Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

2300 Lake Elmo Drive
Billings MT 59105

25 August, 2016

DECISION NOTICE

TO: Environmental Quality Council*
Director's Office, Dept. of Environmental Quality*
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks*

Director's Office	Lands Section
Parks Division	Design & Construction
Fisheries Division	Legal Unit
Wildlife Division	Regional Supervisors
Comm Ed Division	

Tim Baker, Governor's Office*
Dave Parker, Communications Director, Governor's Office*
Montana Historical Society, State Preservation Office*
Janet Ellis, Montana Audubon Council*
Montana Wildlife Federation*
Montana State Library*
George Ochenski
Bob Gibson*
Brett French*
Montana Environmental Information Center*
Wayne Hirst, Montana State Parks Foundation*
FWP Commissioner Matt Tourtlotte*
Montana Parks Association/Our Montana (land acquisition projects)
Matt Wolcott, DNRC Area Manager, Southern Land Office*
Sweet Grass County Commissioners*
Other Local Interested People or Groups*
* (Sent electronically)

Dear Interested Party:

Attached for your review is a Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) outlining proposed construction and improvements at the Big Rock Fishing Access Site (FAS.) Big Rock FAS is located on the Boulder River approximately 5 miles upstream of the mouth of the Boulder River near Big Timber, in Sweet Grass County, Montana.

As a result of heavy spring flows scouring and eroding the Boulder River bank, the FAS loop road is now too close to the Boulder River. In an effort to protect the road and other FAS facilities from damage during heavy spring flows, to enhance recreational opportunities, and to reduce resource degradation, FWP proposes to relocate FAS facilities away from the riverbank and improve

recreational facilities.

Proposed FAS improvements include: 1) development of two new parking areas to accommodate approximately three truck/trailer vehicles and four single vehicles; 2) reclamation of the existing loop road adjacent to the riverbank; 3) construction of a new loop road over 120’ from the riverbank; 4) development of five designated campsites; 5) graveling the pioneered river access for hand launching boats and rafts; 6) reconditioning the existing camp loop road and access road; 7) installation of barrier rock to control vehicle movement; and 8) installation of informational and directional signs.

Any questions should be directed to Ryan Taynton (406-633-0081) or Ken Frazer (406-247-2961). All comments must be received by September 30, 2016. Please address written comments to:

Big Rock FAS Proposed Improvement Project
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
2300 Lake Elmo Drive
Billings, MT 59105

Thank you for your interest.

Barb S. Beck
Regional Supervisor, Region 5

Draft Environmental Assessment

BIG ROCK
FISHING ACCESS SITE
PROPOSED IMPROVEMENT

APRIL 2016

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Big Rock 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 69-acre Big Rock Fishing Access Site (FAS) has been a popular recreational site along the Boulder River since its acquisition by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) in 1975 and provides quality recreational opportunities for fishing, non-motorized boating, floating, camping, hunting, picnicking, and wildlife viewing. As a result of heavy spring flows scouring and eroding the Boulder River bank, the FAS loop road is now too close to the Boulder River. In an effort to protect FAS facilities from damage during heavy flows, to enhance recreational opportunities, and to reduce resource degradation, FWP proposes to relocate FAS facilities away from the riverbank. Proposed improvements include; developing two designated parking areas; reclaiming the loop road adjacent to the river; designating and improving the unimproved campsites, graveling the pioneered river access, and reconditioning the access road.

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 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:

Big Rock Fishing Access Site Proposed Improvement Project

4. Project sponsor:

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Region 5
2300 Lake Elmo Drive
Billings, MT 59105

5. Anticipated Schedule:

Estimated Public Comment Period: September 2016
Estimated Decision Notice: October 2016
Estimated Commencement Date: Fall/Winter 2016

Estimated Completion Date Fall/Winter 2016
Current Status of Project Design (% complete): 35%

6. Location:

Big Rock FAS is located on the Boulder River on Old Boulder Road, 4 miles south of Big Timber, Montana in Sweet Grass County, Section 34, Township 1 North, Range 14 East (Figures 1 and 2).

Figure 1. General Location of Big Rock FAS

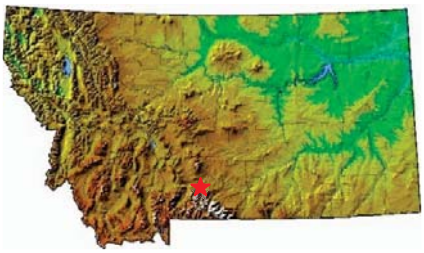

Figure 2. Highway Location of Big Rock FAS

Figure 3. Big Rock FAS Parcel Map

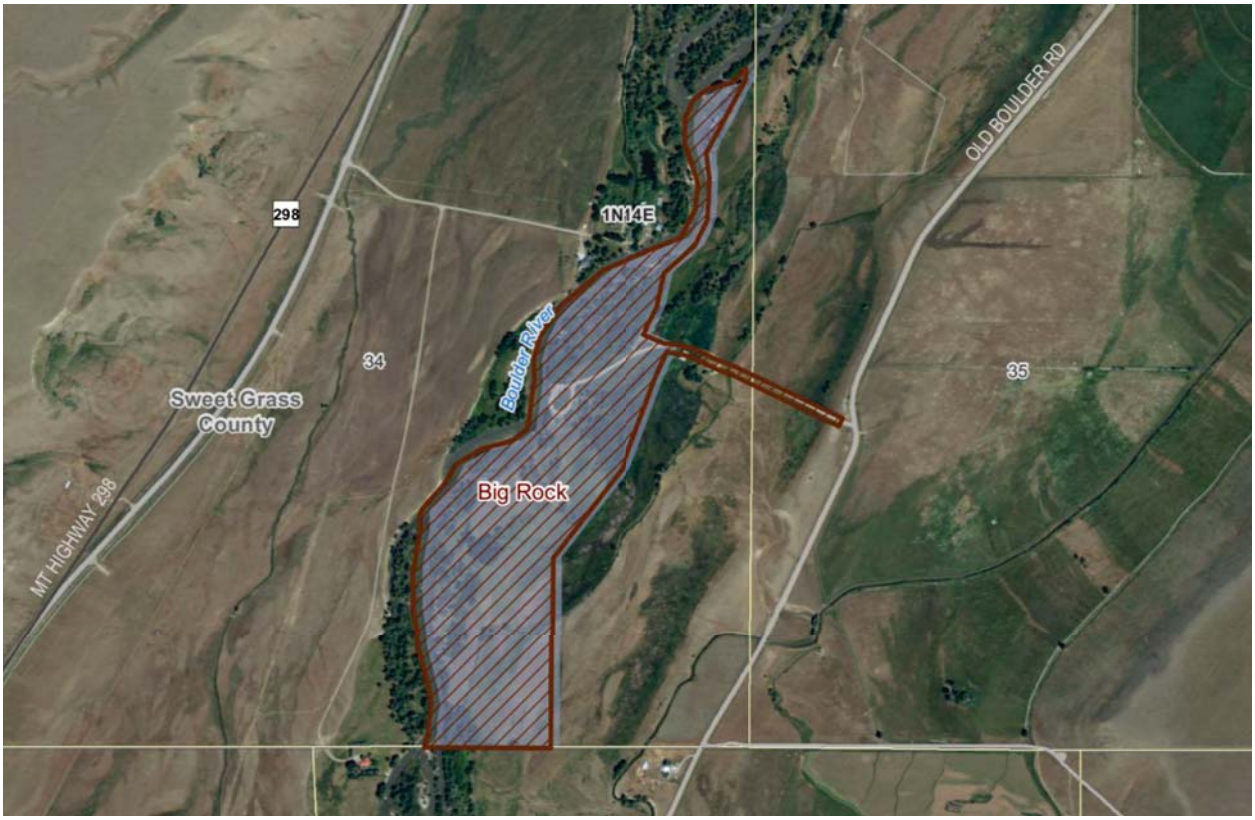

Photo 1. Loop Road Almost Undercut by Boulder River at Big Rock FAS

Figure 4. Big Rock FAS Preliminary Overall Concept Plan

Figure 5. Big Rock FAS Enlarged Concept Site Plan

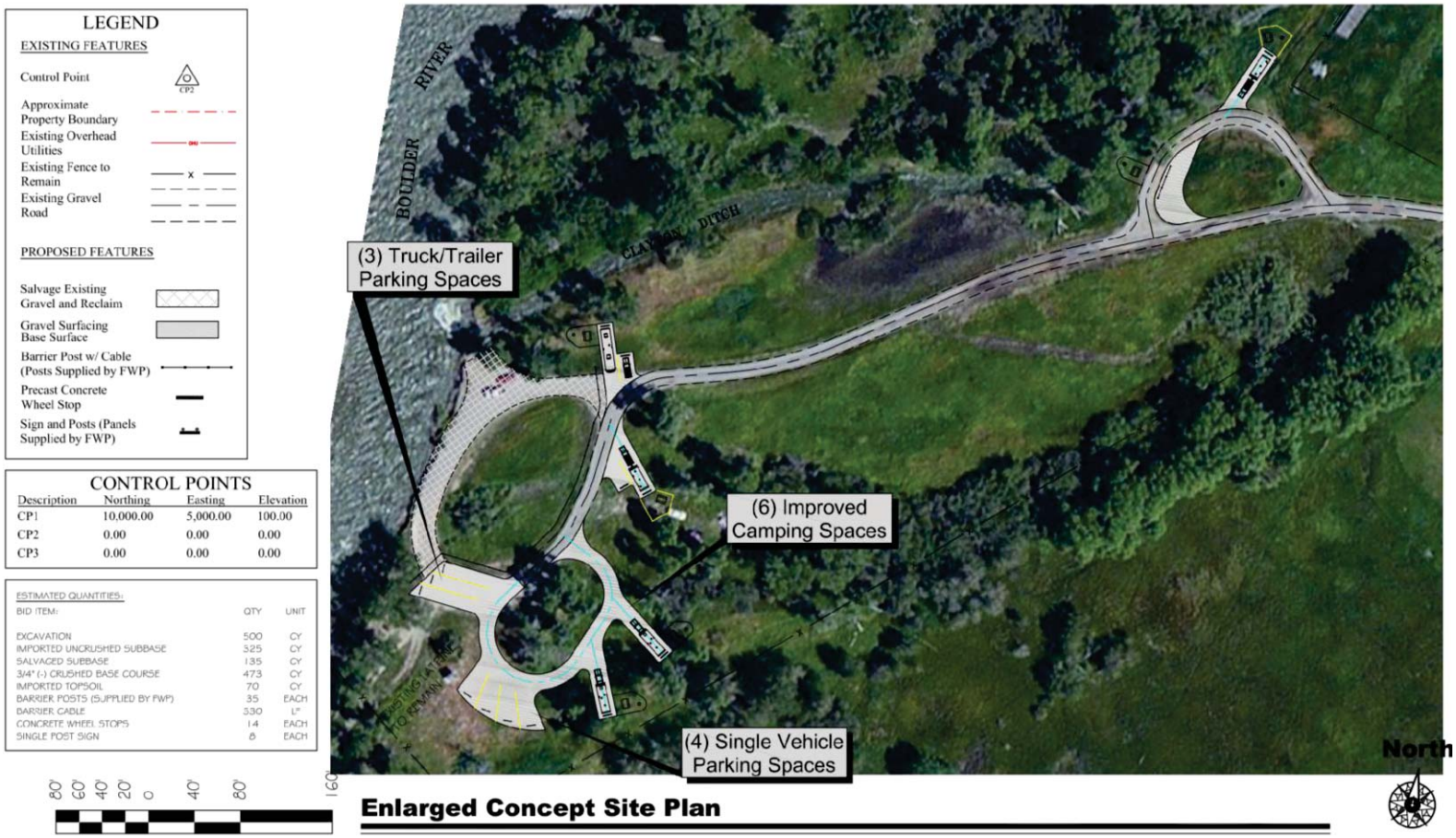

Photo 2. Pioneered River Access at Big Rock FAS

7. Project size -- estimate the number of acres that would be directly affected that are currently:

	Acres		Acres
(a) Developed:		(d) Floodplain	0
Residential	0		
Industrial	0	(e) Productive:	
		Irrigated cropland	0
(b) Open Space/	1	Dry cropland	0
Woodlands/Recreation		Forestry	0
(c) Wetlands/Riparian	4	Rangeland	0
Areas		Other	0

8. Permits, Funding & Overlapping Jurisdiction.

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

Agency Name	Permits
Sweet Grass 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 Army Corps of Engineers	404 Federal Clean Water Act

(b) Funding:

Agency Name	Funding Amount

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Site Protection Fund $86,912

(c) Other Overlapping or Additional Jurisdictional Responsibilities:

Agency Name	Type of Responsibility
Montana Natural Heritage Program	Species of Concern *(Appendix B)*
State Historic Preservation Office	Cultural Clearance
Sweet Grass County Weed District	Weed Management Coordination

9. Narrative Summary of the Proposed Action:

The scenic Boulder River originates in the rugged, high elevations of the Beartooth Mountains in the Gallatin National Forest. It flows down 7,300 feet and 60 miles through mixed conifers, deciduous trees, shrubs, grassland, and agricultural land to join the Yellowstone River at Big Timber. Most of its drainage lies within the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness. The upper 22.5 miles of the Boulder River cuts through a glacial valley, flowing clear, cold and fast in a spectacular sub-alpine setting. As the river runs north, its gradient lessens, resulting in clean gravels, riffles, runs, and deep pools. Below Natural Bridge and Boulder Falls, the Boulder River meanders through agricultural land to its confluence with the East Boulder River. Its final 28 miles to the mouth are somewhat steeper and strewn with boulders and cobbles. The Boulder, East Boulder, and West Boulder rivers and their many tributaries provide a wide diversity of fisheries habitats and recreational opportunities while supporting an agricultural economy. The system is part of the habitat required by fish from the Yellowstone River. It is subject to extreme runoffs, droughts, wildfires, mass wasting of soils and rock, and the impacts of agriculture, land development and channelization. Upper portions of the Boulder River are designated as “Scenic” and have been considered for “Wild and Scenic River” Classification. In addition to agriculture, the Boulder River is important for recreational use along its entire length and is heavily used for fishing, non-motorized boating, floating, hunting, and wildlife viewing.

Big Rock FAS is located on the Boulder River approximately 5 miles upstream of the mouth of the Boulder River near Big Timber, Montana. The Boulder River is open to angling year-round along its entire length and use by anglers is heavy. According to recent FWP surveys of the Boulder River, the average angler days per year from 2005 to 2013 on the 37-mile stretch from the mouth near Big Timber (river mile 0) to Boulder Falls (Natural Bridge, river mile 37) was 16,417, with a low of 13,959 in 2013 and a high of 18,190 in 2011. The regional ranking for this stretch of river averaged the 7th most fished body of water, and ranged from 3 to 11 for the same period. The state ranking for this stretch of river averaged the 45th most fished body of water out of more than 1,400 stream reaches, lakes and reservoirs in Montana surveyed annually by FWP. Boulder Forks FAS (river mile 20) and Big Rock (river mile 5) are the only FWP managed FAS’s on the Boulder River. In addition, a boat ramp is located on the Boulder River Park, which is owned and managed by the City of Big Timber.

Vegetation on Big Rock FAS is diverse with four Ecological Systems found on the FAS, as defined by the Montana Natural Heritage Program (MNHP), with the majority of the site classified as Great Plains Riparian. The most common plant species found on Big Rock FAS include narrowleaf cottonwood, quaking aspen, Douglas-fir, sandbar willow, yellow willow, peachleaf willow, planeleaf willow, water birch, Wood’s rose, chokecherry, red-osier dogwood, snowberry, serviceberry, currant, gooseberry, western wheatgrass, orchardgrass, smooth brome, and Kentucky bluegrass. Though cheatgrass, a species classified as regulated by the Montana Department of Agriculture, is found throughout the FAS, the only noxious weeds, as classified by the Montana Department of Agriculture, are scattered, small

concentrations of spotted knapweed, Canada thistle, houndstongue, and leafy spurge. No Montana Plant Species of Concern have been observed in the vicinity of Big Rock FAS.

Wildlife species found in the vicinity of Big Rock FAS include white-tailed and mule deer, elk, moose, black bear, wolves, mountain lion, red fox, coyote, badger, beaver, northern river otter, American mink, and a variety of small mammals. A wide variety of resident and migratory bird species use or travel through the area on a seasonal basis, including Canada geese, bald eagle, golden eagle, osprey, American white pelican, great horned owl, great blue heron, gray (Hungarian) partridge, sharp-tailed grouse, and a variety of other raptors, waterfowl, and songbirds. Peregrine falcon, listed as DM by the USFWS, was delisted from federal ranking and is now being monitored. The search of the MNHP element occurrence database indicates that great blue heron, bald eagle, greater sage-grouse, little brown myotis, black-tailed prairie dog, and greater short-horned lizard, Montana Animal Species of Concern, have been observed on or near Big Rock FAS. Common game fish found in this stretch of the Boulder River include brown trout, rainbow trout, and mountain whitefish. Other fish species found in this reach include mountain sucker, longnose sucker, mottled sculpin, and longnose dace.

The 69-acre Big Rock FAS has been a popular recreational site since its acquisition by FWP in 1975. Existing facilities at the FAS include: a gravel access road; a gravel loop road with unimproved parking along the loop; a pioneered river access for hand launching boats and rafts; a gravel camp loop road; four pioneered campsites; one concrete vault latrine; one culvert on the access road; barrier rock; boundary and riparian fencing; and directional, informational and regulatory signs. Primitive camping is currently allowed on the site without a fee and hunting is allowed during established hunting seasons for archery hunting only.

As a result of heavy spring flows scouring and eroding the Boulder River bank, the FAS loop road is now too close to the Boulder River. In an effort to protect the road and other FAS facilities from damage during heavy spring flows, to enhance recreational opportunities, and to reduce resource degradation, FWP proposes to relocate FAS facilities away from the riverbank and improve recreational facilities. Proposed FAS improvements include: 1) development of two new parking areas to accommodate approximately three truck/trailer vehicles and four single vehicles; 2) reclamation of the existing loop road adjacent to the riverbank; 3) construction of a new loop road over 120’ from the riverbank; 4) development of five designated campsites; 5) graveling the pioneered river access for hand launching boats and rafts; 6) reconditioning the existing camp loop road and access road; 7) installation of barrier rock to control vehicle movement; and 8) installation of informational and directional signs.

The property would continue to be managed under existing FWP public use regulations. Management of the FAS includes routine maintenance, control of vehicles, regulation of hunting and camping, and other accepted FWP recreation area management policies. Protection of the natural resources, the health and safety of visitors, and consideration of neighboring properties are being considered and incorporated into improvement plans for this site. Extension of the access road, construction of a designated parking area, improvement of the existing parking area, and graveling the pioneered river access would renhance visitor use of this site, reduce resource degradation, and provide long-term protection of the resources. Archery hunting and overnight camping would be allowed but off-road vehicle use would not be allowed. The Proposed Action at Big Rock FAS would improve recreational opportunities and protect FAS facilities from flood damage on the scenic and popular Boulder River.

10. Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives:

Alternative A: No Action.

If no action is taken and FAS facilities are not relocated away from the Boulder River bank, the FAS loop road could eventually become undercut and wash away. Vehicle parking would continue to be inconvenient and inefficient, with vehicles often blocking other vehicles during times of heavy visitation. Camping facilities would continue to be primitive and insufficient and launching of non-motorized boats and rafts would continue to be difficult. FWP would continue to provide general maintenance of the site and would continue to implement the Statewide Integrated Weed Management Plan using chemical, biological, and mechanical methods to control weeds on the property.

Alternative B: Proposed Action.

As a result of heavy spring flows scouring and eroding the Boulder River bank, the FAS access road is now too close to the Boulder River. In an effort to protect FAS facilities from damage during heavy spring flows, to enhance recreational opportunities, and to reduce resource degradation, FWP proposes to relocate FAS facilities away from the riverbank. Proposed improvements include: developing two designated parking areas; reclaiming the loop road adjacent to the river; developing a new loop road for additional parking, reconditioning the access road; developing designated campsites, and graveling the pioneered river access.

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 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, 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 construction of the parking areas, reclamation of the loop road, graveling the pioneered river access, and development of campsites. All disturbed areas would be seeded with a native seed mix to minimize erosion, decrease sediment delivery to the Boulder River, and minimize the spread of noxious weeds. The FAS is managed for recreation and wildlife habitat and is not under commercial agricultural production. The Proposed Action would not affect soil productivity or soil fertility. FWP 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. Erosion of the Boulder River bank is causing sedimentation of the Boulder River in the vicinity of the FAS and degradation of native riparian vegetation. The relocation of the loop road and parking area away from the riverbank, development of designated parking areas and campsites, reclamation of the existing loop road, graveling the pioneered river access, and re-vegetation of unimproved areas would reduce erosion of those surfaces and reduce sedimentation of the river. Minor amounts of sediment may enter the river during construction of the new loop road, parking areas, and campsites, reclamation of the existing loop road, graveling the river access, and reconditioning of the access road. However, upon completion, erosion and sedimentation to the river would be reduced from previous levels.

	IMPACT *

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

2a. Dust may be temporarily generated during development of the new loop road, parking areas, campsites and rehabilitation of the existing loop road. If additional materials were needed off-site, loading at the source site would generate minor amounts of dust. FWP would follow FWP BMP during all phases of construction to minimize risks and reduce dust that may bother FAS users and neighboring residences. See *Appendix D* for the BMP. There would be a temporary increase in diesel exhaust from equipment used during construction. If the Proposed Action were implemented, odors from diesel exhaust would dissipate rapidly. These impacts would be short term and minor.

2b. The latrine would continue to be regularly maintained by FWP staff to minimize objectionable odors.

2e. The proposed project would have no impact on air quality in the vicinity of Big Rock FAS and would not result in any discharge that could conflict with federal or state are quality regulations.

	IMPACT

3. WATER Will the proposed action result in:	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.)			X		X	3l.
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.)			X		Yes Positive	3.m.

3a. The proposed improvements may cause a temporary, localized increase in turbidity in the Boulder River. FWP would obtain a Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) 318 Authorization Permit for Short Term Water Quality Standard for Turbidity. FWP BMP would be followed during all construction *(Appendix D).*

3b. The relocation of the loop road and parking area away from the riverbank, development of designated parking areas and campsites, reclamation of the existing loop road, graveling the pioneered river access, and re-vegetation of unimproved areas would reduce erosion of those surfaces and reduce sedimentation of the river, thus improving the water quality in the immediate area. 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 a temporary increase in sediment delivery to the river. FWP

BMP would be followed during all phases of construction to minimize these risks *(Appendix D).*

3l. According to the Sweet Grass County Floodplain Administrator, the proposed project site on Big Rock FAS is located within a designated floodplain, as shown on the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Digital Map #30097C0665B, Panel #665B, effective date May 18, 2015. The proposed river access, existing loop road, and several pioneered campsites are located within the floodway and the remainder of the project site is located within the 100-year floodplain, with a 1% annual chance of a flood hazard. Permits from FWP, Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), the US Army Corps of Engineers, and Sweet Grass County will be obtained to insure the proposed project will be in compliance with federal, state, and county floodplain and water quality regulations.

3m. All impacts to water quality resulting from construction would be temporary. Water quality of the river could improve as a result of the proposed project by reducing sedimentation into the river from surface and riverbank erosion.

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 Positive	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		Yes	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?		X				4f.
g. Other:						

4a. The Proposed Action would have no impact on the plant diversity or productivity of the FAS and would have a minor impact on plant abundance. 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 and all pioneered areas would be reseeded with a native seed mix. Construction of the Proposed Action would disturb a relatively small area that has been disturbed by public use for years.

The relocation of the existing loop road and unimproved parking area away from the riverbank, rehabilitation of the existing loop road, graveling the pioneered river access, and development of designated parking areas and campsites would reduce ongoing and future degradation of riparian vegetation. The proposed project would have an overall beneficial impact on the FAS plant communities.

4b. Vegetation on Big Rock FAS is diverse with four Ecological Systems found on the FAS, as defined by the Montana Natural Heritage Program (MNHP). The majority of the site is classified as *Great Plains Riparian*, with *Great Plains Floodplain; Rocky Mountain Lower Montane- Foothill Riparian Woodland and Shrubland; and Rocky Mountain Lower Montane Foothill and Valley Grassland* also found on the FAS. The most common plant species found on Big Rock FAS include narrowleaf cottonwood, black cottonwood, Douglas-fir, sandbar willow, yellow willow, peachleaf willow, planeleaf willow, water birch, Wood's rose, chokecherry, red-osier dogwood, snowberry, serviceberry, currant, gooseberry, western wheatgrass, orchardgrass, smooth brome, and Kentucky bluegrass. Though cheatgrass, a species classified as regulated by the Montana Department of Agriculture, is found throughout the FAS, the only noxious weeds, as classified by the Montana Department of Agriculture, are scattered concentrations of spotted knapweed, Canada thistle, houndstongue, and leafy spurge.

4c. A search of the MNHP Montana Species of Concern database found that no Montana Plant Species of Concern have been observed in the vicinity of Big Rock FAS.

4d. Because the FAS is not under commercial agricultural production, the proposed project would have no impact on the productivity or profitability of agricultural production on the FAS.

4e. Leafy spurge, Canada thistle, and spotted knapweed are the most common noxious weeds found in the vicinity of the Proposed Action. 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 the Sweet Grass County Weed Department, 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 also 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 to minimize the spread of noxious weeds. In addition to these methods, the Sweet Grass County Weed District contracts with a local rancher to control leafy spurge by grazing sheep on the FAS. Weed control costs for Big Rock FAS in 2016 will be approximately $1,000, which included spraying by both FWP and Sweet Grass County Weed Department. FWP estimates that weed control will cost approximately $1,100 in 2017.

4f. According to a search of the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) Web Soil Survey on March 14, 2016, approximately five acres of the proposed project site is classified as Farmland of Local Importance and approximately one acre is classified as Not Prime Farmland. The site has not been under agricultural production since FWP acquired the property in 1975. A search of the MNHP wetland-mapping program on March 14, 2016 found that approximately three acres of the proposed project site is classified as a Lotic Riparian Forest with lest than one acre as Riparian Scrub-Shrub. Less than one acre of the project site located adjacent to the access road is classified as Freshwater Emergent Wetland. Because the existing access road has been heavily used since 1975 and the project area is small, there would be very little impact to this wetland resulting from reconditioning the access road.

	IMPACT

5. FISH/WILDLIFE Will the proposed action result in:	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Deterioration of critical fish or wildlife habitat?		X				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				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.)		X				5h.
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.)		X				5i.

5a. This stretch of the Boulder River and the vicinity around the FAS is not considered critical habitat for any fish or wildlife species, so the Proposed Action would have no impact on any critical fish or wildlife habitat. The proposed improvements are designed to minimize impacts to wildlife habitat. The project is designed so that few trees or shrubs would be removed for construction of the parking areas, loop road, and campsites and every effort would be made to preserve all large healthy trees.

5b/5c. Wildlife species found in the vicinity of Big Rock FAS include white-tailed and mule deer, elk, moose, black bear, wolves, mountain lion, red fox, coyote, badger, beaver, northern river otter, American mink, and a variety of small mammals. A wide variety of resident and migratory bird species use or travel through the area on a seasonal basis, including Canada geese, bald eagle, golden eagle, osprey, great horned owl, great blue heron, gray (Hungarian) partridge, sharp-tailed grouse, and a variety of other raptors, waterfowl, and songbirds. According to Justin Paugh, FWP Region 5 Wildlife Biologist, the proposed project would have no impact on wildlife or wildlife habitat.

Common game fish found in this stretch of the Boulder River include brown trout, rainbow trout, and mountain whitefish. Other fish species found in this reach include mountain sucker, longnose sucker, mottled sculpin, and longnose dace. It is possible for Yellowstone cutthroat trout, a Montana Species of Concern, to be found in this stretch, though these species have not been detected during FWP surveys since 2004. According to Jason Rhoten, FWP Region 5 Fisheries Biologist, the proposed project is not expected to have any impact on the aquatic habitat or fish species of the Boulder River.

5f. A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program (MNHP) element occurrence database indicates no occurrences of Threatened, Endangered, or other species federally ranked by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) have been found in the vicinity of Big Rock FAS.

Peregrine falcon, listed as DM by the USFWS, was delisted from federal ranking and is now being monitored. The search indicates that great blue heron, bald eagle, greater sage-grouse, little brown myotis, black-tailed prairie dog, and greater short-horned lizard, Montana Animal Species of Concern, have been observed on or near Big Rock FAS *(Appendix B)*. According to Justin Paugh, bald eagles are also common in the area though the nearest bald eagle nest is over five miles south of the FAS. Golden eagles are frequently observed in the Boulder River Valley though no golden eagle nest is located in the vicinity of Big Rock FAS. There are also no great blue heron rookeries in the vicinity of the FAS. As a result, the proposed project would not impact golden eagle, bald eagle, or great blue heron nesting. According to Justin Paugh, even though black bears and wolves occasionally move through the area, construction of the proposed project and any subsequent increase in public use would not adversely impact any of these species as they are likely accustomed to some level of disturbance. The area has been disturbed by nearby highways, agricultural use, and has had heavy recreational use by for years.

According to Abigail Nelson, FWP Wolf Management Specialist, Big Rock FAS is within the habitat of the gray wolf. Currently there is one radio-collared pack that has home ranges that overlap the project area, but only occasionally use the area. While it is possible for wolves to travel through the project area, none have been recently sighted in the immediate area of Big Rock FAS. The wolf population in Montana is strong and wolves may pass through just about any area including this site. According to Abigail Nelson, FWP has no concerns with this project impacting gray wolves and no adverse impacts are anticipated from the proposed project on the wolf population.

5h. A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program (MNHP) element occurrence database indicates no occurrences of Threatened, Endangered, or other species federally ranked by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) have been found in the vicinity of Big Rock FAS. Peregrine falcon, listed as DM by the USFWS, was delisted from federal ranking and is now being monitored. The search indicates that great blue heron, bald eagle, greater sage-grouse, little brown myotis, black-tailed prairie dog, and greater short-horned lizard, Montana Animal Species of Concern, have been observed on or near Big Rock FAS

5i. No wildlife species would be imported or exported to the area as a result of the proposed development. This project only involves the improvement of the FAS and will not promote the introduction or spread of invasive species.

B. HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

	IMPACT

6. NOISE/ELECTRICAL EFFECTS Will the proposed action result in:	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 serve 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 would cause a temporary, minor increase in noise levels at the project site. Any increase in noise levels at the construction site would be short term and minor.

6b. Five residences are located within ½ mile of Big Rock 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 attempt to limit construction to periods of low visitation to minimize disturbance to others.

There could be a minor increase in visitor use as a result of the improved parking, launching, and camping facilities, which could increase noise levels and disturb nearby neighbors. The FAS would be managed and regulated to minimize noise disturbance to neighbors.

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. Conflicted 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		X	7c.
d. Adverse effects on or relocation of residences?		X				

7a. Land use would not change at Big Rock FAS so the proposed project would have no impact on the productivity or profitability of the FAS.

7c. The Proposed Action could result in increased use of the 8-Mile Bridge on Highway 298 by visitors that launch boats and rafts at the bridge and take out at Big Rock FAS. Visitors frequently launch at 8-Mile Bridge, located about twelve miles upstream of the FAS, where parking is currently limited. Parking could become even more limited upon completion of the

Proposed Action, possibly creating traffic and safety issues during the few weeks of the year when the river is high enough to support rafts and boats.

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)			X		Yes	8d.

8a. Physical disturbance of the soil during construction would encourage the establishment of additional noxious weeds on the site. In conjunction with the Sweet Grass 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 river during construction. Contractors would have absorbent materials on site 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 FWP BMP during all phases of construction to minimize risks *(Appendix D).*

8c. The proposed project would improve public safety by improving boat hand-launching facilities, providing adequate parking, and improving traffic flow, thereby minimizing vehicle conflicts between visitors.

8d. The use of herbicides to control noxious weeds could result in temporary water contamination from an inadvertent spill. The use of herbicides would be in compliance with application guidelines, outlined in the FWP Statewide Integrated Noxious Weed Management Plan, to minimize this risk and would be applied by people trained in safe handling techniques.

	IMPACT

9. COMMUNITY IMPACT Will the proposed action result in:	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 boat hand-launching and parking facilities. 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 on Old Boulder Road. There could be a slight increase in traffic along the FAS access road as a result of the improved FAS facilities, disturbing the neighbor located along the access road.

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 the site would continue to be patrolled by FWP.

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

10e. Overnight camping at the improved campsites would continue to be allowed with no fee and, therefore, no income would be generated from camping fees.

10f. Annual operating, maintenance, and personnel expense for fiscal year 2016 is estimated to total approximately $2,500 and is not expected to change for 2017.

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		Yes Positive	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.)		X				11d.

11a/b. The Proposed Action would improve the aesthetic values of the FAS. Even though the river access, access road, and parking area would be visible from the Boulder River, rehabilitation of the loop road would improve the aesthetic value of the area.

11b. The site is already developed and the Proposed Action would have no effect on the aesthetic character of the neighborhood or community.

11c. The Proposed Action would improve recreational use of the area by improving the boat launching, camping, and parking facilities of the FAS and improving traffic flow through the FAS. This could benefit local retail and service businesses *(Appendix C - Tourism Report).*

11d. No designated wild or scenic rivers, trails, or wilderness areas would be impacted by the proposed improvements.

	IMPACT

12. CULTURAL/HISTORICAL RESOURCES Will the proposed action result in:	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	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 12.a.)		X				12d.

12a/d. Prior to acquisition in 1975, a cultural resource inventory was completed and FWP concluded that there was a low likelihood of adverse impacts to cultural resources if the property was acquired and developed as then proposed. FWP contracted with a cultural resource specialist to conduct a new cultural resource assessment in March 2016 to determine whether the Proposed Action would impact cultural resources. Concurrence with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) would be sought before construction begins. 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.)		X				13f.
g. For P-R/D-J, list any federal or state permits required.		X				13g.

During construction of the Proposed Action, 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 would positively impact the public's recreational use of Boulder River, an important, popular, and heavily used recreational river. The proposed improvements could result in increased use at 8-Mile Bridge by floaters and boaters, where parking is limited.

13f. Big Rock FAS is a very popular and heavily used FAS. The proposed project is designed to improve recreational facilities and minimize damage to FAS facilities of Big Rock FAS and is not expected to generate organized opposition or substantial public controversy.

13g. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineer 404 Federal Clean Water Act is the only federal permit required for the proposed development. The Montana DEQ 318 Short Term Water Quality Standard for Turbidity and the FWP 124 Montana Stream Protection Act are the only state permits required for the proposed development. In addition, a Sweet Grass County Floodplain and Sanitation Permit would also be required.

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 would positively impact the public's recreational use this stretch of the Boulder River, an important, popular, and heavily used recreational river. However, the proposed improvements could result in increased use at 8-Mile Bridge by floaters and boaters, where parking is limited.

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. Though peregrine falcon, listed as DM by the USFWS and great blue heron, bald eagle, greater sage-grouse, little brown myotis, black-tailed prairie dog, and greater short-horned lizard, Montana Animal Species of Concern have been observed within the vicinity of the FAS, it is unlikely that the Proposed Action would have any impact on these species or their habitat. None of these species are known to nest in the vicinity of Big Rock FAS and these species are likely accustomed to disturbances from recreation, agriculture, and residential development that have occurred in the area for years.

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 Sweet Grass 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 Big Rock FAS would improve recreational opportunities by providing improved parking, camping, and watercraft launching facilities, reducing flood damage of FAS facilities, and by reducing erosion and resource degradation. In addition, the proposed improvements would improve recreational opportunities for fishing, boating, floating, hunting, and wildlife viewing on the very popular and scenic Boulder River.

PART IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

1. Public involvement:

The public will be notified in the following manners to comment on the Big Rock FAS Proposed Improvement Project, the Proposed Action and alternatives:

- Two public notices in each of these papers: *the Big Timber Pioneer, the Billings Gazette, and the Helena Independent Record.*
- Public notice on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks web page: *http://fwp.mt.gov.*
- Draft EA's will be available at the FWP Region 5 Headquarters in Billings 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 5 issues.

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) thirty days. Written comments will be accepted until 5:00 p.m., date , 2016 and can be emailed to kfrazer@mt.gov or mailed to the addresses below:

Big Rock FAS Proposed Improvement Project
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Region 5
2300 Lake Elmo Drive
Billings, MT 59105

PART V. EA PREPARATION

1. Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required? NO If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this Proposed Action.

Based on an evaluation of impacts to the physical and human environment under MEPA, this environmental review revealed no significant positive or 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:

Ken Frazer
Region 5 Fisheries Manager
2300 Lake Elmo Drive
Billings, MT 59105
kfrazer@mt.gov
(406) 247-2961

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
Design and Construction
Lands Unit
Legal Unit

Fisheries Division
Wildlife Division
Montana Natural Heritage Program – Natural Resources Information System (NRIS)
Montana Historic Preservation Office

APPENDICES

A. MCA 23-1-110 Qualification Checklist
B. Native Species Report - Montana Natural Heritage Program
C. Tourism Report – Department of Commerce
D. Fish, Wildlife and Parks Best Management Practices

APPENDIX A
23-1-110 MCA PROJECT QUALIFICATION CHECKLIST

Date: March 7, 2016 **Person Reviewing:** Andrea Darling

Project Location: Big Rock FAS is located on the Boulder River on Old Boulder Road, 4 miles south of Big Timber, Montana in Sweet Grass County, Section 34, Township 1 North, Range 14 East.

Description of Proposed Work: The 69-acre Big Rock Fishing Access Site (FAS) has been a popular recreational site along the Boulder River since its acquisition by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) in 1975 and provides quality recreational opportunities for fishing, non-motorized boating, floating, camping, hunting, picnicking, and wildlife viewing. As a result of heavy spring flows scouring and eroding the Boulder River bank, the FAS access road is now too close to the Boulder River. In an effort to protect FAS facilities from damage during heavy spring flows, enhance recreational opportunities, and reduce resource degradation, FWP proposes to relocate FAS facilities away from the riverbank. Proposed improvements include; developing two designated parking areas; reclaiming the loop road adjacent to the river; reconditioning the access road; designating and improving the unimproved campsites, and graveling the river access.

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.)

[ ] A. New roadway or trail built over undisturbed land?
Comments: No new roadway built over undisturbed land.

[ ] 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: Yes, for the new parking area and improved campsites.

[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 new parking area would expand parking capacity by over 25%.

[ ] E. Any new shoreline alteration that exceeds a doublewide boat ramp or handicapped fishing station?
Comments: No.

[ ] F. Any new construction into lakes, reservoirs, or streams?
Comments: No new construction into the Boulder River.

[ ] G. Any new construction in an area with National Registry quality cultural artifacts (as determined by State Historical Preservation Office)?
Comments: A cultural resource inventory was conducted in February 2016 and no artifacts were found.

[ ] H. Any new above ground utility lines?
Comments: No new utility lines.

[X] I. Any increase or decrease in campsites of 25% or more of an existing number of campsites?
Comments: Yes, there would be an increase of over 25% of designated campsites.

[ ] J. Proposed project significantly changes the existing features or use pattern, including

effects of a series of individual projects?
Comments: No. The proposed project 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 Big Rock 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 no occurrences of Threatened, Endangered, or other species federally ranked by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) have been found in the vicinity of Big Rock FAS. Peregrine falcon, listed as DM by the USFWS, was delisted from federal ranking and is now being monitored. The search indicates that great blue heron, bald eagle, greater sage-grouse, little brown myotis, black-tailed prairie dog, and greater short-horned lizard, Montana Animal Species of Concern, have been observed on or near Big Rock FAS. No Montana Plant Species of Concern were observed in the vicinity of Big Rock FAS. 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 ANIMALS IN THE VICINITY OF BIG ROCK FISHING ACCESS SITE

1. Ardea Herodias (Great Blue Heron)

Vertebrate animal- Bird — *Habitat- Riparian Forest*

Natural Heritage Ranks
State: **S3**
Global: **G5**

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

Element Occurrence data was reported of great blue heron eagle within one mile of the project area. Last recorded observation date was 2011.

2. Haliaeetus leucocephalus (Bald Eagle)

Vertebrate animal- Bird — *Habitat- Riparian Forest*

Natural Heritage Ranks
State: **S4**
Global: **G5**

Federal Agency Status:
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**: BGEPA; MBTA; BCC**
U.S. Forest Service**: Sensitive**
U.S. Bureau of Land Management: **Sensitive**

Element Occurrence data was reported of bald eagle within one mile of the project area. Last recorded observation date was 2014.

3. Falco peregrinus (Peregrine Falcon)

Vertebrate animal- Bird — *Habitat- Cliff, Canyons*

Natural Heritage Ranks
State: **S3**
Global: **G4**

Federal Agency Status:
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**: DM**
U.S. Forest Service**: Sensitive**
U.S. Bureau of Land Management: **Sensitive**

Element Occurrence data was reported of peregrine falcon within the project area. Last recorded observation date was 2006.

4. Centrocercus urophasianus (Greater Sage-Grouse)

Vertebrate animal- Bird — *Habitat- Sagebrush*

Natural Heritage Ranks
State: **S2**
Global: **G3G4**

Federal Agency Status:
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**:**
U.S. Forest Service**: Sensitive**
U.S. Bureau of Land Management: **Sensitive**

Element Occurrence data was reported of greater sage-grouse within one mile of the project area. Last recorded observation date was 2008.

5. Myotis lucifugus (Little Brown Myotis)

Vertebrate animal- Mammal — *Habitat- Generalist*

Natural Heritage Ranks
State: **S3**
Global: **G3**

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

Element Occurrence data was reported of little brown myotis within the project area. Last recorded observation date was 1917.

6. **Cynomys ludovicianus (Black-tailed Prairie Dog)**

Vertebrate animal- Mammal	*Habitat- Grasslands*
Natural Heritage Ranks	Federal Agency Status:
State: **S3**	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**:**
Global: **G4**	U.S. Forest Service**: Sensitive**
	U.S. Bureau of Land Management: **Sensitive**

Element Occurrence data was reported of black-tailed prairie dog within the project area. No observation date was recorded.

7. **Phrynosoma hernandesi (Greater Short-Horned Lizard)**

Vertebrate animal- Reptile	*Habitat- Sandy, gravelly soils*
Natural Heritage Ranks	Federal Agency Status:
State: **S3**	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**:**
Global: **G5**	U.S. Forest Service**: Sensitive**
	U.S. Bureau of Land Management: **Sensitive**

Element Occurrence data was reported of greater short-horned lizard within the project area. Last recorded observation date was 1953.

APPENDIX C
TOURISM REPORT

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

The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and 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:

Jeri Duran, Bureau Chief
Montana Office of Tourism
301 S. Park Ave.
Helena, MT 59601

Project Name: Big Rock Fishing Access Site Proposed Improvement Project

Project Description: The 69-acre Big Rock Fishing Access Site (FAS) has been a popular recreational site along the Boulder River since its acquisition by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) in 1975 and provides quality recreational opportunities for fishing, non-motorized boating, floating, camping, hunting, picnicking, and wildlife viewing. As a result of heavy spring flows scouring and eroding the Boulder River bank, the FAS access road is now too close to the Boulder River. In an effort to protect FAS facilities from damage during heavy flows, enhance recreational opportunities, and reduce resource degradation, FWP proposes to relocate FAS facilities away from the riverbank. Proposed improvements include; developing two designated parking areas; reclaiming the loop road adjacent to the river; reconditioning the access road; designating and improving the unimproved campsites, and graveling the pioneered river access.

1. Would this site development project have an impact on the tourism economy?
   NO **YES** If YES, briefly describe:

   Yes, as described, this 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 Jeri Bucy Date March 14, 2016

APPENDIX D
MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE AND 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. Road Design

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. Drainage from Road Surface

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.