current kiosk would remain in use, providing information and registration services to visitors. Finally, the public would still have entrance to the access road area, which could allow for vandalism and inappropriate camping sites to be established.

Public Comment

Public comment was accepted from October 13, 2006 through December 29, 2006. The length of this comment period was the result of two extensions due to technical problems with having the environmental analysis available on the FWP web site. During this time frame, four parties responded with written comments. Three of these parties are supportive of this project, while one party is opposed.

Issues

In the letter of opposition, two issues were raised that fell within the scope of work proposed in this project:

- 1) **There is concern that this project will alter the small camping atmosphere and create congestion.** This project will reduce the size of campsites in Loop A, limiting camping unit size to 22 feet. This will encourage tent campers and small hard-sided campers to utilize these sites. This project

will reclaim four campsites in Loop A, leaving the total number of sites in the park unchanged. Road realignment and reconstruction is specifically intended to alleviate congestion and improve safety.

- 2) **There is concern that FWP is spending all available money for Flathead Lake State Park improvements on the West Shore unit.** FWP is currently planning upgrades at the Wayfarers and Big Arm units of Flathead Lake State Park in 2007.

Finding of no significant impact (FONSI)

Based on analysis in the EA, I find Alternative B to be the preferred alternative. I have evaluated the EA and applicable laws, regulations, and policies, and have determined that this action will not have a significant impact on the human or physical environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

There were no changes to the draft EA; therefore the draft becomes the final EA, which may be viewed at or obtained from Montana, Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Region 1, 490 North Meridian Road, Kalispell, MT 59901.

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 Ave., Helena, MT 59620.

James R. Satterfield, Jr., Ph.D.
Regional Supervisor

Date