



Decision Notice

Tongue River Reservoir State Park

Proposed Campground Renovations Project

Description of Proposed Project

Montana State Parks proposes to perform campground renovations at Tongue River Reservoir State Park. Affected areas include the Camper's Point, Pee Wee Point South, Pee Wee Point North and Sand Point camp areas along with a new sign plan for the entire park. Evaluation of the project determined total costs to be approximately 3 million dollars. The project as a result will be completed in two phases. Phase one of the project, estimated to cost \$1.2 million, will be started in the fall of 2013.

Phase One

Campers Point

One camp site on Campers Point south will be upgraded to serve as a volunteer camp host site. Upgrades will include a potable water hookup and a sewer connection. Approximately 600 feet of both sewer and water lines will be installed along with a septic tank. The dry dock storage area will be expanded to provide more space for the Concessionaire's operations at the park including renting secured space to store privately owned recreational gear. If funding allows, this project will also add a second slip dock. Both the slip dock and dry dock storage will be managed by the Tongue River State Park private concessionaire.

Pee Wee Point South

Forty-one existing campsites will be upgraded. The upgrade of the existing sites will include installation of electrical service at all 41 campsites along with electrical transformers and circuit breaker panels. A water well for landscaping irrigation will also be installed. Two camp host sites will be developed with associated water and sewer infrastructure. A parking area and picnic shelter will be added in the open space close to the camp host sites.

Pee Wee Point North

Fourteen campsites will be renovated with hardened gravel camp pads. Two sites will be developed as camp host sites with the associated water and sewer infrastructure.

Phase Two – Future Projects

Phase Two of the project will commence at a future, yet to be determined date. Phase two will consist of any developments not completed during Phase One construction including work on Sand Point and adjacent upland area. The total estimated cost of Phase Two is \$1.8 million.

Sand Point

Construction of up to 46 new gravel hardened back-in campsites and renovation of 11 existing campsites. New construction will be located in areas currently having little development.

Alternatives Considered:

Alternative A – Proposed Action: Montana State Parks will renovate campsites, as described above, at the Campers Point camp area, Pee Wee Point North and South camp areas, and Sand Point Camp area. The proposed action will be completed in two phases. Phase one will begin in the fall of 2013 and consist of the work described for the camp areas on Campers Point and Pee Wee Point North and South. Cost for phase one will be \$1.2 million. Phase two will commence at a later, undetermined date. Phase two will consist of any work not completed during phase one including the work on Sand Point.

Alternative B – No action: Montana State Parks would not perform any of the campground renovation work described above.

This alternative leaves the area in its current state. There will be no expansion in the offering of electrical service to the 41 camp pads at Pee Wee South camp area. Campers will continue to use electrical generators at these camp pads. The use of generators produces exhaust fumes, noise pollution and the threat of gasoline spillage will continue along with the risk of accidental fire from improperly stored gasoline containers. The camp area at Pee Wee North will remain without a hardened surface. Further negative impacts to the soil and the vegetative community will continue unabated at this camp area during and following rain events. The same would be the case on Sand Point. Proper stewardship of the two camp areas may require closure of these popular camp areas to prevent further resource degradation and to allow for reseeded and reestablishment of native ground cover species. Public demand for expanded dry dock storage and an increased number of boat slips would remain unmet.

Public Process

Montana State Parks is required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) to assess the potential impacts of its proposed action to the human and physical environments, evaluate those impacts through an interdisciplinary approach, including public input, and make a decision based on this information.

The legal notices for the Tongue River Reservoir State Park Campground Renovations project were published in the *BILLINGS GAZETTE*, *HELENA INDEPENDENT RECORD*, *MILES CITY STAR* and the *SHERIDAN PRESS*. Montana State Parks issued a statewide press release on August 17, 2012. The EA was available for public review on Montana State Parks' website from August 17, 2012 through September 14, 2012.

Comment Summary

During the official comment period, Montana State Parks received five comments in the form of letters or e-mails. Four of the comments were from individuals or families and one from an agency, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (from whom Montana State Parks leases the park lands).

From the five comments received, there was almost complete support for the proposed campground renovation project at Tongue River Reservoir State Park. Specific comments, concerns and recommendations are addressed below.

1.

- *"I applaud the continual work FWP has completed at TRR. I think having electric at more sites will help with the noise and overall experience. ... To many visitors leave generators run all day even if they are out on the water away from the noise themselves."*
- *"Improvements have to be made at Tongue River. I'd like to see electrical put in at Pee Wee Point."*
- *"This is another good start on facilities that need to be installed at T.R.R. being a senior and living in Miles City I use the dry storage and marina's docking facility."*

Montana State Parks Response: *"Thank you for your support."*

2.

- *"They have the pull through areas for bigger campers. They actually fit two, but they don't let you put two in one spot", which is so ridiculous. If both are paying what does it matter?"*
- *"They should allow more than one camper unit in sites 34-52. These sites are plenty big enough for two fifth wheels."*

Montana State Parks Response: *"Thank you for the comment. Yes, while the sites are large enough to accommodate two campers, they aren't large enough to accommodate two campers, two tow vehicles along with boats and or jet skis on trailers. We have made the decision to limit these sites to single camper occupancy in an attempt to keep all wheeled vehicles and trailers on the gravel pads."*

3.

- *“What I don’t see addressed in the DEA-paving the main road from the highway to the asphalt at Camper’s Point. I recall that was supposed to be included in the first couple phases when Camper’s Point was paved and electrical trenched. We visit the park in the summer and winter. The dust is horrible. Washboards are bad. I feel those couple miles need to be paved and it should be at the top of the improvement list.”*

Montana State Parks Response: *“Thank you for the comment. Montana State Parks continues to seek a resolution to the dust problem through discussions with Big Horn County and Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, the two entities who actually own the road.”*

4.

- *“The Department of Natural Resources and Conservation is not opposed to the project and generally will always support enhanced recreational opportunities at Tongue River Reservoir State Park. However, as the underlying owners of the property, please provide us written verification that federal, state and/or county permits and clearances have been, or are in the process of being obtained. Please provide hard copies of each permit and clearance to our office as appropriate.”*

Montana State Parks Response: *“Montana State Parks will obtain all necessary permits prior to commencing with the campground renovation project and provide copies to the DNRC as requested.”*

5.

- *“More ramps need to be provided to ease the waiting, especially at the Marina.”*

Montana State Parks Response: *“While outside the scope of this project, Montana State Parks does recognize that the ramp at the Marina receives heavy use on summer weekends. Adding another launch lane at the Marina is not practical. The parking lot currently fills to overflowing with the current double launch lane ramp. State Parks will need to identify a location to accommodate another ramp and associated parking lot. This work would be included in a later development project at Tongue River Reservoir State Park.”*

6.

- *“We are too nice a state. We need to change things to make more money for these improvements at our recreational areas, like charging more for out of state campers and a launch fee. Why aren’t we implementing some of these things like other states do...?”*

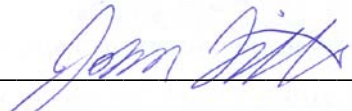
Montana State Parks Response: *“Montana State Parks fees are determined by the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission on a two year cycle. Montana State*

Parks is actively pursuing the charging of fees for services where and when it is justified. Nonresident campers in Montana State Parks do pay a \$5 higher fee per night than do Montana residents. While outside the scope of this project, we do appreciate your comment.”

Decision

It is my decision to proceed with the campground renovation work at Tongue River State Park as described in Alternative A of the draft Environmental Assessment and in this Decision Notice. Based on the Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) and the applicable laws, regulations and policies, I have determined that the proposed action will not have significant negative effects on the human and physical environments associated with the proposed campground renovation project. Therefore, I conclude that the EA is the appropriate level of analysis and preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is unnecessary.

By this notification, the draft EA is made the final EA with this Decision Notice, since very minimal changes (noted in the Montana State Parks responses above) are required to the draft document. It is my decision to recommend that the FWP Commission approve Montana State Parks’ proposed action – to proceed with the campground renovations as described in the EA.



John Little

Montana State Park Regional Park Manager

11/14/2012

Date