



**Montana Fish,
Wildlife & Parks**

DECISION NOTICE:

Brush Lake State Park – Proposed Campground Improvements

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
54078 US Hwy 2 West
Glasgow, MT 59230
(406) 228-3700

Location:

Brush Lake State Park is located approximately 31 road miles southeast of Plentywood, in the northeastern part of the state. It is within Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks' Region 6.

Proposed state action:

The proposed action by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) is to develop a campground with delineated/designated camping sites at Brush Lake State Park. Specific recreational improvements proposed in this project would include approximately 17 campsites with electrical hookups, group use pavilion, vault latrines, informational kiosk, group-use/picnic shelter, campground host pad, an interior access road and RV dump station. These improvements will be accomplished in stages.

Montana Environmental Policy Act

The Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) requires Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks to assess significant potential impacts of a proposed action to the human and physical environment. In compliance with MEPA, a Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) was completed for the proposed project by FWP and released for public comment on November 18, 2009.

Public Process and Comment

The Draft EA was posted on November 18, 2009 in the Recent Public Notices section of the FWP website. Two legal notices were published in each of these papers: *Wolf Point Herald-News*, *Sidney Herald-Leader*, and *The Sheridan County News*. Printed copies of the EA were mailed to adjacent landowner, Sheridan County Commissioners & Planner, and the USFWS office at Medicine Lake NWR. Public comments were accepted through December 18, 2009.

The EA is still available for review at:

<http://fwp.mt.gov/news/publicnotices/environmentalAssessments.html>

Alternative A: Proposed action

MFWP does embark upon the proposed campground improvements at Brush Lake State Park

With the implementation of Alternative A, the recreational camping needs of the public would be addressed. Currently, visitors to the Park safely take part in several recreational activities, including but not limited to, motorized boating, picnicking, swimming, nature viewing, hiking, historical/cultural education, and natural resource education. With the establishment of a designated campground within this water-based State Park, summer visitors can extend their stay and take full advantage of these recreational activities. It is also foreseen that this proposed campground would receive some use during the hunting and summer seasons due to the close proximity of the US Fish and Wildlife Service's Medicine Lake Wildlife Refuge and the several FWP Block Management (hunting) Areas located within a 15-mile radius of Brush Lake State Park.

Depending upon the final costs of the development elements of this proposed project, portions of the proposed facilities may have to be postponed until additional funding becomes available.

Alternative B: No Action

MFWP does not provide proposed campground improvements at Brush Lake State Park

With this alternative, the existing situation of "Day-Use only" would continue at this State Park. It is presumed that the written and verbal requests from the public for overnight camping facility improvements would continue.

Summary of Public Comment:

A total of two (2) public comments were received. One comment was received by e-mail, and the other comment was made and recorded in person at the Region 6 Headquarters in Glasgow.

Comments in support of the campground development

The comments from one individual were supportive of the proposed action.

Excerpts from comments received:

Comment: With the development of the campground at Brush Lake, motorboat users "will stay longer at the park ... will spend several days there rather than just one day."

With the availability of electricity at each campsite, "RV campers will be more apt to stay longer during those hot weekends because they can use their air conditioners."

(In addressing the proposed improvements, two additional development projects were suggested by this individual.)

- In order to provide visitors safe and easy passage between the campground and the existing day-use area, a walking trail located away from the interior roadway was advocated.

- It was also recommended to have a parking area within the campground area designed and designated for motor boat trailers.

FWP Response: *So noted for above supportive comments. Both of the suggested additional improvements projects will be included in the final EA, and in turn will be addressed in the final designing process.*

Comments in opposition of proposed project:

Due to several questions another letter-of-comment was opposed to the proposed campground development.

Excerpts from comments received:

Comment: "...concerned that no financial information is presented in the EA. Since the cost and cost effectiveness are vital considerations in determining whether a proposed project should proceed, we do not believe the EA in its present form offers sufficient information on which to make a decision."

(Stated in EA - "The proposed new development of the facilities at Brush Lake State Park will use funds from the Wallop Breaux Program ...") "This appears to be the only statement regarding the actual source of funds for the project. It is not sufficient for an analysis of either costs or cost effectiveness. It is our understanding that the expenditure of W-B monies requires a 25% match. Where those funds would be sought?"

FWP Response: *The total cost going into this project is \$300,000. Specifically, \$202,500 will come from the federally funded Wallop-Breaux program, and \$97,500 from state park user fee revenues.
Funds used for these projects are park user fees, not general fund tax dollars.*

Comment: (The document states that "visitation statistics for 2007 was (sic) 5,491 and for 2008, the actual count was 6,210.") "How were these numbers collected? What number of the visitors was from Montana? North Dakota? Elsewhere?"

FWP Response: *In August of 2006, FWP installed a traffic counter at the entrance of the interior road which leads to the Park's day-use area. On a monthly basis, the readings of this traffic counter are recorded in a state-wide computer data-base system. The numbers cited in the EA were obtained from this data base.*

Through periodic observation and recordings, the following data has been compiled:

<i>During the 2007 season:</i>	<i>95% of the visitors were Montana residents</i>
	<i>5% of visitors were non-residents</i>
<i>During the 2008 season:</i>	<i>97% of the visitors were Montana residents</i>
	<i>3% of visitors were non-residents</i>

There have been no surveys administered within this Park to provide information of the residency of the non-resident visitors. Through observations of Park's staff, it has been noted that the vast majority of non-resident vehicles have been from North Dakota.

Comment: “There should certainly be a calm and soothing night time environment at present. If overnight camping were to be permitted, equal or greater tranquility could be achieved by simply banning the use of generators thus preserving the quiet atmosphere and saving a bundle of public dollars. The installation of electrical service is unnecessary, undesirable and unjustified.”

FWP Response: *This project reflects the changing needs and values of state park visitors. Our 2006/07 visitor survey shows that already over 76% of the campers in Montana State Parks are using motor-homes, full size hard-sided campers, auto-campers or pick-up truck campers. Every recreational vehicle sold today has provision for electrical connections.*

Comment: “Why is there no appendix entry for a USFWS determination of either a finding of no significant impact or an EIS?”

FWP Response: *FWP’s and the US Fish & Wildlife Service’s schedules were out of synch for the “comment periods” for their environmental assessment processes. The USFWS has don’t begin their comment period, plan to do so soon.*

Decision

Based on the analysis in the Environmental Assessment (EA) and the applicable laws, regulations and policies, I have determined that this action will not have a significant effect on the natural or human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared. It is my decision to implement Alternative A to have FWP embarks upon the proposed campground improvements at Brush Lake State Park, pending on the US Fish & Wildlife Service’s finding of no significant impact and their final decision.

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, and 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.


Woody Baxter
Regional Parks Manager

1/22/2010

Date