Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

PO Box 200701
1420 East Sixth Avenue
Helena, MT 59620-0701
August 2009

To those interested in Flathead Lake islands:

The attached decision notice approves the Flathead Lake Islands Final Management Plan for implementation. Four Flathead Lake islands owned by Fish, Wildlife & Parks are considered under this plan: Wild Horse Island State Park, Cedar, Bird and O'Neil (Douglas) Islands. The plan guides natural resource conservation, recreation, interpretation and educational efforts, park operations, and visitor services for the next ten years.

Seven people commented on the draft plan during a thirty-day comment period ending June 5. All comments were considered and the plan modified accordingly. The plan is an update to the 1994 Wild Horse Island Management Plan and will be consulted regularly to guide management actions at the four islands. The Management Action Timeline identifies priority projects, but this list is sure to change over time. It does help focus management efforts on the most important issues as viewed today. Prior to implementing, certain projects will be subject to an environmental assessment and additional public review as required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act.

Copies of the Flathead Lake Islands Final Management Plan can be obtained on the FWP web page: fwp.mt.gov under State Parks. If you prefer, you can pick up a copy of the management plan from the FWP Kalispell Headquarters, 490 N. Meridian Road, between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., or call (406) 752-5501 to request a copy.

Sincerely,

Chas Van Genderen
State Parks Administrator

attachment

DECISION NOTICE
FLATHEAD LAKE ISLANDS
FINAL MANAGEMENT PLAN
Effective September 4, 2009

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
1420 East 6th Avenue South
PO Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620-0701

PROPOSAL
The proposal is to adopt the Flathead Lake Islands Final Management Plan and implement the outlined actions as feasible over the next ten years. The islands referred to in the plan include: Wild Horse Island State Park (WHI), and three islands currently categorized as Wildlife Habitat Protection Islands (WHPA): Cedar, Bird and O'Neil (Douglas).

PUBLIC PROCESS
The primary issues and actions outlined in the plan were identified by a public advisory committee who began work in 2003. The planning process stalled while commercial use rules were determined by the Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) Commission and other preliminary management issues were resolved. Draft plans (27 copies), postcards (121) and email notices (112) were sent May 1 to interested parties, as was a FWP statewide press release. The public was also notified of the draft plan via public notice printed May 3 in the Kalispell *Daily InterLake*, *Missoulian*, and Helena *Independent Record*. These publications began a 33-day public comment period ending June 5, 2009. The draft plan and supplemental documents were also posted on the FWP web page with links on several pages and appearing through the full comment period. The public could submit comments via the web page or in writing to the Kalispell FWP Headquarters.

PUBLIC COMMENT
Seven people submitted comments during the thirty-three-day comment period. A summary of topics raised and resulting planning approach is listed below; the final plan was modified accordingly.

Recreation Resources
- Sanitation is of primary concern and must be addressed on Cedar Island prior to allowing overnight use.
- Overnight vehicle parking is available at mainland state parks around Flathead Lake for people wishing to boat to public islands and camp when allowed.
- Overnight use will not be allowed on O'Neill Island due to its small size and associated impacts, including human waste.
- As proposed in the plan, recreational use would be managed to limit resources impacts on Cedar and Bird Islands, including overnight use. Delineating camping sites and limiting use

to six people per site would likely mitigate impacts and perhaps improve conditions over the dispersed use currently occurring. A future environmental assessment will evaluate this proposal more thoroughly.

- Camping would be open to motorized and non-motorized boaters.
- The final plan clarifies that any group of 16 or more must acquire a special use permit. This is consistent with Wild Horse Island State Park policy.
- Additional trails on WHI are not proposed to help conserve the natural and primitive nature of the park experience and wildlife habitat.
- The islands will retain a low level of accessibility for people with disabilities to match the primitive setting and desired recreational experience.

Cultural Resources

- The agency will collaborate with tribes who inhabited the area historically, and the State Historic Preservation Office, prior to implementing actions which may impact cultural resources on the islands.
- In accordance with ARM 12.8.501-507, the future state of buildings on Cedar Island will be determined after a cultural inventory has been conducted and alternatives researched. The State Historic Preservation Office will be consulted, as will the public. In addition to the structures' historic significance, the agency will also consider these issues when determining future actions: public safety, costs and budgets, feasibility, social and environmental impacts.

Wildlife Resources

- Overall, wildlife habitat on Wild Horse Island has not deteriorated according to the Regional Wildlife Manager. Though conditions change over time, ungulate populations remain stable and the Palouse Prairie system habitat has improved since FWP has owned the island. Mitigation measures for wildlife related issues will be addressed according to state or species management policies.
- Helicopter netting is nationally recognized as the most efficient, humane and successful means of trapping and transporting bighorn sheep. Sheep removal is necessary to regulate populations appropriate for the available island habitat.
- Mule deer populations will naturally disperse (swim the lake) if population densities rise above the natural threshold. FWP does not trap and transport deer in Montana due to the risk of transmitting Chronic Wasting Disease. Diseases are most likely to occur when ungulates are artificially crowded. The eye infection conjunctivitis, for example, can be spread when ungulates crowd around human supplied grain feeders, thus feeding is now an illegal activity.
- Proposed management of human use and waste, designating camping sites and managing group use is intended to maintain or improve vegetation and soil conditions on the WHPA islands.

Pets

- As stated in the draft plan, pets will not be allowed on the WHPA islands except during waterfowl hunting season, when dogs may be utilized for hunting purposes. This regulation is intended to reduce pet conflicts with users and wildlife, and limit pet related waste.

Primitive Parks Designation

- WHI is the only island designated as a Primitive Park (MCA 23-1-116). This law limits new developments at WHI, but does not prevent responsible property management such as: maintaining existing facilities, managing the natural landscape (like weed and pest control), wildlife management actions and habitat restoration projects.

Administration

- The Actions listed and timeline proposed in this plan illustrate the priorities suggested by the advisory committee and the agency at this time. Prerequisite actions, research, funding and opportunities may influence the feasibility or sequence of the proposed actions.
- Transferring federal aid encumbrance out of the WHPA islands is a high priority in the next two to three years; recreation management expenses will be minimized until this transfer can be accomplished.
- Developing standards and indicators for the Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) will be a primary focus when the plan is adopted. Many actions hinge on monitoring impacts and identifying key indicators.
- Commercial use on the islands may be allowed in the future. The agency will develop policy that equitably evaluates commercial use proposals to ensure activities are safe, compatible with the goals of conserving island resources, and maintain or improve the target recreational experiences on the islands. The draft plan errantly referred to providing equitable access to the islands; as a state park, all people (public, private, commercial) are allowed access *to* the islands. The Commercial Use Rules (ARM 12.14.101) clearly exempt commercial services that shuttle people or vehicles (to the island). The state, however, does have the authority to regulate activities occurring *on* state-owned land (emphasis added).
- Additional zoning maps, visitation tables, and comprehensive rule/law text used for planning are readily available as supplemental documents, but were not included in the plan to minimize document size.
- Determining if a "no wake" zone is needed at Skeeko Bay is outside the scope of this plan.
- FWP staff will continue attending WHI landowners association annual meetings and will inform landowners and interested parties of proposed projects prior to implementation as required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act. Public comments are welcome at any time. The public can contact FWP staff at 406-752-5501, Kalispell.

DECISION

It is my decision to implement the final plan as proposed combined with the above determinations, having considered all comments. In accordance with state and federal policy, environmental analyses will evaluate impacts of qualifying individual actions. The public will be asked to provide additional input to these actions.

The plan is subject to appeal, which must be submitted to the Director in writing, and postmarked within 30 days of the date on this decision notice. The appeal must specifically describe the basis for the appeal, explain how the appellant has previously commented to the department or participated in the decision-making process, and lay out how FWP might address the concerns in the appeal. The appeal should be mailed to: Director, Fish, Wildlife & Parks, PO Box 200701, 1420 East 6th Avenue, Helena, MT 59620. If you have questions regarding this decision notice, please contact the Parks Division at (406) 444-3750.

Chas Van Genderen, Parks Division Administrator
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Flathead Lake Islands

Final Management Plan

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
490 N. Meridian Road
Kalispell, MT 59901
July 2009

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

FWP FLATHEAD LAKE ISLANDS
FINAL MANAGEMENT PLAN APPROVAL

Dave Landstrom, Region One Parks Manager — Date: 7/27/09

Jim Satterfield, Region One Fish & Wildlife Supervisor — Date: 8/3/09

David Risley, Fish & Wildlife Division Administrator — Date: 8/27/09

Chas Van Genderen, Parks Division Administrator — Date: 08/27/09

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Supplemental Documents Available

Copies of these documents can be obtained from FWP Region 1 office at 406-752-5501, or the website *fwp.mt.gov*.

A. Wild Horse Island Visitation Statistics 1995-2008

B. Visitor Preference Surveys 2002
Park Visitor Survey Summary
Property Owners Survey Summary

C. Wild Horse Island Zoning and LAC Process

D. Island Parks Legislation MCA 77-1-405

E. Primitive Parks Legislation MCA 23-1-116

F. Commercial Use Rules ARM 12.14.101

G. Trail Maintenance Level Standards

H. Pictures of Cedar Island Buildings

Acknowledgements

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks recognizes the Flathead Lake Islands Planning Committee for their generous contributions of time and energy during the early stages of this planning process. Without the committee member's dedication to the process, as well as their resources and innovation, the plan would not have been possible.

Committee Members

Lester Bigcrane – Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes

Bobbie Gilmore – Glacier Sea Kayaking/Flathead Paddlers

Laney Hanzel – Flathead Lakers

Hank Harrington – Wild Horse Island Property Owners Association (deceased)

Mike Hutchin – Lake County Commissioners

Sandy Maki – Polson Chamber of Commerce/Glacier Country Tourism Commission

Brent Mitchell – Flathead Chapter of Audubon Society/Flathead Wildlife

Bill Myers – Pointer Scenic Cruises

Greg Poncin – Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation

Meeting Facilitators

Ginny Tribe

Eric Wenum

Representatives from Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Tom Litchfield – District Wildlife Biologist

Sue Dalbey and Kirsten Shelton – Parks Division Statewide Planners

Jerry Sawyer – Park Manager, Flathead Lake State Park

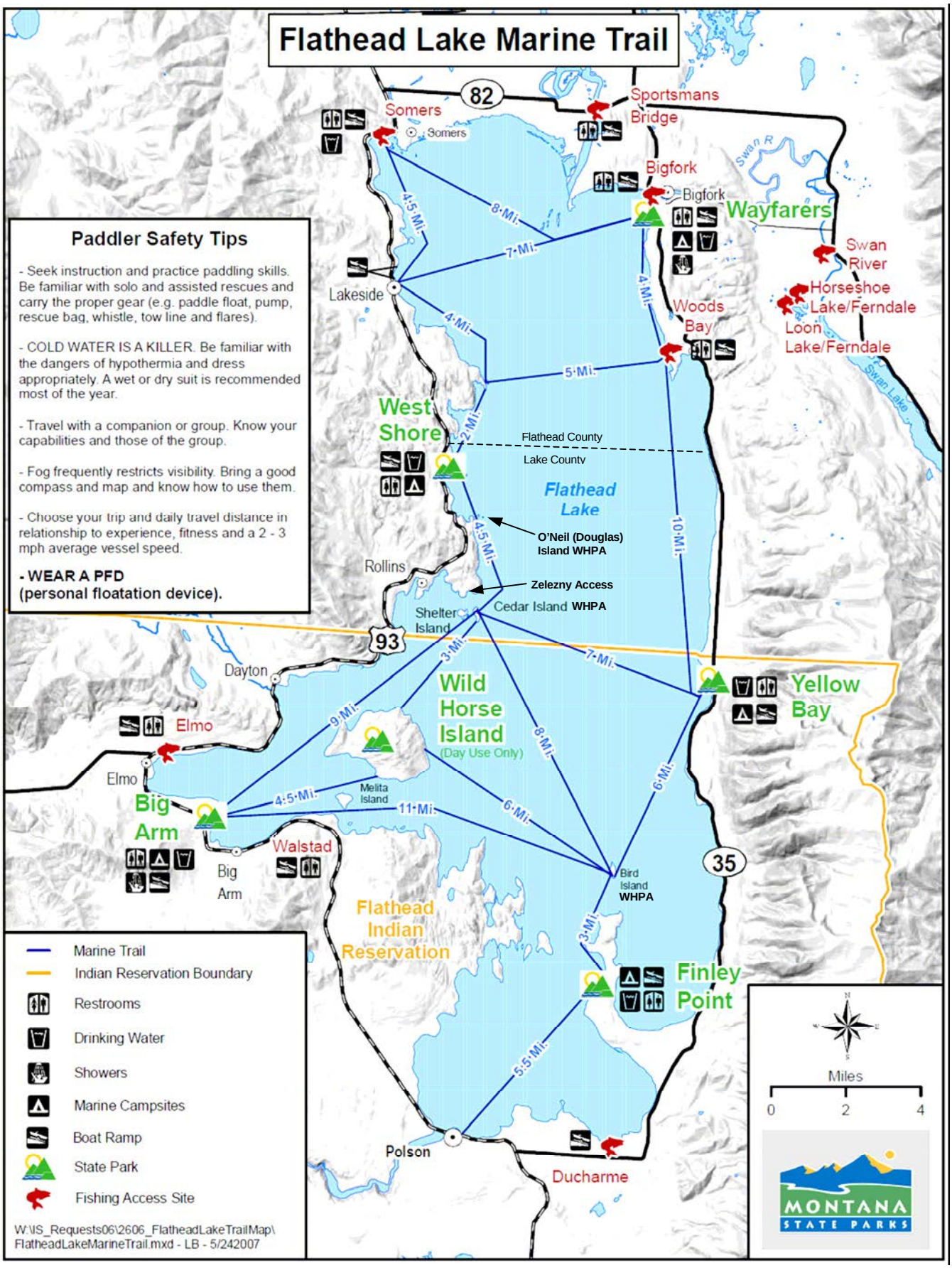
I. INTRODUCTION

Flathead Lake is located in a region marked by increasing tourism and growth of the resident population. Although tourism has brought economic benefit to the valley, it also presents challenges for protecting natural areas. This plan looks at ways to balance recreational opportunities with resource conservation.

The Flathead Lake area has steadily grown in popularity as a tourist destination through the last decade. Lake use has increased and visits to state parks and fishing access sites have also risen. Increases in visitation have occurred not only on the mainland, but also on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) managed islands as well (Figure 1). These include anecdotal increases at Bird, Cedar, O'Neil (Douglas) and measured increases at Wild Horse Islands. In July and August, mainland state park areas are frequently at or near capacity. Parking is often congested at public fishing access sites such as Somers, Bigfork and Walstad. Wild Horse Island visitation has more than tripled in the last fourteen years, from approximately 5,000 visits in 1995 to almost 18,000 visits in 2008. Visual observations by FWP staff confirm that the other islands are receiving more use as well.

The difference between the recreational settings of mainland areas and the islands are significant. The mainland areas are designed for high use levels, where visitors have different expectations from those held for the islands. At mainland parks, recreation expectations and opportunities offer more highly developed facilities, such as boat ramps, docks, and campgrounds with flush toilets and showers. The islands provide a more primitive setting where opportunities exist for solitude and seclusion from the sights and sounds of urban life. Flathead Lake Island recreation opportunities are a unique recreation experience and may be compromised unless a proactive management strategy is adopted.

Figure 1. Flathead Lake Map and Marine Trail



Base map modified 4/22/09 sed

II. PLANNING PROCESS

The original plan for Wild Horse Island (WHI) was developed in 1978. To keep a plan effective, it must periodically undergo review for relevancy and to address changing circumstances. As a part of the planning process, periodic reviews of the WHI plan have occurred over the years. Reviews and plan updates occurred in 1986 and 1994. A special review of the commercial use issue occurred in 1999 and formal rules were adopted by the FWP Commission in 2006. The current update procedure is a continuation of an adaptive planning process, which addresses multiple issues identified for WHI, and incorporates the other FWP-owned islands into the plan.

Past planning efforts for Wild Horse Island have historically included formation of an advisory committee to assist the Department with management decisions. Members are selected for their diversity of interests ranging from wildlife, recreation and wildfire expertise to tourism and economic development. The wide field of participants leads to alternative solutions that consider a broad range of viewpoints. The committee helps identify major issues regarding social and physical impacts, including threats to the resource and suggestions to better manage the island to meet its objectives. A similar methodology was followed in this planning process.

The FWP Flathead Lake Islands Management Plan was developed through a broad public planning process including the FWP Islands Advisory Committee, and public comment on the draft plan. The FWP Islands Advisory Committee, entirely citizen-based, was formed in the fall of 2002 of representatives from a wide range of public and private interests (see Acknowledgements for a list of committee members). Guided by a professional facilitator, the group met four times from mid- December through March to identify issues pertaining to FWP's Flathead Lake Islands and to develop management recommendations for FWP managers. During this period, the committee developed a list of issue areas and a series of management recommendations for all the islands, which were used to form this plan.

To provide additional public input into the process, a visitor study was conducted during the summer of 2002 covering the period from July 4 to September 30. The study consisted of two surveys; one to assess visitor preferences for management of the islands and the other to gather total visitor counts for this time period. Although limited to on-site visitors, the survey data

provided a valuable ‘snapshot” of visitor preferences for management of the island and was useful input for determining future direction.

III. MANAGEMENT APPROACH

The purpose of this plan is to develop a consistent management approach for all Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) owned islands on Flathead Lake. As previously noted, FWP manages four islands on Flathead Lake for wildlife and primitive recreation opportunities. These consist of: Wild Horse Island State Park, Cedar, Bird and O'Neil Islands. Of the four, Wild Horse Island (WHI) is the only one which has a previously written plan. The WHI plan addresses the protection of the natural resources of the island with special emphasis on recreational opportunities and management of visitor impacts.

Wild Horse Island is a state park managed by the Parks Division. Cedar, Bird and O'Neil Islands are categorized as Wildlife Habitat Protection Areas (WHPAs) under the authority of the Wildlife Division. The different land management classifications of islands, i.e. State Park vs. WHPA, has resulted in differing purposes and funding, and therefore, differing management approaches. State Parks are managed for both resource protection and public recreation with active management toward the latter. The WHPAs are more passively managed with the original intent to provide nesting habitat for Canada Geese and other birds; recreation is incidental to the primary purpose.

The end product of habitat protection through purchase of the WHPA islands has been extremely successful, especially in reference to Canada Geese. This species has proliferated throughout the area and populations are stable. Although habitat protection will continue to be a major emphasis in order to ensure stable populations, another opportunity exists for these areas in providing recreation to the public. This will require the WHPA islands to be more actively managed. Although direct visitation data has not been gathered for the WHPAs as it has at Wild Horse Island, it is clear from observations that public use is increasing on the WHPA islands. Trends in population growth and visitation suggest that recreation use will continue to increase, therefore FWP is re-evaluating management of these islands to balance recreational use and wildlife habitat obligations.

This plan proposes transferring management of the current WHPAs from the Wildlife Division to the Parks Division. This would allow the Parks Division to adopt a management strategy similar to that of Wild Horse Island, which emphasizes resource conservation while allowing compatible recreational opportunities. For this change in management to occur, the federal aid encumbrance associated with the WHPAs would be transferred to another property with equal habitat and appraisal values. This transfer is a priority in FWP and is supported by the Director's Office; however, it is contingent upon National Environmental Policy Act review and approval by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

The management plan lays out the overall management direction for the FWP islands on Flathead Lake. This direction may change over time due to funding and evaluation of impacts. Specific actions will be reviewed as required under the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) to ensure full and timely consideration of potential impacts. Examples of actions requiring review include transferring federal aid (wildlife habitat) encumbrance, and developing tent pads. As part of the MEPA process, the public will be notified and have the opportunity to review the specific project in greater detail and comment.

If other islands on Flathead Lake are proposed for FWP acquisition and Parks Division management in the future, the agency would evaluate those opportunities on an individual basis, considering the costs, public benefits, and agency's ability with given budgets and staff.

LIMITS OF ACCEPTABLE CHANGE

The 1994 WHI management plan update adopted a Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) approach and area zoning for the management of Wild Horse Island. This concept essentially states that change is a natural consequence of recreational use and involves both environmental and social changes. The type and extent of these changes varies from area to area because of differences in types and amounts of use, susceptibility of vegetation and soils, desire for solitude and other factors. LAC directs attention from maximum use level or carrying capacity as the key management concern, to the environmental and social conditions desired in a particular setting or zone. Zone management incorporates the LAC process by dividing an area into sub-units or compartments, setting management objectives for these units, and defining and describing the

recreation opportunity afforded in these units through a classification system. Within each zone, there are indicators and standards that can be used to maintain the objectives of the particular unit and the preferred setting. Finally, in order to maintain the standards for the zone, some type of monitoring system must be incorporated into managing the unit. When the standards are approached, met or exceeded, management actions to maintain acceptable levels of change will occur. This plan includes action to complete the LAC framework and implement the process, including collecting baseline data, developing LAC standards and identifying indicators, monitoring resource conditions, and establishing management priorities. More detail is available in Supplemental Document C: Wild Horse Island Zoning and Limits of Acceptable Change Process.

ZONING OVERVIEW

Zoning for recreation areas, in principle, is similar to that found in city or county planning. A particular land area is set aside for specific uses. Just as areas of a city may have single-family dwellings vs. multiple dwellings or allow small businesses along with cluster housing, recreation areas can be zoned for particular types of recreational opportunities, activities and facilities. The zones allow for specific management techniques and strategies that reflect the attributes of the resource, potential recreational opportunities and management objectives.

If the Waterfowl Management Area islands are to be managed in a manner similar to Wild Horse Island, then the approach will use a strategy combining zoning with the LAC concept.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

In addition to the above mentioned techniques for management of the islands in accordance with an LAC approach, it was part of the advisory committee's role to make recommendations and develop more finely honed guiding principles for managing all the islands. The following guidelines were formulated by the advisory committee and adopted by FWP:

- Wild Horse Island is a primitive park. (MCA 23-1-116)
- For the WHPAs, concern for protection of nesting bird habitat should guide all management decisions.
- Active management strategies, including fire, chemical, biological and mechanical measures where appropriate, can protect and maintain the islands and their ecosystems.
- The priority in management decisions and actions should be protection of the Islands environment.
- In order to preserve a more primitive experience for visitors and the health of the ecosystem, dispersed access should be promoted, including the use of designated campsites.
- An island is one component in a larger ecosystem and it is important to monitor impacts of activities around the islands.
- All use of the islands should complement the management goals of protecting the natural resources and should provide opportunities for the public to experience the islands.
- Management of all islands will work to conserve cultural resources as reasonable and feasible.
- Management decisions on all islands will fully consider effects on public health and safety.

From these guidelines, goals and objectives were formulated which ensure that all the islands, including Wild Horse, retain their original priorities and are actively managed for dispersed recreation. The following goals and objectives, which incorporate the prior planning goals set for Wild Horse Island, will be adopted for the new management approach for all the Flathead Lake FWP islands.

MANAGEMENT GOALS

1) **To preserve and where necessary, restore the natural ecological processes and conditions that exist on the islands.**

2) **To ensure that current wildlife habitat is maintained and that opportunities for species propagation are not diminished.**

3) **To provide a range of compatible dispersed recreational opportunities, while maintaining the natural character of the islands and providing for public health and safety.**

4) **To provide educational opportunities, which allow the public to experience, understand and appreciate the unique natural, historical and cultural features of the islands, and which stimulates interest in ecological principles.**

The management goals will be achieved through the attainment of the following objectives:

MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

a) Develop workable management strategies and actions that will preserve the natural conditions of the islands' resources, while providing for regulated compatible recreational activities.
b) Continue to provide secure wildlife breeding and waterfowl nesting habitat during critical periods through seasonal closures where necessary.
c) Develop and implement programs for data collection and resource monitoring of visitor use and impacts.
d) Develop standards for the Limits of Acceptable Change, and adapt and utilize them for all other islands.

ACCESSIBILITY FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

People choose recreation settings based on their expectations about the nature of the recreation experience. Individual's choices often are made with regard to accessibility of the site or area. More developed locations evoke images of easier accessibility than those of a primitive area. Wild Horse Island and the WHPA Islands with their more primitive settings, will not include facilities to make them more accessible than would otherwise be anticipated in their natural state. Designated trails, where established, will be designed at an accessibility level that matches the park's primitive recreation experience and natural environment. Modifications solely for accessibility are determined to be inappropriate for these types of settings. Efforts to inform individuals of difficult accessibility levels will be made through signing at landing sites and other public mainland departure points, and through informational brochures. Electric or hand powered wheelchairs will be allowed if an individual requires one and it is functional on existing surfaces. Resource impacts will determine if restrictions are necessary for future mobility aids as the designs and power systems become more technologically advanced.

RESTRICTIVE FACTORS

Federal Criteria

The WHPA Islands were purchased with a combination of federal Pittman-Robertson funds and state funds in a 75/25 ratio respectively. The use of federal dollars requires that certain conditions are met and continue to be met during the course of ownership by FWP. Among these stipulations is the requirement that the land continue to be utilized as nesting habitat for waterfowl. Compatible recreation is allowed, but must be kept to a level that does not reduce habitat or interfere with the breeding season. Consequently, a seasonal closure during the nesting season and overall protection of the habitat will need to continue for the state to honor the original funding agreement.

Island Parks Bill

In 1997, the Montana Legislature established Mont. Code Ann. 77-1-405, the "Island Parks Bill." The bill essentially states that state-owned islands are limited in development in order to create a unique recreational opportunity for the public and preserve the integrity of the island experience,

while maintaining the island in as natural a condition as possible. FWP will incorporate the legislative purpose of this statute into this plan to achieve those purposes. This plan compliments the law by reiterating the goals and by carrying out actions to address identified concerns in the law.

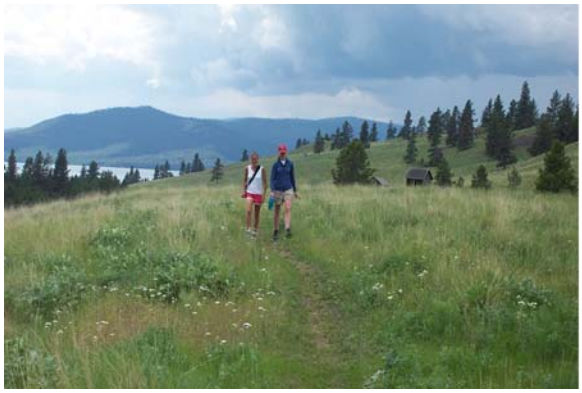
Commercial Use Rules

The planning process included in-depth discussions about commercial use on Wild Horse Island. Since then commercial use has been defined under the Administrative Rules of Montana, 12.14.101, which can be found in the plan's supplemental documents. Commercial use includes any person, group or organization, that makes or attempts to make a profit, vend a service or product, receive money, amortize equipment, or obtain goods or services as compensation from participants in activities occurring on land that is under the control, administration, and jurisdiction of the department. This includes nonprofit organizations and educational groups that receive money from participants in activities occurring on department land. The rule states: "These commercial use rules do not apply to the transferring of vehicles or people" which are typically referred to as shuttles. This plan outlines the objectives to allow equitable access to the islands for commercial purposes, yet protect the resources.

IV. FWP ISLANDS BACKGROUND

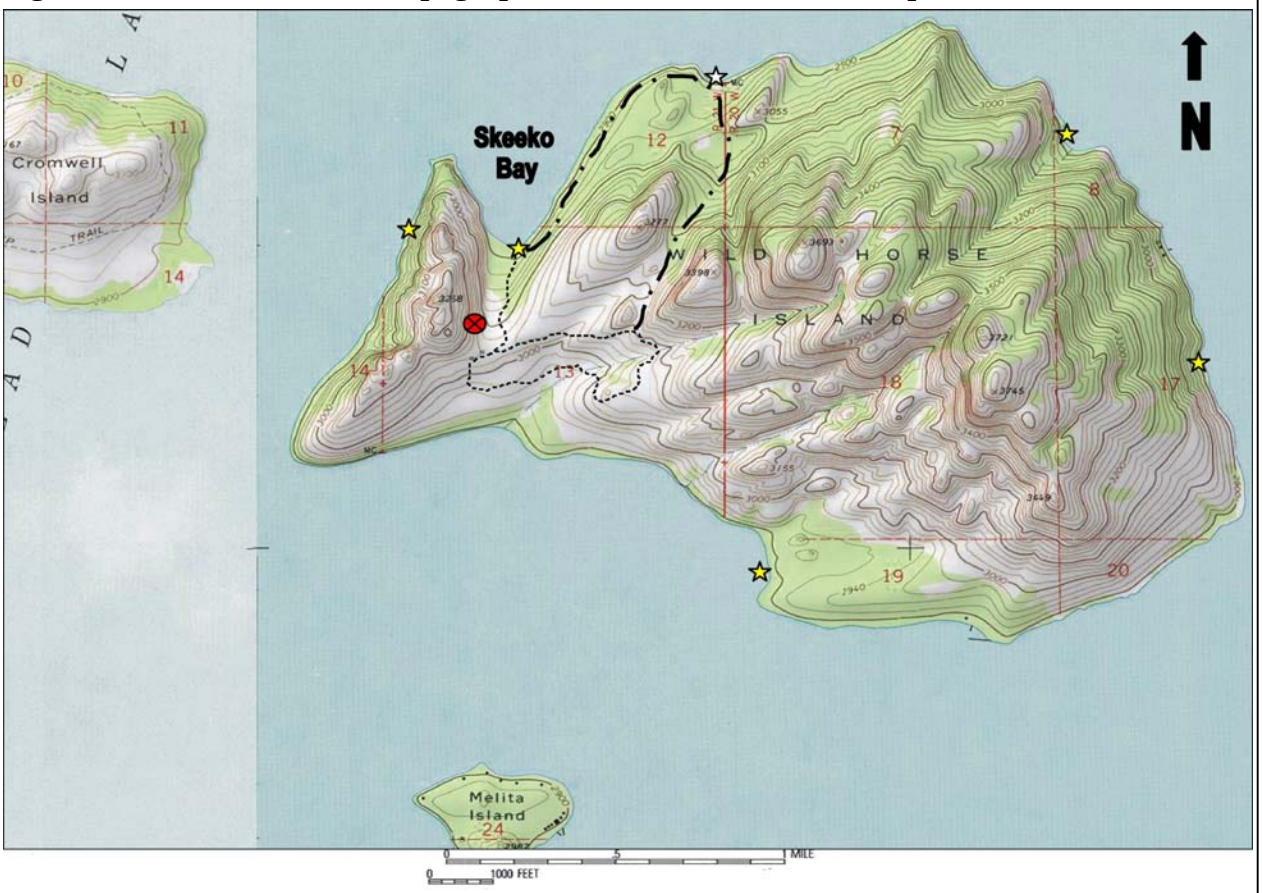
Wild Horse Island

Wild Horse Island is located near Big Arm Bay on Flathead Lake (Figure 2). It is situated within the exterior boundary of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes Reservation. Most of the island became a State Park in 1978 through the cooperative efforts of the McDonald family, the Nature Conservancy and the State. The island consists of 2,163 acres. When the island was transferred to state ownership, the previous owner retained possession of 56 private lots ranging in size from ½ to 1 acre. These are located along the perimeter of the island with about half developed with summer homes.



(Hikers on WHI)

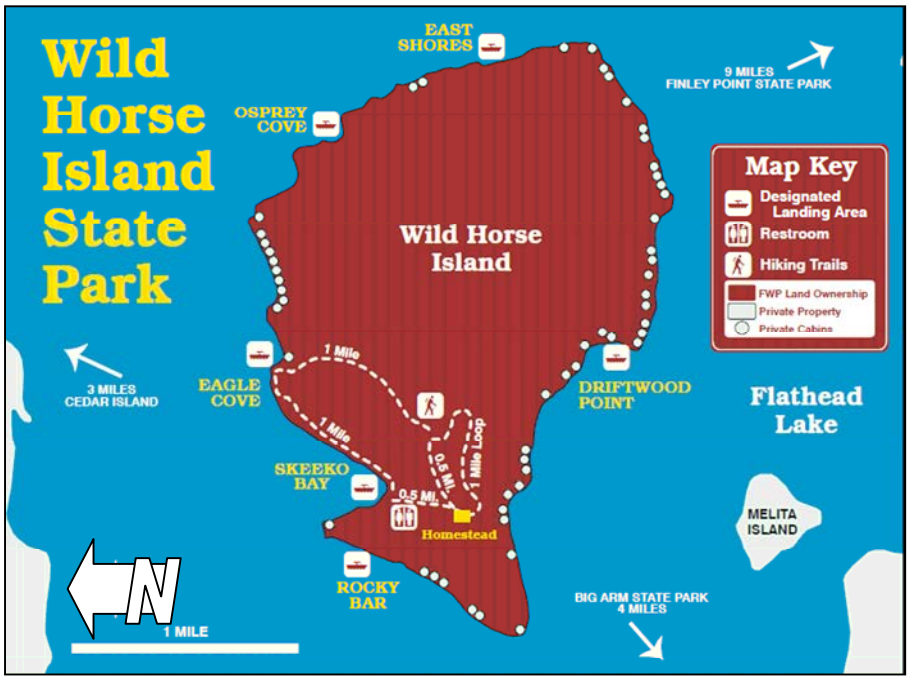
Figure 2. Wild Horse Island Topographic and Park Orientation Maps



Designated Public Landing Site

Public Toilet

Designated Hiking Trails



Although Wild Horse Island had previously been managed by FWP to maintain its primitive character, it officially was designated a "Primitive Park" in 1993 by the Montana Legislature. Under this designation the park's "development" is limited to signing, hiking trails and facilities for safety and health.

There are no major facilities in the park, although a compost toilet has been installed near Skeeko Bay. The park is currently managed under the Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) management model in order to preserve its primitive character. LAC is the management principle used by various federal agencies to maintain wilderness or backcountry areas. Wild Horse Island boasts some of the best watchable wildlife opportunities in the state with herds of bighorn sheep and mule deer, nesting bald eagles, osprey, and numerous species of songbirds. Additionally, to maintain its namesake tradition, the island has a small resident population of wild horses obtained through the Bureau of Land Management's "Adopt-a-Horse" program. Other inhabitants of the island include coyotes, badgers, squirrels and other small mammals with an occasional black bear and mountain lion. Another feature of interest includes a historic cabin and barn, and an apple and pear orchard dating back to the first homesteaders. Wild Horse Island contains one of the few remaining segments of native Palouse prairie to be found in Montana. This includes Spalding's Catchfly (Silene spaldingii), an endangered plant species.

Over time, Wild Horse Island has come to hold special meaning for those who have visited its rocky shores to hike, picnic, and observe wildlife and the many prairie flowers, or simply to enjoy the peaceful solitude.

Wildlife Habitat Protection Area Islands (WHPAs)

Cedar (Marshall), Bird (Ainsworth) and O'Neil (Douglas) Islands comprise part of Flathead Lake's WHPAs. As mentioned, the intent of the Flathead Lake WHPA is specifically to provide secure nesting habitat for Canada Geese and other waterfowl. All three islands were purchased with a combination of state license fees and Federal Pittman-Robertson wildlife restoration dollars in a 25/75 ratio. The use of federal aid in wildlife restoration dollars requires that certain conditions be maintained by FWP. Among these stipulations is the requirement that the acquired lands continue to be used as waterfowl nesting habitat. Incidental recreation has occurred, but habitat and breeding seasons were maintained. Areas were historically closed to public access during the

typical goose breeding season of March 1 and June 15. FWP closure signs have disappeared over time as Canada Geese populations increased and the emphasis on protected goose habitat has diminished.

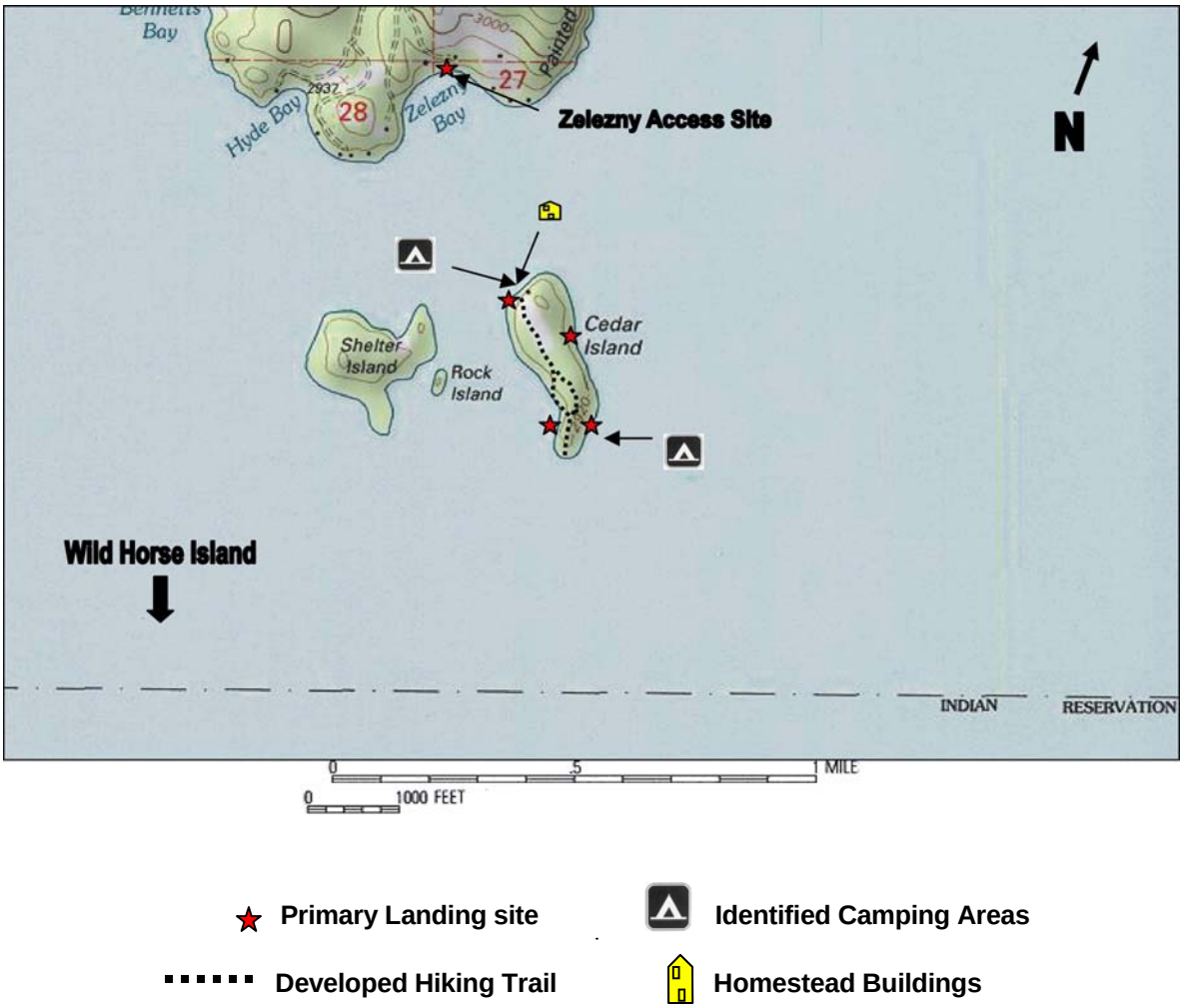
Cedar Island

Cedar Island is comprised of approximately 23 acres (Fig. 3). It was purchased in 1954 from the Marshall family. The island is forested with Douglas fir and Ponderosa pine with several open meadows. Of the four islands, Cedar receives the second most public use (Wild Horse Island State Park receives more). It includes a large house built in the late 1920s, a boathouse and several out-buildings.

(Cedar Island House)

The house porch has been utilized for years as a camping area. Approximately 50 yards to the south is a wire fence enclosing a three-to-four acre old orchard. A few fruit trees still exist, but the area has generally been taken over by shrubs and grasses. The house and surrounding area show heavy impacts to soils and significant vegetation loss from original habitation and subsequent visits from the public through the years. The house has deteriorated over time. The house has been heavily vandalized, and graffiti covers the interior and exterior walls. The stability of the stairs and upstairs flooring is questionable. The roof is comprised of overlapping metal sheets, but water from rain and snow can still enter the interior. The structure's windows have long been broken out contributing to water damage. The interior floors are covered with rodent feces and accompanying odors. The structure and current condition pose potential public health risks and safety hazards.

Figure 3. Cedar Island



Zelezny Access

The purchase of Cedar Island also included a small lot (@129'x 211') on the mainland known as the Zelezny Access. The lot is about ½ mile to the west of the island and about 2 miles east from Hwy 93. The deed includes a perpetual road easement to Hwy 93 from the access site via a partially paved gravel road. The parking area is limited to a capacity of 4 vehicles. It is best suited for car -top boats or vehicles with small trailers. The entrance road is paved, but has a steep grade. A small dock built by a private party has been removed.

(Zelezny Parking Area)

Bird Island

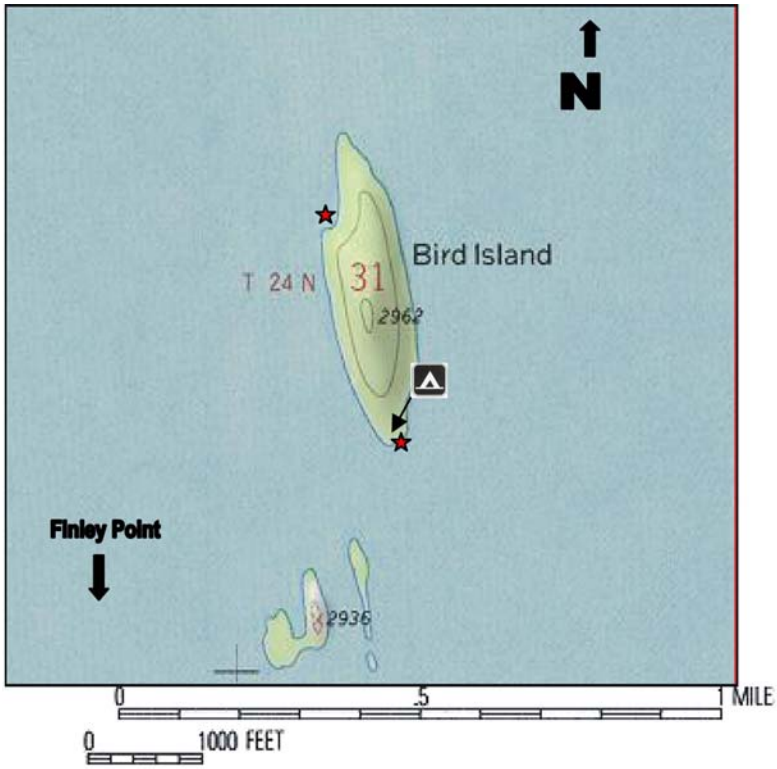
(View of Bird island Looking East)

Bird Island is a pristine, heavily forested, 30-acre island located in the eastern portion of Flathead Lake. In 1953, Bird Island was purchased by FWP from the Ainsworth family for purposes of the aforementioned goose and bird habitat. It is in close proximity to a cluster of small islands known as the Flathead Lake Bird Preserve. The Bird Preserve was established by the Montana Legislature in 1947 and is managed by the University of Montana (U. of M.) as a biological reserve for the purpose of providing for the "breeding, propagating, and protection of all species of birds". Although not technically included in the legislatively established bird preserve, Bird Island has in effect been managed as part of the preserve for many years. In 1983, an interagency agreement between FWP and the University of Montana gave U. of M. formal permission to use the island for research purposes as long as the university's activities were in keeping with the intent of the island's purchase. "No trespass" signs were placed on the island by the U of M to prohibit public access, so that research projects would not be disrupted. Since the mid-90's the University has not conducted any research projects on the island. In 1997, the no trespassing signs were removed by FWP and limited public access has been tolerated. Unlike Cedar Island, Bird's past usage as a research area by the University and subsequent public closure, has helped preserve the island, making it one of the more pristine of the FWP island properties.

Due to its rocky shoreline, the island affords only a few access points (Fig. 4). There are small gravel beaches on the northwest side and southern tip of the island. Other areas can be used for access, but are generally not conducive to beaching a boat. The landing sites have become popular for shoreline picnickers, swimmers and campers.

Well-defined hiking trails are non-existent, however access trails are beginning to develop along the west shoreline. Some evidence of trampling and minor vegetation loss has been observed at the landing sites. The interior of the island is thick with underbrush and the lack of any trails indicates few visitors venture far from the shoreline.

Figure 4. Bird Island



★ Primary Landing Site Identified Camping Area

O'Neil (Douglas) Islands

O'Neil Islands are comprised of two small rocky knolls located just south of Table Bay on the west side of Flathead Lake (Fig. 5). They were purchased in 1985 from the O'Neil family. The larger of the two, is approximately .53 acres in size and has a moderately dense growth of Douglas fir and Ponderosa pine with little underbrush. The smaller island is a rock outcrop. It is barely visible above the waterline at full pool.

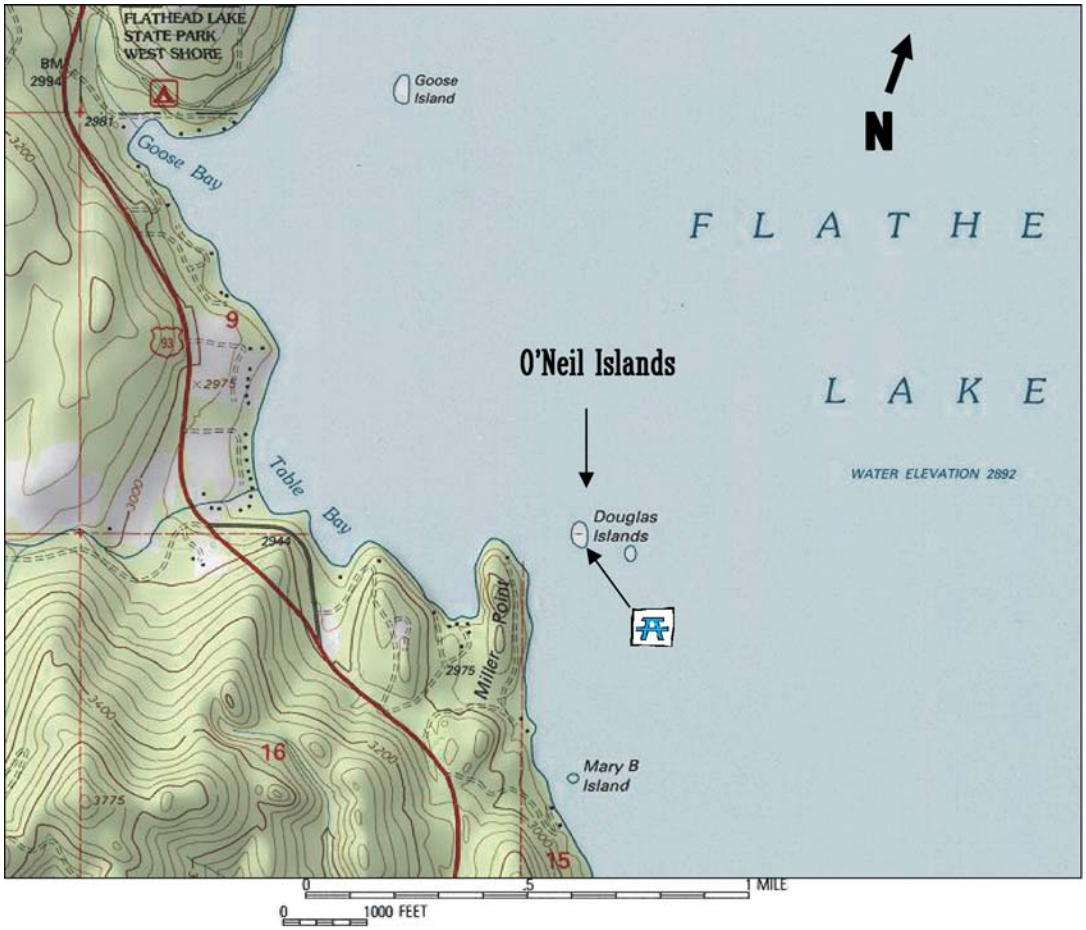
(O'Neil Islands Looking North)

The larger island is relatively flat, approximately 20' x 20' at the top of the rocky knoll, which would make an acceptable camp or picnic site with excellent scenic views. The island has no other flat ground. A major drawback for visitors to the island is that it has no beach area.

Although access is difficult, there are some locations on the west side of the island where canoes or kayaks can be pulled from the water. Currently, the island receives light visitation.

(West Shoreline of O'Neil Island)

Figure 5. O'Neil Islands (a.k.a. Douglas)



Picnic Site

V. MANAGEMENT ISSUES

During the planning process, the advisory committee identified issues relevant to each island and then developed recommendations for management actions related to each issue. Table 1 below summarizes the identified issues. The table is followed by more complete descriptions of issues for the individual islands. Actions were developed based on committee and agency recommendations.

Table 1. IDENTIFIED ISSUES AND CONCERNS FOR FWP ISLANDS

Item # ***A. Human Related Issues***	***Cedar***	***Bird***	***O'Neil***	***Wild Horse***
1. Visitor Hazards	X	x		X
2. Campsites Impacts	X	x		
3. Proliferation of Non-designated Access Trails	X	x		x
4. Proliferation of Fire Rings	X	x		
5. Pet Running Loose	X	x		x
6. Sanitation/Trash	X	x	x	x
7. Visitation Management	X	x	x	x
8. Vandalism/Property Disturbance/Rule Violations	X	x		X
9. Public/Private Conflict				x
B. Vegetation Issues				
10. Control of Exotic Plants and Noxious Weeds	X	x		X
11. Fuel Mgmt. & Fire Prevention	X	X	x	X
12. Vegetation Loss at Impacted Sites	X			x
13. Grasslands Preservation/restoration				X
C. Soils Issues				
14. Compacted Soils & Bare Soil Increase	X			x
15. Trail and Site Erosion	X	x		x
D. Wildlife Issues				
16. Wildlife Habitat & Species Protection	x	x	x	x
17. Disturbance During Breeding	x	x	x	x
E. Public Facilities Issues				
18. Information/Regulatory/Interpretive Signing	X	X	x	x
19. Hiking Trails	X	x		x
20. Campsites	X	X		
21. Sanitation	X	x		x
22. Docks/Mooring Buoys/tie offs	x	x		X
23. Emergency Facilities (phone/water)				x
24. Landing Site Access	x	x		x
25. Docks/Parking (Zelezny access only)				
F. Administration				
26. Commercial Use	x	x	x	x
27. Use of volunteers	x	x	x	X
28. Cultural and Historic Site Inventory	X	X	x	X

* Large cap X denotes significant issue. Issues marked by small cap x, though still a concern, denote a lesser significance and may require only minor actions.

ISLAND ISSUES IDENTIFICATION

The advisory committee considered Cedar, Bird and O'Neil Islands together during the planning process because of the similar primitive nature, their smaller size and differing mandate. Although issues pertaining to each island are discussed separately in this plan, the management recommendations are combined for all three islands. Wild Horse Island was considered separately and issues and management recommendations are, therefore, listed separately. The commercial use management recommendations for all islands are addressed at the end of the Management Strategy.

Issue Discussions (The item numbers below correspond to those identified in the Table 1. Only identified items specific to an island are discussed.)

CEDAR ISLAND

A. Human Related Issues

1. Visitor Hazards

- Badly deteriorating old homestead buildings on the north end of island present safety hazards to the public. Heavy rodent feces deposits are present in the buildings and represent the potential for Hanta virus hazard.
- A wire fence surrounds the old orchard area and is down in some places presenting a tripping hazard.
- Old broken waterline pipes are sticking up out of the ground near the buildings.
- Snags and potential hazard trees overhang popular landing, picnic and camping sites.

2. Campsite Impacts

- Loss of vegetation and bare soil increase is occurring at dispersed campsites.
- The number of dispersed campsites has increased over the last few years.

3. Proliferation of non-designated access trails

- There are no designated (maintained) trails on the island. There are numerous braided trails leading up from the landing sites and multiple trails across the island.

4. Proliferation of campfires

- Numerous fire scars exist around the island at campsites. Fire remnants have been observed along the shoreline. Some sites had multiple fire rings present.

- Currently, fire restrictions are minimally posted.

5. Pets running loose

- At present, there are no posted restrictions on pets. Pets have been observed running loose and there have been complaints from visitors. Pets running loose can have an impact on wildlife and other visitor experiences.

6. Sanitation/trash

- No sanitation facilities are provided on the island and human waste is often observed near the popular landing areas. Visitors often leave trash near the buildings. No signing is present.

7. Visitation management

- No controls over usage exist. There are no group size limits. Camping is unregulated and dispersed, occurring mostly near the homestead and at the south end of the island. There are no regulations governing fire use, nor are there any other regulations posted. Large groups (20-30) have occasionally been observed on the island as well as having been reported by the public.

8. Vandalism/Property Disturbance/Rule Violations

- Vandalism is extensive at the old homestead. This includes graffiti, ripped out sections of walls and floors and smashed bottles.
- No regulations are posted hence depreciative behavior occurs here more than at any of the other islands. Large parties have occasionally been reported occurring at the homestead.
- There have been reports and evidence of paint ball games occurring on the island the past few years.
- Complaints about individuals shooting off fireworks are reported every summer.

B. Vegetation Issues

10. Control of exotic plants and noxious weeds

- Canada Thistle is well established in the old orchard area. Other non-native plant species are also present in this area.

11. Fuel Management & Fire Prevention

- Minor efforts have been made to control the buildup of fuels, pests or noxious weeds. Many areas of the island have dense stands of Douglas fir with Ponderosa pine. Mistletoe is heavy in the trees surrounding the homestead.
- Fire restrictions are minimally posted.

12. Vegetation loss at impacted sites

- Heavy vegetation loss is apparent in the area around the homestead buildings. Additionally, five campsites varying from 150-300 sq. ft. have been identified where vegetation loss is greater than 50% when compared to offsite conditions.
- Numerous spur trails contribute to unnecessary vegetation loss.

C. Soil Issues

14. Compacted soils & bare soil increase

- Soil compaction is evident at the frequently used campsites, along multiple access trails and especially in the area of the main homestead building, where years of trampling have eliminated most ground vegetation.

15. Trail and site erosion

- Erosion affects are visible on some sections of trails located on steeper slopes. This occurs primarily on access trails leading up from the landing sites near the old house and on trails leading up from the beach in the southwest and northeast coves.

D. Wildlife Issues

16. Wildlife and habitat protection

- Currently there is no evidence that the habitat for nesting waterfowl has deteriorated.

17. Disturbance during breeding

- At present, there is no indication that human disturbance is occurring at unacceptable levels or having any measurable impact. The breeding season coincides with low recreation use periods.

E. Public Facilities Issues

18. Information/Regulatory/Interpretive signing

- Minor signing is present. An old "Game Mgmt. Area" sign can be seen near the homestead and a vandalized "Pack in Pack out" sign is attached to the building; a fire restriction sign is posted. Signing is absent on the rest of the island.

19. Hiking Trails

- There is no designated and maintained trail system. However, there are numerous trails existing over the island often with multiple access trails from one location to another.

20. Campsites

- Eight campsites have been identified with vegetative loss ranging from approximately 25-100% within the site area. Camping primarily occurs near the old homestead, on the north and south ends of the orchard and on the south end of the island.

21. Sanitation

- Human waste is often seen in the summer near the homestead buildings.

22. Docks/Mooring Buoys/tie offs

- None of these are present. Visitors must beach their boats or drop anchor offshore and access via raft or similar craft. A dock once existed near the homestead, but all that remains is a break wall of piled rocks.

25. Zelezny Access

- The access site consists of approximately 3/4 acre of land and is located on the mainland 1/2 mile north of the island. The parking lot has room for 4-5 vehicles without trailers. A steep, narrow road leads down to the site. The small property size and proximity to neighbors are not conducive to high visitor use.

F. Administration

26. Commercial use

- Some commercial use seems to be occurring.

27. Use of volunteers

- FWP currently has no program for using volunteers at the island.

28. Cultural/Historical Inventory

- Inventories for the above, have not been performed.

BIRD ISLAND

A. Human Related Issues

1. Visitor Hazards

- Snags overhang the popular landing and picnic sites.
- Poison ivy is present along the shore on the south tip of the island

2. Campsite Impacts

- Minor loss of vegetation has occurred at dispersed campsites on the south end of the island. Compaction of soils at the sites appears to be insignificant. These areas would be expected to fully recover if camping ceases.

3. Proliferation of non-designated access trails

- There are no designated (maintained) trails on the island. Minor trails follow the shoreline for a short distance from the main landing areas. No trails exist inland.

4. Proliferation of campfires

- Old fire scars have been observed near the shoreline at the primary landing areas.
- Currently, fire restrictions are not posted.

5. Pets running loose

- There are no posted restrictions on pets. Pets have been observed running loose, although no complaints have been received. Pets running loose can have an impact on wildlife and other visitor experiences.

6. Sanitation/trash

- No sanitation facilities exist on the island and human waste has been observed on occasion near the popular landing areas. Minor amounts of trash have been picked up from the landing areas. No signing is present.

7. Visitation management

- No controls over usage exist. There are no group size limits. Camping does occur on the south end of the island, but is infrequent. There are no regulations governing fire use, nor are any other regulations posted.

8. Vandalism/Property Disturbance/Rule Violations

- Vandalism on the island has been confined to the chopping down of a few, small diameter trees at the northwest landing site.
- No regulations are posted to dissuade depreciative behavior.

B. Vegetation Issues

10. Control of exotic plants and noxious weeds

- Poison ivy, although a native species, is well established on the south tip of the island where visitors land (in this context, it is considered a weed).

11. Fuel Management & Fire Prevention

- No efforts have been made to control the buildup of fuels. Many areas of the island have dense stands of Douglas fir with Ponderosa pine and heavy underbrush. More open areas exist on the north end of the island, where vegetation is less dense.
- There are no posted restrictions on building campfires.

12. Vegetation loss at impacted sites

- Minor vegetation loss can be observed at the campsites at the south tip of the island.
- Some vegetation loss occurs on the spur trails leading which follow the shoreline from the landing sites.

C. Soil Issues

14. Compacted soils & bare soil increase

- Soil compaction is minor at the campsites due to infrequent use and the buildup of duff. Some compaction occurs on developing access trails.

15. Trail and site erosion

- Erosion affects are minor, but visible on some sections of the developing shoreline trails.

D. Wildlife Issues

16. Wildlife and habitat protection

- Currently there is no evidence that the habitat for nesting waterfowl has deteriorated.

17. Disturbance during breeding

- At present, there is no indication that human disturbance is occurring at unacceptable levels or having any measurable impact. The breeding season coincides with low recreation use periods.

E. Public Facilities Issues

18. Information/Regulatory/Interpretive signing

- No signing is present on the island.

19. Hiking Trails

- There are no designated or maintained trails. Shoreline trails are beginning to develop.

20. Campsites

- Campsites have been identified, but with little vegetative loss within the site area. Camping appears to be infrequent and primarily occurs near the south end of the island.

21. Sanitation

- No sanitary facilities are present. Human waste has sometimes been observed near the landing sites.

22. Docks/Mooring Buoys/ties offs

- None of these are present. Visitors must beach their boats or drop anchor offshore and access via raft or similar craft.

F. Administration

26. Commercial use

- Some commercial use may be occurring at Cedar Island although levels are unknown. This appears to involve stopovers for various motorboat and canoe/kayak tours.

27. Use of volunteers

- FWP currently has no program for using volunteers at the island.

28. Cultural/historical Inventory

- Inventories for the above have not been performed.

O'NEIL ISLANDS

A. Human Related Issues

5. Pets running loose

- Currently there are no posted restrictions on pets.

6. Sanitation/trash

- No sanitation facilities exist on the island. No evidence of human waste has been observed.
- Minor bits of paper trash have been found. No signing is present.

7. Visitation management

- No controls over usage exist. There are no group size limits. There are no regulations governing fire use, camping nor are any other regulations posted. Large groups have not been observed and as yet not a problem as the shoreline is very rocky and access limited.

B. Vegetation Issues

11. Fuel Management & Fire Prevention

- Due to the size and rocky nature of the island, vegetation is limited. However, some large trees do exist with minor ground cover and could support a fire.
- There are no posted fire restrictions.

C. Soil Issues - None

D. Wildlife Issues

16. Wildlife and habitat protection

- Currently there is no evidence that the habitat for nesting waterfowl has deteriorated.

17. Disturbance during breeding

- Currently, there is no indication that human disturbance is occurring at unacceptable levels or having any measurable impact. The breeding season coincides with low recreation use periods.

E. Public Facilities Issues

18. Information/Regulatory/Interpretive signing

- No signing is present

F. Administration

26. Commercial use

- Level unknown. Likely very little commercial activity. May be used as a stopover for canoe or kayak tours.

27. Use of volunteers

- FWP currently has no program for using volunteers at the island. Volunteer use could be used for monitoring, inspection or site cleanup. E.g. Adopt –a-Site program

28. Cultural/historical Inventory

- Inventories for the above, have not been performed.

WILD HORSE ISLAND

A. Human Related Issues
Item #

1. Visitor Hazards

- Homestead cabin and barn present safety hazards to the public due to easy access to interior of the structures. Rodent feces and bird droppings are present in the buildings and may present a health hazard.
- Remnant wire fencing still exists around the island creating tripping hazards for visitors and wildlife.
- There are snags overhanging popular landing and picnic sites.

3. Proliferation of non-designated access trails

- There is one designated loop trail system on the island. There are numerous braided trails leading up from the landing sites and multiple parallel trails across the island. Many of these are well developed game trails which may make closing difficult.

5. Pets running loose

- Currently pets are prohibited on the state owned parts of the island. However, pets have been frequently observed running loose and there have been complaints from visitors. FWP staff have issued numerous citations for violations of this regulation. Pets running loose can have an impact on wildlife and other visitor experiences.

6. Sanitation/trash

- Visitors often leave trash at the landing sites. This is mostly confined to paper products. Signing is present.

- Lack of toilet facilities resulted in visible signs of human waste, especially in the Skeeko Bay area. Installation of a compost toilet several years ago helped resolve this issue. In others areas, visible evidence is infrequent.

7. Visitation management

- Visitor management controls exist. There are group size limits (16 or more need a permit) and no camping, fires, pets or mountain bikes are allowed. Some illegal camping occurs, although violations appear low. Visitors are encouraged to land at five designated landing sites, although at present may land at any point along the public shoreline. Visitor density is highest at Skeeko Bay and management zone 4 receives the greatest number of visitors.

8. Vandalism/Property Disturbance/Rule Violations

- Vandalism is worsening at the old homestead. This includes graffiti, ripped out sections of walls and floors and a few smashed bottles.
- Shed deer antlers and other natural property are being removed from the island, which is prohibited by ARM 12.8.207.
- "No pets" continues to have the highest rate of non-compliance of all island regulations.

9. Public/private conflicts

- Conflicts over the public using private docks still occur. There are no public docks at Wild Horse Island.

B. Vegetation Issues

10. Control of exotic plants and noxious weeds

- Canada Thistle is well established in the wetter low-lying areas. Patches of leafy spurge have been identified and continue to be chemically treated, though not eradicated. Knapweed, though not a major problem, periodically is discovered in small patches. Isolated plants have been identified mostly near landing sites. Other non-native plant species such as cheat and quack grasses are also present on the island.

11. Fuel Management & Fire Prevention

- An overall forest management plan has not been developed.
- Forest health could be improved in many areas; multiple site specific projects have occurred. A hand-thinning project occurred in 1996 and a pilot project in 2000 evaluated controlled burning as a forest management tool. In 2007, small diameter pine trees were thinned to reduce pine beetle outbreaks, and secondarily to reduce fuel build-up through greater ground spacing. Many of the Ponderosa pine show evidence of some type of needle blight and there are numerous standing and fallen dead trees.

12. Vegetation loss at impacted sites

- Vegetation loss is apparent in the area around the homestead buildings and at the landing sites, especially at the popular Skeeko Bay area.
- Impacts at the Skeeko Bay landing site have approximately doubled in the last 10 years. Other landing sites show low to moderate trampling effects;
- Braided trails leading up from the landing sites contribute to some vegetation loss.

13. Grasslands restoration

- Ponderosa pine continues to encroach on prairie areas. Other exotic plant species are distributed throughout the grasslands.
- The survival of Silene spaldingii is questionable and only a few individual plants existed as of 1998.
- Fire is being proposed as a tool to contribute to the health of the grasslands (as noted under fuel mgmt.), but some areas have high concentrations of cheat grass or are too close to structures for fire to be safely utilized. Limited mechanical cutting has been used near the old homestead buildings. However, no plan or overall strategy for prairie restoration has been developed.

C. Soil Issues

14. Compacted soils & bare soil increase

- Soil compaction is evident at the frequently used landing sites, along multiple access trails and in the area near the homestead buildings.

15. Trail and site erosion

- Erosion affects are visible on some sections of trails located on steeper slopes. This occurs primarily on access trails leading up from the landing sites and on the game trails leading up from ravines. The developed nature trail has water bars installed on steep trail sections, but some are in need of repair. Other sections of the lower trail from the Skeeko Bay landing show visible erosion impacts.

D. Wildlife Issues

16. Wildlife and habitat protection

- Currently, wildlife populations are stable or increasing; there is no evidence that habitat for wildlife has deteriorated.

17. Disturbance during breeding

- Currently, there is no indication that human disturbance is occurring at unacceptable levels or having any measurable impact. The breeding season coincides with low recreation use periods.

E. Public Facilities Issues

18. Information/Regulatory/Interpretive signing

- Currently, signing of the above types is present at the primary landing sites, where information boards (4'x4') have been constructed, and to a lesser extent at secondary landing areas, where regulations are posted.
- Interpretive and informational signing are present on the landing site info boards and interpretive and informational brochures have been developed.
- Directional signing has been placed on the designated trail. No other signing is present in the interior of the park.

19. Hiking Trails

- One designated trail system has been developed and is maintained. It is approximately a 2-mile loop starting at Skeeko Bay. Starter trails are present at the other primary landing sites. These lead up from the shoreline and stop 50-100 yards inland (their purpose is to direct visitors toward or away from a particular area). There are numerous game trails existing over the island often with multiple access trails from one location to another.

21. Sanitation

- A compost toilet has been constructed up the trail from Skeeko Bay. No other public toilet facilities are in the park.

22. Docks/Mooring Buoys/tie offs

- No docks or mooring buoys are provided. Visitors must beach their boats or drop anchor offshore and access land via raft or similar craft. Options for docks are limited and the Primitive Parks Legislation may limit new development to improve accessibility.

23. Emergency Facilities (phone/water/etc.)

- None

F. Administration

26. Commercial use

- Unauthorized commercial use may be occurring, such as guided hikes and photography outings.

27. Use of volunteers

- FWP currently has no formal program for using volunteers at the island.

28. Cultural/Historical Inventory

- Historical inventories have identified areas of interest such as the Johnson Homestead and Thurber Orchard area and the Hiawatha Lodge (on private property). However, there is no record of significant cultural inventories other than identification of peeled trees in the Skeeko Bay area.

VI. MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

A. CEDAR, BIRD AND O'NEIL ISLANDS MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

WHPA acquisition in the 1950's for the purpose of Canada Geese habitat and production was successful - populations rebounded. The human population in northwest Montana has also grown, along with the demand for recreational opportunities. These islands can serve both wildlife and human populations if actively managed. FWP will work to transfer the Pittman-Robertson federal aid encumbrance on these islands to other lands with similar wildlife habitat and appraisal values. The Wildlife and Parks Divisions will jointly manage the islands to protect resources until after the federal aid encumbrance has been exchanged, then the Parks Division will assume primary management responsibilities.

Resource conservation will continue to be the primary management emphasis of these islands, particularly during nesting seasons. Public access will be limited during the nesting period and the islands will be signed appropriately. Recreation use will be permitted on the islands; camping will be confined to designated areas.

Following the classification system developed for WHI, the WHPA islands will be zoned or classified to meet the goals set for these areas. Unlike Wild Horse Island, because of their limited acreage, the islands were not divided into multiple zones. This draft plan proposes to classify the WHPA islands into the following zones:

Zone 3 -Semi-natural	Zone 4 - Semi-natural modified
- Bird Island	- Cedar Island
- O'Neil Island	

Description of Zones:

A semi-natural area (zone 3) is primarily for the protection of the natural environment. It provides excellent opportunities to experience nature and wildlife and scenic viewing. The number of area encounters with other visitors is low to moderate and the chance of group interaction is minimal. The environmental condition is semi-modified with human impacts confined, but visible from year to year.

Management presence is noticeable only at the access points with limited site modification. Trails are present, but are not usually maintained. No facilities are provided except those for safety, health and protection of the resource. Signing may be present, but is limited. Staff patrols are infrequent. Typical recreational activities include hiking, primitive camping (no facilities) in designated areas, picnicking, wildlife viewing/photography and outdoor skills development.

Zone 4

This classification provides opportunities to experience nature and wildlife in a family setting. The environmental condition is semi-modified, with human impacts confined, but visible from year to year. The area is easily accessible, but temporary closures are allowed. The level of human encounters may be moderate to high and chances of group interaction may be high during peak seasons. Management is readily apparent and moderate site modifications exist. Trails are developed and maintained. Signing is present and regular staff patrols would occur during the high use season. Facilities may be provided for safety, health and sanitation, resource protection and convenience for the visitor. Recreational activities may include those found in the previous

class plus opportunities for onsite interpretation with the use of interpreters, kiosks or display panels.

The aforementioned two zones are basically the same in regards to environmental condition. However, zone 4 permits less stringent standards for social and physical conditions, where more people or larger groups may be encountered or higher resource impacts tolerated. Additionally, a zone 4 area may focus on management provided interpretation and environmental education opportunities for the general public and school groups, whereas a zone 3 would focus on self-discovery experiences. It should be noted that what is allowed in a particular zone, does not mean it will always be present. However, there is more flexibility in management options as the classification number increases. The higher the classification, the higher the standard for acceptable impacts.

If the LAC framework with zoning is applied to the WHPA islands as proposed, the result is a consistent management approach for ensuring resource protection and providing recreational opportunities.

WHPA Islands Management Actions

Based on committee and FWP discussions, the following actions will be implemented:

1. Integrate recreation and wildlife management strategies into island management.
    a. Transfer federal aid encumbrance from WHPA islands to property with similar values.
    b. Transfer island and Zelezny Access management responsibilities from Wildlife Division to Parks Division, after federal aid encumbrance is transferred.

2. In accordance with ARM rules, 12.8.501-12.8.507, FWP will evaluate the historical significance of the Cedar Island Homestead and develop management recommendations relative to possible stabilization or preservation of the resource. If the property is found to be historically significant but is in an advanced deteriorated state or if the property poses a serious public safety hazard that cannot be abated, FWP may decide to remove the building and associated structures. To mitigate the impact of removal if no other options are feasible, the history of the property will be fully researched and the building will be recorded in detail according to the standards of the Historic American Building Survey (HABS).

3. Implement signage on the islands to address over-use issues through information regarding low-impact techniques (such as, Leave No Trace outdoor ethics program) along with other pertinent information and regulations pertaining to the islands. Signing will be placed at major landing sites and designated campsites where applicable.

4. Manage use of the Zelezny access by posting signs and designating the site as day use only. Manage it similarly to fishing access sites. Remove or replace the dock constructed by the local property owner after appropriate legal notice.

5. Remove hazardous obstructions, especially from the shoreline at popular landing sites.

6. Work with Tribal entities and SHPO to complete cultural and historic site inventories.

7. Develop a designated trail on Cedar Island and obliterate unnecessary braided trails.

8. Incorporate the islands into the Parks Division Region 1 Weed Management Program.

9. Designate O'Neil Island as day us only.

10. Camping will be allowed only at designated sites on Bird and Cedar Islands and open to motorized and non-motorized recreationists. Campsites will be designated in traditional use areas to limit proliferation of sites and overall impacts. The following campsite criteria will be used: Cedar Island – maximum 5 sites, Bird Island maximum of 2 sites. Sites will be a minimum of 75 feet from the shoreline with a limit of six (6) people per site and camping units confined to designated tent pads.

11. Post signs prohibiting all open fires (as allowed under ARM 12.8.206). Propane/butane gas canister type stoves are allowed at designated campsites on Bird and Cedar Islands. Additionally, propane/butane gas canister type stoves are allowed along the shoreline (not more than 5 feet inland from the high water mark) on Bird, Cedar and O'Neil Islands.

12. Establish additional use guidelines for all users, including commercial users, if and when impacts determine the need.

13. Develop and distribute interpretive, educational and informational brochures describing the uniqueness of each island and the principles of "Leave No Trace" program to promote responsible outdoor recreation. Increase volunteer involvement to help disseminate information and increase visitor service.

14. Establish maximum group size of 15 (16 or more need a permit) similar to that ofWild Horse Island.

15. Prohibit pets on Bird, Cedar and O'Neil Islands (as allowed under ARM 12.8.203). (EXCEPTION: During the waterfowl hunting season, dogs are allowed on the islands and are not required to be on a leash when utilized for hunting purposes.)

16. Develop options for human waste management and implement when necessary and feasible to address sanitation; consider composting toilet and other methods, costs/budget, location, educational requirements and effectiveness. The first priority will be Cedar Island.

17. Commercial use of Cedar, Bird and O'Neil Islands will be prohibited without a permit.

B. WILD HORSE ISLAND MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Wild Horse Island is a wild place, with Palouse Prairie and dense Montane forest ecosystems. Most of the island is accessible to the public with private residences scattered around its perimeter. Human impacts on the island ecosystem, including vegetation and wildlife, and cultural and historic sites are managed within the "Limits of Acceptable Change" principles.

WHI Management Actions

The planning committee drafted several general management recommendations for the park, as well as recommendations to address specific issues on the island. Based on those recommendations, the following management actions will be established for WHI.

General Management Actions

1. Set organizational priorities that would allow FWP to implement the Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) process (see Appendix C for the LAC direction outlined in the 1994 WHI Management Plan). This implementation will include:

   a. Collection of necessary additional baseline data.

   b. Develop LAC "standards & indicators," to assure the inclusion of impacts on the natural environment as well as on the island visitors' experience.

   Suggested indicators:
   - Overused trails
   - Vegetation loss and bare soil increases due to visitation
   - Vandalism and trespassing on private property
   - Visible trash
   - Interruption in wildlife or waterfowl distribution and use patterns
   - Number and type of visitor encounters per visit
   - Degradation of the health of wildlife populations or wildlife habitat in any of the four zones.

   c. Establish annual priorities and management strategies for implementing LAC on the island.

2. Maintain the four zones as designated in the 1994 WHI plan to allow different levels of use in each. Establish standards for each zone and apply management strategies to maintain those standards.

Specific Management Actions

Human-Related:

1. Increase island patrols by FWP staff and volunteers to provide better service to park visitors, educate visitors on park information and responsible outdoor recreation. The "Leave No Trace" outdoor ethics program can be incorporated to aid in this effort.

2. Maintain group size limits of 15 without a permit (16 or more need a permit).

3. Develop additional options for human waste management and implement when necessary and feasible (one composting toilet is currently provided); consider another composting toilet and other methods, costs/budget, location, educational requirements and effectiveness.

4. Develop management alternatives when LAC standards are exceeded which may include, but not limited to:
   - A permit system for all visitors
   - Temporary or permanent closures
   - Time and place regulations

5. Establish additional designated access points as needed.

6. Analyze and evaluate private property concerns, visitor distribution and significant wildlife and waterfowl areas when establishing access points.

7. Evaluate access points and remove hazards to improve public safety.

8. Protect the island's historic buildings through stabilization and visitor education.

9. Continue posting and enforcing current regulations, including prohibiting all fires and pets.

10. Conduct an inventory in cooperation with the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribe (CS&KT), of cultural and historic sites on the island.

11. Evaluate and pursue efforts to purchase undeveloped private lots, which significantly affect resources or recreational opportunities.

Vegetation, Soil, and Wildlife Actions:

1. Develop a grasslands restoration plan for protection of the Palouse Prairie ecosystem.

2. Develop a comprehensive island forest management plan that includes fuels management, forest enhancement and pest control.

3. Minimize the occurrence of unwanted human-caused fires through implementation of a comprehensive fire prevention program that includes education and enforcement.

4. Place natural surfacing materials on established trails where needed to reduce trail erosion. First priority will be the trail from Skeeko Bay to the homestead cabin, including the spur trail to the new toilet.

5. Maintain horse numbers at a maximum of five. Bighorn Sheep populations will be maintained at approximately 125 animals. Mule deer populations will be monitored, and allowed to naturally disperse.

6. Maintain protection zones and seasonal closures for threatened or endangered species.

ISLANDS COMMERCIAL USE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The FWP Commission adopted Commercial Use Rules in 2006 (ARM 12.14.101 to 170), which generally defines commercial use as any person or entity that attempts to make a profit from activities occurring on FWP land. The Commission concluded that "commercial use rules do not apply to the transferring of vehicles or people to or from a department site," also known as shuttles (ARM 12.14.110).

The commercial use strategy for FWP-owned islands on Flathead Lake, including Wild Horse Island State Park, was developed in order to mitigate the impacts on the islands resources that may result from increased visitation due to commercial use of the islands. The majority of the committee members were concerned with the effects of increased, unregulated use on the island resources and felt that any commercial use should be regulated using the Limits of Acceptable Change approach that is currently used to manage Wild Horse Island.

Taking the planning committee input into consideration, FWP developed the following commercial use objectives and actions in order to equitably evaluate commercial use proposals at Wild Horse Island, provide a variety of opportunities for the public, and to protect the valued island resources. At this time, commercial use of the Wildlife Habitat Protection Area islands is prohibited. If select WHPA islands are opened for commercial access in the future, the following objectives and actions would apply to those islands as well.

Commercial Use Objectives

1. Regulate commercial use to ensure compliance with established LAC standards (see Management Objective on page 8 of this plan), which upholds the guiding principles, management goals and objectives for the islands.

2. Coordinate commercial management strategies with FWP enforcement staff and Tribal entities. Work with the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribe (CS&KT) to establish and enforce regulations and rules about commercial use for FWP lands within reservation boundaries.

3. Implement the statewide Commercial Use Rules and permit system to manage and regulate commercial use.

Commercial Use Actions

1. Define commercial uses compatible with island management principles and goals and establish criterion to evaluate allowable uses.

2. Allow limited commercial use of the islands that includes regulated enforceable management.

3. Implement a permit system to regulate all compatible commercial uses. This system will specify dates, locations, group sizes, fees and types of activities.

VII. PLAN IMPLEMENTATION COSTS, STAFFING, AND REVENUE POTENTIAL

The following is a summary of the estimated costs associated with implementing the plan initially and subsequent annual management.

WHI will continue to receive primary funding through the Parks Division. Prior to transferring the federal aid encumbrance to other lands, the Parks and Wildlife Divisions will minimize management costs while continuing to allow public access and protect resources on the WHPAs. After transfer, the Parks Division will primarily fund recreation management of all islands, with specific wildlife habitat enhancement projects funded by the Wildlife Division.

The federal aid transfer will require a formal exchange of values, both wildlife habitat and monetary values. In addition, FWP would ask the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to join in developing an environmental assessment (EA) and federal grant amendment. One year is often needed to complete this process, which may cost about $25,000. To avoid a diversion of federal funds, this transfer process must be completed prior to implementing recreation-related plans on the WHPAs.

Initial costs for new signs, designating campsites, sanitation and trails on Cedar and Bird Islands will be higher than subsequent annual operating costs. Initial staffing will come from existing WHI staff allocations, but additional staff may be pursued in the future. It is estimated that ten hours a week would be adequate to maintain the WHPA islands, with additional management staff needed of over 100 hours annually. Operations and personnel costs to operate WHI and the three WHPAs after the federal aid transfer is estimated at about $25,000 annually.

The Enforcement Division can supplement compliance by including the WHPAs on existing patrol routes. Impacts of integrating these patrols should be minimal as wardens and Water Safety Officers already patrol in the vicinity of the WHPAs during the summer peak visitation period.

Operating costs will be partially offset by revenue generated from camping fees and special use permits. Providing designated campsites, rather than promoting dispersed camping on Cedar and Bird Islands, will help conserve the natural qualities and wildlife habitat while providing a high quality camping experience. Five campsites are proposed on Cedar Island and three on Bird

Island after the federal aid encumbrance is transferred. Sites will be open to motorized and non-motorized boats. Camping will be limited to six people per site; camping units will be confined to the designated tent pads. Vehicles could be parked overnight at the mainland state parks. Camping fees will be determined based on comparative fees at mainland state parks and costs to operate and maintain these remote camps. Revenue will vary depending on rate charged, compliance and occupancy rates, but is estimated at about $5,000 (based on 50% occupancy during a 16-week peak summer season). The public will have the opportunity to review proposed fees and comment during the biennial FWP Commission Fee Rule process. No camping will be allowed on Wild Horse or O'Neil Islands, which will be open for day use only.

VIII. MANAGEMENT ACTION TIMELINE for Flathead Lake Islands

The following actions represent current management priorities. Some actions are ongoing or already near completion. Priorities may change over time, as funding, opportunities and circumstances change. In addition, further research, public comment and environmental assessments may determine that some actions are not feasible as proposed.

WHPA Actions

Within 1- 3 years

- improve human waste management on Cedar Island
- transfer federal aid encumbrance to property with equal values (prerequisite for the following actions)
- install information and regulatory signing on islands i.e. group size, fires, camping, pets, low impact techniques etc.
- remove hazards from designated landing sites and other areas
- develop indicators and standards for LAC
- designate campsites locations on Bird and Cedar
- develop informational brochures
- initiate monitoring of visitor impacts
- complete weed inventory and mitigation plan
- complete historic and cultural inventories

Within 4-6 years

- propose and pursue future action to historic structures based on inventories
- improve human waste management on Bird Island
- complete hiking trail system for Cedar Island
- complete fire fuel management plan

Wild Horse Island Actions

Within 1-3 years

- develop standards for LAC and implement visitor impact monitoring system
- establish criterion for commercial and special use activities compatible with island principles and goals
- enforce group size limits and gas canister stove usage
- complete historic and cultural inventory
- repair historic buildings as feasible and add security measures
- update informational and interpretive brochures and signing and include fire prevention information

Within 4-6 years

- purchase undeveloped private lot east of Skeeko Bay if available and feasible
- develop comprehensive forest management plan
- complete grasslands restoration plan
- install additional sanitation method if necessary
- establish additional designated landing sites if needed

IX. CONCLUSION

This management plan is a continuation of the planning process initiated in 1978 when Wild Horse Island became a State Park. However, in this instance a new strategy of incorporating all FWP-owned islands into a consistent administrative approach has been initiated. Within this document, an attempt has been made to resolve the current issues and concerns about the management of the FWP islands and to anticipate future impacts due to their growing popularity.

Flathead Lake is located in a region marked by increasing tourism and growth. These trends and their consequences and opportunities are of interest to Fish, Wildlife & Parks and the public. To maintain the islands in as natural a condition as possible will require decisions that will not always be popular. Efforts have been made to strike a balance between current primitive conditions, wildlife habitat considerations, and provisions for compatible recreational opportunities. The management direction presented in this plan reflects the diversity of the island's resources and focuses on the continuance of healthy ecological systems by actively managing public recreation.

There often exists a fine line between providing recreational opportunities for visitors, and resource protection. The exceptional natural attributes of an area contribute to attracting visitors. Often, the attraction can lead to increased use and diminish the experience for which the area was originally sought, as visitors seek the “last best place.” Consequently, it becomes vitally important that managers balance preservation and use in order to preserve the uniqueness of the land and avoid diminishing the quality experience visitors seek. Managing use through responsible pro-active management, in order to keep the amount of change at an acceptable level, is the challenge we face.

Through a cooperative effort between the Parks and Wildlife Divisions, and with help from citizen groups, management goals and actions have been developed which will help conserve the mystic allure of the FWP Flathead Lake Islands and wildlife habitat they provide.

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