Draft Environmental Assessment

BLANCHARD LAKE
FISHING ACCESS SITE
PROPOSED IMPROVEMENT

August 2013

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Blanchard Lake Fishing Access Site
Proposed Improvement
Draft Environmental Assessment
MEPA, NEPA, MCA 23-1-110 CHECKLIST

PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

1. Type of proposed state action:

The 10-acre Blanchard Lake Fishing Access Site (FAS) has been a popular recreational site since its acquisition by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) in 1962. The FAS is conveniently located less than 2 miles southwest of Whitefish near residential developments and Whitefish Lake Golf Course on the scenic Blanchard Lake. The site provides quality recreational opportunities for fishing, boating, floating, and wildlife viewing. Due to increased use, the existing small parking lot is inadequate to accommodate the increased visitor use of the site. As a result, visitors are often forced to park on Blanchard Lake Drive and then walk down the narrow access road, which has poor visibility for vehicles, causing safety concerns. In addition, the access road and boat ramp have eroded, causing sedimentation of the lake and an uneven surface from which to launch boats. FWP proposes to increase parking capacity and improve existing facilities. Proposed improvements include developing an upper parking area along Blanchard Lake Drive, developing a trail between the upper parking area and the existing lower parking area, installing additional signs and an automatic entrance gate, and improving the drainage of the access road and boat ramp.

2. Agency authority for the proposed action:

The 1977 Montana Legislature enacted Section 87-1-605, Montana Code Annotated (MCA), which directs FWP to acquire, develop, and operate a system of fishing accesses. The legislature earmarked a funding account to ensure that the fishing access site program would be implemented. Section 87-1-303, MCA, authorizes the collection of fees and charges for the use of fishing access sites and contains rule-making authority for their use, occupancy, and protection. Furthermore, Section 23-1-110, MCA, and Administrative Rules of 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 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 will illuminate the facets of the proposed action in relation to this rule. See Appendix A for HB 495 qualification.

3. Name of project:

Blanchard Lake Fishing Access Site Proposed Improvement Project

4. Project sponsor:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Region 1
490 North Meridian Road
Kalispell, MT 59901
(406) 752-5501

5. Anticipated schedule:

Estimated public comment period: August 2013
Estimated decision notice: September 2013
Estimated commencement date: Fall 2013
Estimated completion date: Spring 2014
Current status of project design (% complete): 35%

6. Location:

Blanchard Lake FAS is located on Blanchard Lake, 2 miles southwest of Whitefish in Flathead County, NW1/4 Section 2, Township 30 North, Range 22 West (Figures 1 and 2).

Figure 1. General Location of Blanchard Lake FAS.

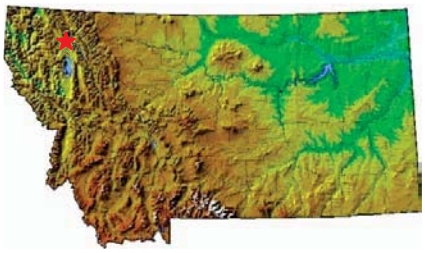


Figure 2. Highway Location of Blanchard Lake FAS.

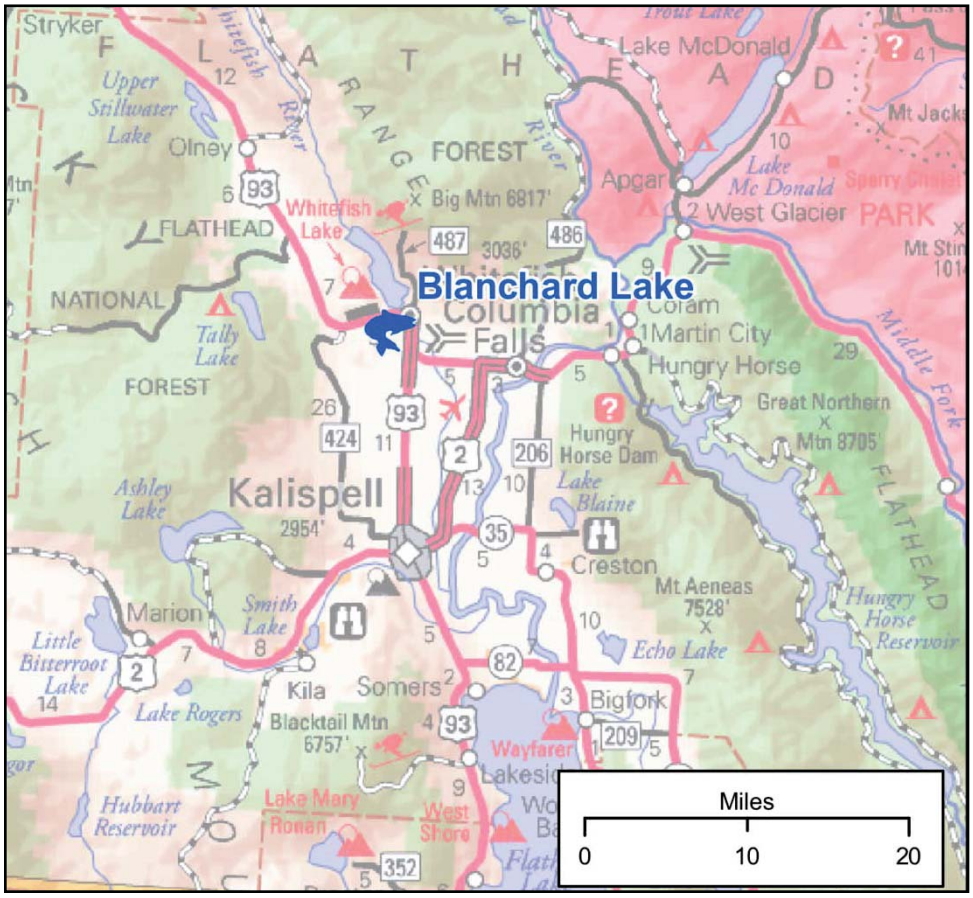


Figure 3. Blanchard Lake FAS Parcel Map.

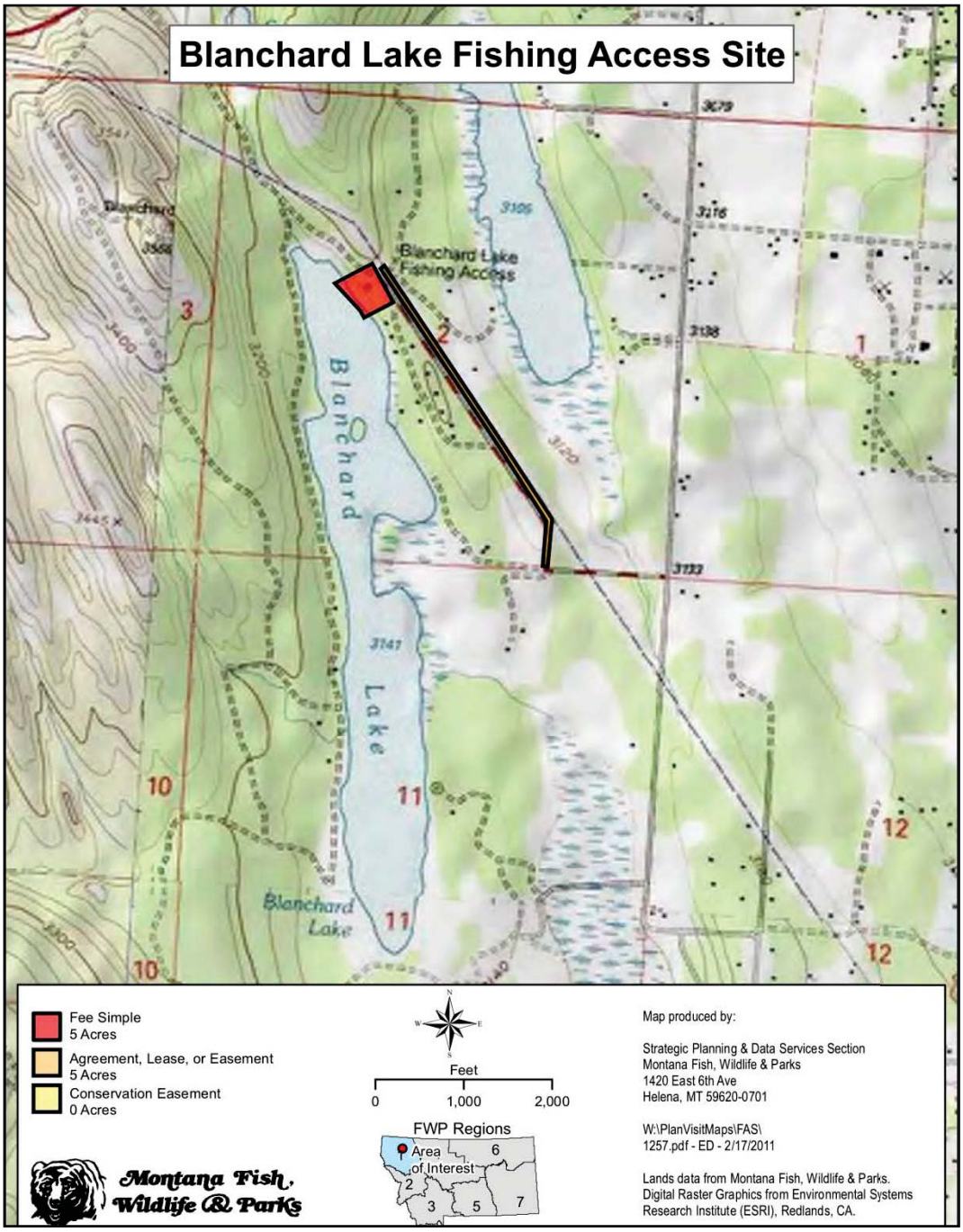
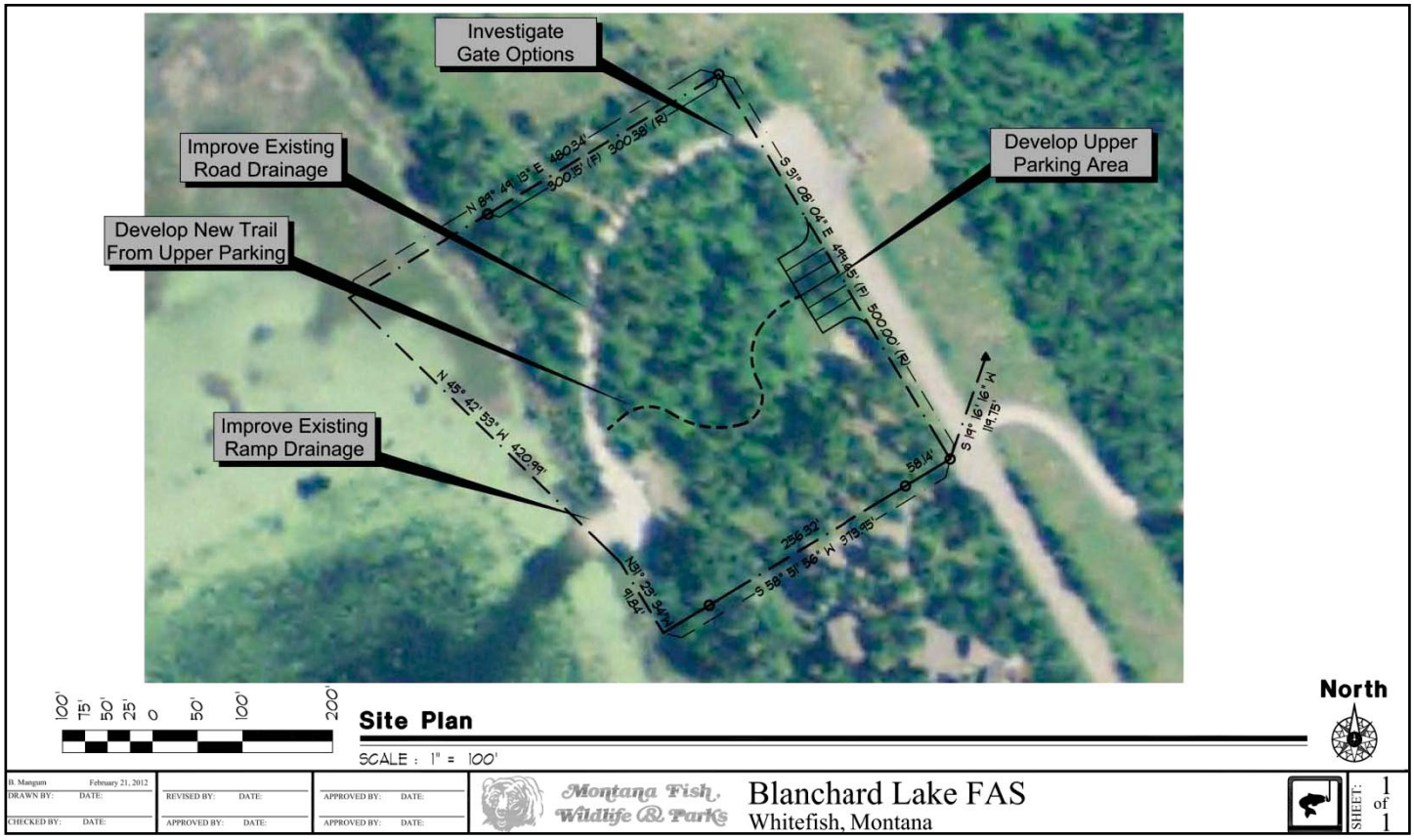


Photo 1. Erosion of Boat Ramp Due to Poor Drainage.

Photo 2. Lower Parking Area With Insufficient Parking and Erosion From Poor Drainage.

Figure 4. Blanchard Lake FAS Proposed Improvement Preliminary Concept Plan.



7. Project size:

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

8. Permits, funding & overlapping jurisdiction.

(a) Permits: Permits would be filed at least 2 weeks prior to project start.

Agency Name	Permits
Flathead County	Floodplain Permit and Sanitation Permit
Montana Dept. of Environmental Quality	318 Short-term Water Quality Standard for Turbidity
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP)	124 Montana Stream Protection Act
US Corps of Engineers	404 Federal Clean Water Act

(b) Funding:

Agency Name	Funding Amount
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks FAS Development Fund	$50,000

(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
Flathead County Weed District	Weed Management Coordination

9. Narrative Summary of the Proposed Action:

Blanchard Lake, located 2 miles southwest of Whitefish, Montana (Figures 1 and 2), is a large, glacial pothole formed in glacial till. The shores and immediately surrounding uplands are, for the most part, gently sloping. There are three intermittent creeks that flow into Blanchard Lake, but whether these or groundwater is the primary water source of the lake is not known. No outflow channels are shown on the topographic map (Figure 3). Blanchard Lake supports a warm water fishery, with black crappie, northern pike, yellow perch, and largemouth bass, the primary game species found in the lake. Blanchard Lake is popular for both open water and ice fishing and is open year-round for fishing.

Vegetation found in the vicinity of Blanchard Lake FAS consists of Rocky Mountain Dry-Mesic Montane Mixed Conifer Forest and Northern Rocky Mountain Lower Montane Riparian Woodland and Shrubland, as defined by the Montana Natural Heritage Program (MNHP). In addition, the lake supports emergent wetland communities around the lake fringe, which extend across portions of the north end of the lake. A search of the MNHP Species of Concern database found three aquatic and wetland plant Species of Concern on Blanchard Lake, including watershield, water bulrush, and pygmy water-lily (Appendix B). Two additional plant Species of Concern were observed over 1.5 miles from Blanchard Lake FAS, including Calliergon moss and small yellow lady's slipper.

Common wildlife species whose habitat distribution overlaps Blanchard Lake FAS include white-tailed deer, moose, mountain lion, beaver, great blue heron, and waterfowl. A wide variety of resident and migratory bird species use or travel through the area on a seasonal basis, including Canada geese and a variety of other waterfowl and songbirds. The site also provides habitat for raptors, including bald eagles. Local residents have observed bald eagles and great blue heron, Species of Concern, near the lake, though MNHP has recorded no observations of these species on Blanchard Lake. According to the MNHP, the common loon, a Species of Concern, annually nests on Blanchard Lake and the northern alligator lizard, another Species of Concern, has been observed near the lake. Grizzly bear, ranked as Listed Threatened by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), are known to occasionally roam the Flathead Valley, though the MNHP has recorded no observations of grizzly bear in the vicinity of Blanchard Lake.

The 10-acre Blanchard Lake FAS has been a popular recreational site since its acquisition by FWP in 1962. The FAS is conveniently located less than 2 miles southwest of Whitefish near residential developments and Whitefish Lake Golf Course on the scenic Blanchard Lake. Blanchard Lake FAS is one of four FASs in the Whitefish area, including Skyles Lake FAS (3 miles west of Whitefish on Skyles Lake), Beaver Lake FAS (6.5 miles west of Whitefish on Beaver Lake), and Bootjack Lake FAS (12 miles northwest of Whitefish on Bootjack Lake).

The site provides quality recreational opportunities for fishing, boating, floating, and wildlife viewing. Existing facilities at the FAS include a seasonal portable latrine, a single-wide gravel boat ramp, a gravel access road, a gravel parking area accommodating three to four vehicles with no trailers, fencing, and signs.

As tourism to the Whitefish area and residential and recreational development in the vicinity of Blanchard Lake have increased, use of Blanchard Lake FAS has also increased. As a result of the increased use, the existing small parking lot is inadequate to accommodate the increased visitor use of the site and inadequate to accommodate boat trailers. As a result, the public is often forced to park on Blanchard Lake Drive and walk to the lake along the narrow access road, which has poor visibility for vehicles, causing safety hazards. In addition to safety hazards, drainage from the access road and boat ramp is poor and has caused erosion on these surfaces and sedimentation of the lake (Photos 1 & 2). The uneven surface of the boat ramp has also made it difficult to launch boats.

FWP proposes to increase parking capacity and improve existing facilities. Proposed improvements include an upper parking area along Blanchard Lake Drive to accommodate additional vehicles and trailers, a trail between the upper parking area and the existing lower parking area to eliminate the hazard of walking with moving vehicles on the narrow access road, additional signs, and an automatic entrance gate (Figure 4). In addition, FWP proposes to improve the drainage of the access road and boat ramp to reduce erosion from the road and ramp surfaces, to reduce sedimentation of the lake, and provide a smoother, more convenient surface to launch boats.

The property would continue to be managed under existing FWP public use regulations. Management of the proposed action includes routine maintenance, control of vehicles, prohibition of firearms, and other accepted FWP recreation area management policies. Protection of the natural resources, the health and safety of visitors, and consideration of neighboring properties would all be considered and incorporated into improvement plans for this site. Construction of the upper parking area and trail, and improvements to the access road and boat ramp would enhance visitor use of this site as well as provide long-term protection of the resources. The FAS would be for day use only and no overnight camping or nighttime activities, ATVs, or hunting would be allowed on the site. The proposed action at Blanchard Lake FAS would improve recreational opportunities by improving safety for fishing, boating, floating, and wildlife viewing, and fill a need for water recreation opportunities on the scenic and popular Blanchard Lake close to Whitefish.

10. Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives:

Alternative A: No Action.

If no action were taken and the proposed improvements were not made, with an additional parking area, trail, additional signs, automatic gate, and improvements to the access road and boat ramp, public safety, resource degradation, and security would continue to be issues at the FAS. Public safety would continue to be an issue, as visitors would continue to be forced to park on Blanchard Lake Drive and walk down the narrow access road along with vehicles. Erosion of the access road and boat ramp and sedimentation of the lake would continue. The condition of the boat ramp would continue to deteriorate, making boat launching increasingly difficult.

Alternative B: Proposed Action.

In order to improve parking and public safety concerns and reduce resource degradation, FWP proposes to develop an upper parking area along Blanchard Lake Drive, a trail between the upper parking area and the existing lower parking area, and install additional signs and an automatic entrance gate. In addition, FWP proposes to improve the drainage of the access road and boat ramp.

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

FWP would employ Best Management Practices (BMP), which are designed to reduce or eliminate sediment delivery to waterways during construction. FWP would develop the final design and specifications for the proposed action. All county, state, and federal permits listed in Part, I 8(a), above would be obtained by FWP as required. A private contractor selected through the state's contracting processes would complete the construction.

PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW CHECKLIST

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

A. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

1. LAND RESOURCES Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
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	1b.
c. Destruction, covering or modification of any unique geologic or physical features?		X				1c.
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. The proposed action would not affect existing soil patterns, structures, productivity, fertility, erosion, compaction, or instability. Soil and geologic substructure would remain stable during and after the proposed work.

1b. During construction, some minor modifications to the existing soil features would be required for the construction of the parking area, trail, and improvement of the boat ramp and access road. Disturbed areas would be seeded with a native seed mix to minimize erosion and sediment delivery to Blanchard Lake and the spread of noxious weeds. The property is managed for recreation and wildlife habitat and is not in agricultural production. The proposed action would not affect soil productivity or fertility. FWP Best Management Practices (BMP) would be followed during all phases of construction to minimize erosion.

1c. No unique geologic or physical features would be altered by the proposed action.

1d. Currently water drains down the access road and boat ramp, causing erosion of those surfaces and sedimentation of the lake. The proposed improvements to the access road and boat ramp would reduce the drainage and erosion to those surfaces and reduce sedimentation of the lake. Minor amounts of sediment may enter the lake during construction of the parking area and trail and during improvement of the access road and boat ramp. However, upon completion, erosion and sedimentation to the lake would be improved.

2. AIR Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Emission of air pollutants or deterioration of ambient air quality? (Also see 13c.)			X		Yes	2a.
b. Creation of objectionable odors?		X				
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 regulations? (Also see 2a.)		NA				

2a. During construction, temporary amounts of dust may be generated during leveling and grading of the access road and boat ramp and construction of the parking area and trail. If additional materials were needed off-site, loading at the source site would generate minor amounts of dust. FWP would follow FWP Best Management Practices (BMP) during all phases of construction to minimize risks and reduce dust. See Appendix D for the BMP. Diesel equipment would be used to implement the proposed action. There would be a temporary increase in diesel exhaust. If the proposed action were implemented, odors from diesel exhaust would dissipate rapidly. The impacts would be short term and minor.

3. WATER Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
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		Yes	3d.
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. Construction of the parking area and trail and improvements to the access road and boat ramp may cause a temporary, localized increase in turbidity in Blanchard Lake. FWP would obtain a Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) 318 Authorization Permit for Short Term Water Quality Standard for Turbidity. FWP BMP would also be followed (Appendix D). FWP would follow the permit requirements for the Montana Department of Environmental Quality for Permit 318 for Short Term Water Quality Standard for Turbidity.

3b. Improvements to the access road and boat ramp would reduce drainage and erosion from those surfaces and reduce sedimentation of the lake. Construction of the parking area and walking trail and proposed improvements to the access road and boat ramp would alter surface runoff. The proposed action would be designed to minimize any effect on surface water, surface runoff, and drainage patterns. FWP BMP would be followed (Appendix D).

3d. There may be a minor, temporary increase of runoff during construction. FWP BMP would be followed (Appendix D).

3h. The use of heavy equipment during construction may result in a slight risk of contamination from petroleum products and an increase in sediment delivery to the lake. FWP BMP would be followed during all phases of construction to minimize these risks (Appendix D).

4. VEGETATION **Will the proposed action result in?**	**IMPACT**					
	Unknown	**None**	**Minor**	**Potentially Significant**	**Can Impact Be Mitigated**	**Comment Index**
a. Changes in the diversity, productivity, or abundance of plant species (including trees, shrubs, grass, crops, and aquatic plants)?			X		Yes	4a.
b. Alteration of a plant community?		X				4b.
c. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?			X		Yes	4c.
d. Reduction in acreage or productivity of any agricultural land?		X				4d.
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				
g. Other:		NA				

4a. The proposed action would have no impact on the plant communities or diversity of the FAS. Construction of the upper parking area and walking trail would have a minor impact on the vegetation. A minimal number of trees and shrubs would be removed during construction. Because the construction area is small, impacts from construction would be minor. Any area disturbed during construction would be reseeded with a native seed mix. Improvements of the access road and boat ramp would have no impact on plant communities or diversity because no new soil would be disturbed.

4b. The proposed action would not alter the composition of plant communities at the site. Vegetation found in the vicinity of Blanchard Lake FAS consists of Rocky Mountain Dry-Mesic Montane Mixed Conifer Forest and Northern Rocky Mountain Lower Montane Riparian Woodland and Shrubland, as defined by the MNHP. Common plant species found on the FAS include Douglas-fir, western larch, ponderosa pine, grand fir, paper birch, quaking aspen, snowberry, serviceberry, Wood's rose, birch leaf spirea, community juniper, elk sedge, blue wildrye, and carex sp.

In addition, the lake supports emergent wetland communities that are around the lake fringe and extend across portions of the northern end of the lake. Cattail, reed canarygrass, and slender sedge dominate the emergent communities. There is also a Bebb's willow community on part of the lakeshore. The floating-leaved and submergent aquatic bed communities are diverse. The deepest zone appears to be dominated by water-lily, while in slightly shallower water, watershield is dominant. Water milfoil dominates in somewhat shallower water, and water smartweed is dominant in the shallowest zone. Associated aquatic species in these wetlands are common bladderwort, grass-leaved pondweed, and long-stalked pondweed.

Common introduced species found on the property include smooth brome, orchard grass, timothy, reed canarygrass, spotted knapweed, Canada thistle, and apple. The most common noxious weeds found on the property include spotted knapweed and Canada thistle. Though not classified as a noxious weed by the state of Montana, reed canarygrass, an invasive species, has become the dominant emergent plant species in Blanchard Lake and poses a threat to emergent plant communities on the lake. FWP would continue implementing the FWP Statewide Integrated Noxious Weed Management Plan to control noxious weeds on the property. FWP spends over $500 per year on weed control, which continues to be a high management priority.

4c. A search of the MNHP Species of Concern database found three aquatic and wetland plant Species of Concern on Blanchard Lake, including watershield, water bulrush, and pygmy water-lily (Appendix B). Two additional plant Species of Concern were observed over 1.5 miles from Blanchard Lake FAS, including Calliergon moss and small yellow lady's slipper. There is a small chance that the proposed action could have a minor, temporary impact on watershield, water bulrush, and pygmy water-lily. The area near the FAS has been disturbed for years by residential construction and recreational use by anglers, boaters, and wildlife viewers, and the majority of soil-disturbing activities would occur away from the lake and emergent plant communities. FWP Best Management Practices (BMP) would be followed during all phases of construction to minimize erosion and sediment delivery to the lake. In addition, disturbed soils would be seeded with a native seed mix to further minimize future erosion and sediment delivery to the lake.

4d. Livestock grazing is not allowed on the FAS and no portion of the property is under agricultural production

4e. Few noxious weeds are found on Blanchard Lake FAS. However, soils disturbed during construction could colonize with weeds. Disturbed areas would be reseeded with a native reclamation seed mix where necessary to reduce the establishment of weeds. In conjunction with Flathead County Weed Control District, FWP would continue implementing the Statewide Integrated Weed Management Plan using chemical, biological, and mechanical methods to control weeds on the property. Weed management would include the establishment of native vegetation to prevent the spread of weeds. Vehicles would be restricted to the parking areas and access roads, which would be maintained as weed-free, and vehicles would not be allowed on undisturbed areas of the site to minimize the spread of noxious weeds. FWP estimates that weed control will cost over $500 during fiscal year 2013.

5. FISH/WILDLIFE Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Deterioration of critical fish or wildlife habitat?			X		Yes	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		Yes	5f.
g. Increase in conditions that stress wildlife populations or limit abundance (including harassment, legal or illegal harvest, or other human activity)?		X				
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. The proposed improvements are designed to minimize impacts to wildlife habitat. A minimal number of trees would be removed for construction of the upper parking area and walking trail, and every effort would be made to preserve all large healthy trees. Blanchard Lake is not considered critical fish habitat. Even though stretches of the nearby Whitefish River are considered critical habitat for the threatened bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout, the proposed work on Blanchard Lake FAS would have no impact on the Whitefish River. The common loon, a Species of Concern, annually nests on Blanchard Lake. Based upon monitoring of nesting activities by FWP wildlife biologists, the timing of construction activities would be adjusted to avoid disturbance to the loons during the critical nesting period.

5b/5c. Common wildlife species whose habitat distribution overlaps Blanchard Lake FAS include white-tailed deer, moose, mountain lion, beaver, great blue heron, and waterfowl. A wide variety of resident and migratory bird species use or travel through the area on a seasonal basis, including Canada geese and a variety of waterfowl and songbirds. The site also provides habitat for raptors, including bald eagles. Local residents have observed bald eagles and great blue heron, Species of Concern, near the lake, though MNHP has not recorded any observations of bald eagle or great blue heron on Blanchard Lake.

Blanchard Lake supports a warm water fishery, with black crappie, northern pike, yellow perch, and largemouth bass the primary game species found in the lake. . Blanchard Lake is popular for both open water and ice fishing and is open year-round for fishing. According to recent surveys by FWP, the average angler days per year from 2003 to 2009 on Blanchard Lake was 2,560, with a low of 1,570 in

2007 and a high of 3,438 in 2009. The state ranking for Blanchard Lake averaged the 163rd most fished body of water in Montana and ranged from 134 to 185 during this same period. This lake averaged the 35th most fished body of water in FWP Region 1 and ranged from 30 to 39 during this same period.

5f. MNHP element occurrence database indicates that no occurrences of federally ranked animal or plant species have been found within the vicinity of the Blanchard Lake FAS. The database indicates that bull trout, ranked as Listed Threatened (LT) by USFWS, was recorded in the Whitefish River over 1.5 miles from Blanchard Lake FAS. The search indicated that common loon and northern alligator lizard, Species of Concern, have been observed on or around Blanchard Lake. MNHP also indicated that westslope cutthroat trout, a Species of Concern, was also found 1.5 miles away in the Whitefish River.

According to Jim Vashro, FWP Region 1 Fisheries manager, the proposed action would not impact bull trout or westslope cutthroat due to the distance between Blanchard Lake and the Whitefish River and that these water bodies are not in the same drainage.

According to Chris Hammond, FWP Region 1 nongame wildlife biologist, the common loon, a Species of Concern, annually nests on Blanchard Lake. Based upon monitoring of nesting activities by FWP wildlife biologists, the timing of construction activities would be adjusted to avoid disturbance to the common loons during the critical nesting period. The northern alligator lizard, a Species of Concern, has also been observed in the vicinity of the lake. The project is unlikely to impact bald eagles, great blue heron, and northern alligator lizards. These species are likely accustomed to some level of disturbance since the area has nearby residential and recreational development and has had heavy recreational use by anglers, boaters, and wildlife viewers for years.

According to Kent Laudon, FWP wolf biologist, Blanchard Lake FAS is within the habitat of the gray wolf. Currently there are no known radio-collared packs that have home ranges that could overlap the project area. While it is possible for wolves to travel through the project area, none have been recently sighted in the immediate area. The wolf population in western Montana is strong and wolves may pass through just about any area including this site. FWP has no concerns with this project impacting gray wolves. Grizzly bear, listed as Threatened by USFWS, is known to occasionally roam the Flathead Valley, though the MNHP has recorded no observations of grizzly bear in the vicinity of Blanchard Lake. The proposed project is also unlikely to affect grizzly bear.

B. HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

6. NOISE/ELECTRICAL EFFECTS Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Increases in existing noise levels?			X		Yes	6a.
b. Exposure of people to severe or nuisance noise levels?			X		Yes	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, minor increase in noise levels at the project site. Any increase in noise level at the construction site would be short term and minor.

6b. Blanchard Lake FAS is located adjacent to residential development with over 25 homes within 1/2 mile of the FAS. The minor and temporary increase of noise levels during construction may disturb nearby neighbors and visitors. FWP would follow the guidelines of the good neighbor policy, all of which would mitigate increased noise levels and would limit construction to periods of low visitation to minimize disturbance to others.

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

7a. The property is not under agricultural production and the proposed action would not alter or interfere with the productivity or profitability of the existing land use of the property.

7d. The proposed action would have no effect on nearby residences.

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

8a. Physical disturbance of the soil during construction would encourage the establishment of additional noxious weeds on the site. In conjunction with the Flathead County Weed District, FWP would continue implementing an integrated approach to control noxious weeds, as outlined in the FWP Statewide Integrated Noxious Weed Management Plan. The integrated plan uses a combination of biological, mechanical, and herbicidal treatments to control noxious weeds. The use of herbicides would be in compliance with application guidelines to minimize the risk of chemical spills or water contamination and would be applied by people trained in safe handling techniques.

There is a minor and temporary risk of fuel or oil from heavy equipment accidently releasing into the lake during construction. 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 Best Management Practices during all phases of construction to minimize risks (Appendix D).

8c. Blanchard Lake FAS is a popular and heavily used recreational site. As a result, the small parking lot is often full, forcing visitors to park along Blanchard Lake Drive and walk down the access road to the lake, causing safety concerns. The proposed project would improve public safety by constructing a safe parking area along Blanchard Creek Drive and walking trail between the upper and lower parking areas, avoiding the hazards of walking with traffic on the narrow access road.

9. COMMUNITY IMPACT Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
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				9c.
d. Changes in industrial or commercial activity?		X				9d.
e. Increased traffic hazards or effects on existing transportation facilities or patterns of movement of people and goods?		X				9e.

9c. The proposed action may improve recreational use of the area by improving the security and public safety of the FAS. This would benefit local retail and service businesses (Appendix C - Tourism Report).

9d. There would be no change in commercial use of the site.

9e. The proposed action would have little or no impact on traffic

10. PUBLIC SERVICES/TAXES/UTILITIES Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
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				10e.
f. Define projected maintenance costs.		X				10f.

10a. The proposed action would have no impact on public services or utilities. The proposed improvements would require periodic maintenance by FWP and would be patrolled by FWP.

10b. The proposed action would have no effect on the local and state tax base and revenue.

10e. Because Blanchard Lake FAS would continue to be operated for day use only, no revenue would be generated from camping fees.

10f. Projected annual operating, maintenance, weed control, and personnel expense for fiscal year 2013 is estimated to total approximately $2,250 per year.

11. AESTHETICS/RECREATION **Will the proposed action result in:**	**IMPACT**					
	Unknown	**None**	**Minor**	**Potentially Significant**	**Can Impact Be Mitigated**	**Comment Index**
a. Alteration of any scenic vista or creation of an aesthetically offensive site or effect that is open to public view?		X				11a.
b. Alteration of the aesthetic character of a community or neighborhood?		X				11b.
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/b. The proposed action would not affect the aesthetic values of the FAS. The upper parking area would be visible from Blanchard Lake Drive and the walking trail could be visible from the lake.

11c. The site is already developed and the proposed improvements would have no effect on the aesthetic character of the neighborhood or community. The site would continue to be closed to camping and managed for day use only.

12. CULTURAL/HISTORICAL RESOURCES **Will the proposed action result in:**	**IMPACT**					
	Unknown	**None**	**Minor**	**Potentially Significan t**	**Can Impact Be Mitigated**	**Comment Index**
a. Destruction or alteration of any site, structure, or object of prehistoric, historic, or paleontological importance?		X				12a.
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 12a.)		NA				

12a. A cultural resource inventory has been completed and no heritage sites were identified. The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) has been consulted and has concurred with FWP recommendations for the project (Appendix E). If cultural materials are discovered during construction, work would cease and SHPO would be contacted for a more in-depth investigation.

SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

13. SUMMARY EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE Will the proposed action, considered as a whole:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
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				
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.)		NA				
g. For P-R/D-J, List any federal or state permits required.		NA				

During construction of the proposed project, there may be minor and temporary impacts to the physical environment, but the impacts would be short term and the improvements would benefit the community and recreational opportunities over the long term. The proposed action would have no negative cumulative effects on the biological, physical, and human environments. When considered over the long term, the proposed action positively impacts the public's recreational use of Blanchard Lake, an important, popular, and heavily used recreational lake.

PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

During construction of the proposed project, there may be minor and temporary impacts to the physical environment, but the impacts would be short-term and the improvements would benefit the community and recreational opportunities over the long term. The proposed action would have no negative cumulative effects on the biological, physical, and human environments. When considered over the long term, the proposed action positively impacts the public's recreational use of Blanchard Lake, an important, popular, and heavily used recreational Lake.

The minor impacts to the environment 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 provide habitat to transient and permanent wildlife species and would be open to the public for river access.

The proposed action would not impact the local wildlife species that frequent the property, and the project would be designed to avoid conditions that stress wildlife populations. Even though the bull trout, a federally protected species, has been observed in the Whitefish River 2 miles from the FAS, the proposed action would not impact this species since bull trout are not found in Blanchard Lake and the Whitefish River does not drain into Blanchard Lake. FWP documented that the common loon, a Species of Concern, annually nests on Blanchard Lake. Construction would be timed to avoid disturbance to common loon during the critical nesting period. While it is possible for wolves to travel through the project area, none have been sighted and there is no pack located in the area, so it is unlikely that the proposed action would impact gray wolves. Grizzly bear are known to roam the Flathead Valley, though no observations of grizzly bear have been documented in the vicinity of Blanchard Lake.

Three aquatic and wetland plant Species of Concern have been observed on Blanchard Lake, including watershield, water bulrush, and pygmy water-lily (Appendix B). There is a small chance that the proposed action could have a minor, temporary impact on these species. The area near the FAS has been disturbed for years by residential construction and recreational use by anglers, boaters, and wildlife viewers, and the majority of soil disturbing activities would occur away from the lake and emergent plant communities. FWP Best Management Practices (BMP) would be followed during all phases of construction to minimize erosion and sediment delivery to the lake, which could affect these species. In addition, soils disturbed during construction would be seeded to further minimize erosion and sedimentation of the lake.

Soils disturbed during construction could colonize with weeds. Disturbed areas would be reseeded with a native reclamation seed mix where necessary to reduce the establishment of weeds. In conjunction with Flathead County Weed Control District, FWP would continue implementing the Statewide Integrated Weed Management Plan using chemical, biological, and mechanical methods to control weeds on the property.

The proposed improvements of Blanchard Lake FAS would improve public safety hazards with convenient and safe parking and would reduce erosion and degradation to water quality from the access road and boat ramp. In addition, the proposed improvements would improve recreational opportunities for fishing, boating, floating, and wildlife viewing at the very popular and scenic Blanchard Lake.

PART IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

1. Public involvement:

The public will be notified in the following manners to comment on the Blanchard Lake FAS Proposed Improvement Project, the proposed action, and alternatives:

- Two public notices in each of these papers: the *Daily Inter Lake* and the *Helena Independent Record.*
- Public notice on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks web page: *http://fwp.mt.gov*.
- Draft EAs will be available at the FWP Region 1 Headquarters in Kalispell and the FWP State Headquarters in Helena.
- A news release will be prepared and distributed to a standard list of media outlets interested in FWP Region 1 issues.
- Copies of this EA will be distributed to neighboring landowners and interested parties to ensure their knowledge of the proposed action.

This level of public notice and participation is appropriate for a project of this scope having limited impacts, many of which can be mitigated.

If requested within the comment period, FWP will schedule and conduct a public meeting on this proposed action.

2. Duration of comment period:

The public comment period will extend for 30 days. Written comments will be accepted until 5:00 p.m., September 14, 2013, and can be emailed to tgarrett@mt.gov or mailed to the address below:

Blanchard Lake FAS Proposed Improvement Project
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Region 1
490 North Meridian Road
Kalispell, MT 59901

PART V. EA PREPARATION

1. Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required? No. Based on an evaluation of impacts to the physical and human environment under MEPA, this environmental review revealed no significant negative impacts from the proposed action; therefore, an EIS is not necessary and an environmental assessment is the appropriate level of analysis. In determining the significance of the impacts, FWP assessed the severity, duration, geographic extent, and frequency of the impact, the probability that the impact would occur, or reasonable assurance that the impact would not occur. FWP assessed the growth-inducing or growth-inhibiting aspects of the impact; the importance to the state and to society of the environmental resource or value effected; any precedent that would be set as a result of an impact of the proposed action that would commit FWP to future actions; and potential conflicts with local, federal, or state laws. As this EA revealed no significant impacts from the proposed actions, an EA is the appropriate level of review and an EIS is not required.

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

Todd Garrett
Region 1 Fishing Access Site Manager
490 North Meridian Road
Kalispell, MT 59901
tgarrett@mt.gov
(406) 752-5501

Andrea Darling
FWP EA Contractor
39 Big Dipper Drive
Montana City, MT 59634
apdarling@gmail.com

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

Montana Department of Commerce – Tourism
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
- Field Services Division
- Design and Construction Bureau
- Lands Bureau
- Legal Bureau
- Fisheries Division
- Wildlife Division

Montana Natural Heritage Program – Natural Resources Information System (NRIS)

APPENDICES

A. MCA 23-1-110 Qualification Checklist
B. Native Species Report - Montana Natural Heritage Program
C. Tourism Report – Department of Commerce
D. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Best Management Practices
E. State Historic Preservation Office Concurrence

APPENDIX A
23-1-110 MCA PROJECT QUALIFICATION CHECKLIST

Date: January 24, 2013 **Person Reviewing:** Andrea Darling

Project Location: Blanchard Lake FAS is located on Blanchard Lake 2 miles southwest of Whitefish in Flathead County in NW1/4 Section 2 Township 30 North Range 22 West.

Description of Proposed Work: FWP proposes to increase parking capacity and improve existing facilities. Proposed improvements include an upper parking area along Blanchard Lake Drive; a trail between the upper parking area and the existing lower parking area; additional signs; and an automatic entrance gate. In addition, FWP proposes to improve the drainage of the access road and boat ramp.

The following checklist is intended to be a guide for determining whether a proposed action or improvement is of enough significance to fall under 23-1-110 rules. (Please check all that apply and comment as necessary.)

[X] A. New roadway or trail built over undisturbed land?
Comments: A trail would be constructed between the proposed upper parking area and existing lower parking area.

[ ] B. New building construction (buildings <100 sf and vault latrines exempt)?
Comments: No building construction.

[X] C. Any excavation of 20 c.y. or greater?
Comments: Possibly, for the new upper parking area and trail.

[X] D. New parking lots built over undisturbed land or expansion of existing lot that increases parking capacity by 25% or more?
Comments: Yes, the upper parking area would increase parking capacity over 25%.

[ ] E. Any new shoreline alteration that exceeds a doublewide boat ramp or handicapped fishing station?
Comments: No shoreline of Blanchard Lake would be disturbed.

[ ] F. Any new construction into lakes, reservoirs, or streams?
Comments: There would be no construction into Blanchard Lake.

[ ] G. Any new construction in an area with National Registry quality cultural artifacts (as determined by State Historical Preservation Office)?
Comments: No. SHPO Concurrence has been obtained.

[ ] 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: No campsites would be constructed.

[ ] J. Proposed project significantly changes the existing features or use pattern, including effects of a series of individual projects?
Comments: No. The proposed action would not affect existing features or use patterns.

APPENDIX B

NATIVE SPECIES REPORT – MONTANA NATURAL HERITAGE PROGRAM
Sensitive Plants and Animals in the Vicinity of Blanchard Lake Fishing Access Site

Species of Concern Terms and Definitions

A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program (MNHP) element occurrence database (http://nris.mt.gov) indicates that no occurrences of federally ranked animal or plant species have been found within the vicinity of the proposed action site. The database indicates that bull trout, ranked as LT by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, was recorded in the Whitefish River, 2 miles from the proposed action site. The search indicated that common loon, westslope cutthroat trout, and northern alligator lizard, Species of Concern, have been observed in or near the proposed action site. In addition, five plant species that are considered Species of Concern have been observed on or near the proposed action site, including calliergon moss, watershield, pygmy water-lily, water bulrush, and small yellow lady's-slipper. More information on these species is included below.

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).

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Endangered Species Act)- Terms and Definitions

LE. Listed endangered: Any species in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range.

LT. Listed threatened: Any species likely to become an endangered species within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of its range.

C. Candidate: Those taxa for which sufficient information on biological status and threats exists to propose to list them as threatened or endangered.

DM. Recovered, delisted, and being monitored - Any previously listed species that is now recovered, has been delisted, and is being monitored.

BGEPA. The Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act of 1940 (BGEPA) prohibits anyone, without a permit issued by the Secretary of the Interior, from taking bald or golden

eagles, including their parts, nests, or eggs. The BGEPA provides criminal and civil penalties for persons who take, possess, sell, purchase, barter, offer to sell, purchase or barter, transport, export or import, at any time or any manner, any bald eagle ... [or any golden eagle], alive or dead, or any part, nest, or egg thereof.

MBTA. The Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) implements four treaties that provide for international protection of migratory birds. The statute's language is clear that actions resulting in a "taking" or possession (permanent or temporary) of a protected species is a violation of the MBTA.

BCC. Birds of Conservation Concern 2008. The 1988 amendment to the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act mandates the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to identify species, subspecies, and populations of all migratory nongame birds that, without additional conservation actions, are likely to become candidates for listing under the Endangered Species Act

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 BLANCHARD LAKE FISHING ACCESS SITE

1. Gavia immer (Common Loon)

Vertebrate animal- Bird

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

FWP CFWCS Tier: **1**

Element Occurrence data was reported of common loon within the project area. Last recorded observation date was 2003.

2. Oncorhvnchus clarkii lewisi (Westslope Cutthroat Trout)

Vertebrate animal- Fish

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**

Element Occurrence data was reported of westslope cutthroat trout within 2 miles of the project area in the Whitefish River. No observation date was recorded.

3. Salvelinus confluentus (Bull Trout)

Vertebrate animal- Fish

Natural Heritage Ranks	Federal Agency Status:
State: **S2**	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: **LT**
Global: **G4**	U.S. Forest Service: **Threatened**
	U.S. Bureau of Land Management: **Special Status**

FWP CFWCS Tier: **1**

Element Occurrence data was reported of bull trout within 2 miles of the project area in the Whitefish River. No observation date was recorded.

4. Eloaria coerulea (Northern Alligator Lizard)

Vertebrate animal- Reptile

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**

Element Occurrence data was reported of northern alligator lizard within 1 mile of the project area. Last recorded observation date was 2004.

5. Calliergon trifarium (Calliergon Moss)

Bryophytes

Natural Heritage Ranks	Federal Agency Status:

State: **SH**
Global: **G4**

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:
U.S. Forest Service**:**
U.S. Bureau of Land Management:

FWP CFWCS Tier:

Element Occurrence data was reported of Calliergon moss 1 mile from the project area. No observation date was recorded.

6. Brasenia schreberi (Watershield)

Vascular Plants

Natural Heritage Ranks	Federal Agency Status:
State: **S1S2**	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:
Global: **G5**	U.S. Forest Service**: Sensitive**
	U.S. Bureau of Land Management:

FWP CFWCS Tier:

Element Occurrence data was reported of watershield 1/2 mile from the project area. Last recorded observation date was 1985.

7. Nymphaea leibergii (Pygmy Water-lily)

Vascular Plants

Natural Heritage Ranks	Federal Agency Status:
State: **S1**	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:
Global: **G5**	U.S. Forest Service**:**
	U.S. Bureau of Land Management:

FWP CFWCS Tier: **2**

Element Occurrence data was reported of pygmy water-lily within the project area. Last recorded observation date was 1982.

8. Schoenoplectus subterminalis (Water Bulrush)

Vascular Plants

Natural Heritage Ranks	Federal Agency Status:
State: **S3**	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:
Global: **G4G5**	U.S. Forest Service**:**
	U.S. Bureau of Land Management:

FWP CFWCS Tier:

Element Occurrence data was reported of pygmy water-lily within the project area. Last recorded observation date was 1985.

9. Cypripedium parviflorum (Small Yellow Lady's-slipper)

Vascular Plants

Natural Heritage Ranks	Federal Agency Status:
State: **S3S4**	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:
Global: **G5**	U.S. Forest Service**: Sensitive**
	U.S. Bureau of Land Management:

FWP CFWCS Tier:

Element Occurrence data was reported of small yellow lady's-slipper 2 miles from the project area. Last recorded observation date was 1992.

APPENDIX C
TOURISM REPORT

MONTANA ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT (MEPA) & MCA 23-1-110

The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & 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: Blanchard Lake FAS Proposed Improvements

Project Description: The 10-acre Blanchard Lake Fishing Access Site (FAS) has been a popular recreational site since its acquisition by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) in 1962. The site provides quality recreational opportunities for fishing, boating, floating, and wildlife viewing. Due to increased use, the existing small parking lot is inadequate to accommodate the increased visitor use of the site. As a result, visitors are often forced to park on Blanchard Lake Drive and then walk down the narrow access road along with vehicles, causing safety concerns. In addition, the access road and boat ramp have eroded, causing sedimentation of the lake and an uneven surface from which to launch boats. FWP proposes to increase parking capacity and improve existing facilities. Proposed improvements include developing an upper parking area along Blanchard Lake Drive; developing a trail between the upper parking area and the existing lower parking area; installing additional signs and an automatic entrance gate; and improving the drainage of the access road and boat ramp.

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 January 28, 2013

APPENDIX D
MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS

BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES
10-02-02
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. <u>Road Design</u>

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. <u>Drainage from Road Surface</u>

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
STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE CONCURRENCE

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Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

RECEIVED
JAN 24 2012
BY: SHPO

1420 East Sixth Avenue
P.O. Box 200701
Helena, Montana 59620-0701

• STAN
• FWP/Fish
• Blanchard Lake FAS Improvement FH CO

RECEIVED
FEB 01 2012
DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION
DEPT. OF FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS

Dr. Mark Baumler, SHPO
State Historical Preservation Office
P.O. Box 201202
1410 8th Avenue
Helena, Montana 59620-1202

RE: Blanchard Lake FAS Improvements

January 23, 2012

Dear Dr. Baumler:

The Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) is proposing improvements to a gravel road and parking area at the Blanchard Lake Fishing Access Site. The proposed undertaking is located on lands owned by FWP at approximately T30N R22W Section 2 in Flathead County.

The project area has been surveyed in the past (Aaberg 1986) with no cultural resources being identified. The proposed road and parking improvements are within the original APE and primarily in areas of previous disturbance. FWP believes that the previously submitted report adequately considers all reasonable potential effects to Historic Properties from the current proposed undertaking. It is our opinion that, due to the low likelihood of adverse impacts to cultural resources, the currently proposed project should be allowed to proceed as proposed.

We request your concurrence on the adequacy of the previously filed reports and the low likelihood of adverse impacts to cultural resources. Please feel free to contact Bardell Mangum at (406) 841-4012 or by e-mail at bmangum@mt.gov if you have any questions or concerns regarding the proposed project.

Sincerely,

Bardell Mangum, RLA
Landscape Architect
Design & Construction Unit

CONCUR
MONTANA SHPO
DATE 1/25/12 SIGNED

cc: File 105.1