



Region 2 Office
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DECISION NOTICE: Placid Lake State Park Boating Facility Improvements

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED PROJECT

Montana State Parks (MSP), a division of Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP), proposes to expand the existing boat trailer parking area at Placid Lake State Park through the addition of 25 paved and delineated parking spaces. Additionally, MSP proposes to replace the existing concrete courtesy boat dock at the Placid Lake State Park day-use area (located 1.5 miles north of the campground entrance) with a seasonal “roll-in” type dock, and install an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) parking pad and accessible trail adjacent to the existing latrine.

Over the past several years, the steady increase in visitation has resulted in existing boat trailer parking at the campground regularly exceeding its capacity. Placid Lake State Park has averaged 40,569 visitors over the past three years. Currently, once existing parking is filled to capacity, visitors park randomly along roadsides within the park and on the county road outside of park boundaries. This unmanaged parking of vehicles and trailers constricts traffic flow, heightens the potential for vehicle collisions, damages roadside vegetation and soil and impedes passage for emergency response vehicles. In addition, annual surveys and regular comments have indicated that the lack of adequate boat trailer parking detracts from visitors’ experiences. Placid Lake State Park provides the only public access to the popular 1,212 acre water body.

At the day-use area, annual winter icing of the lake further deteriorated the condition of the permanent concrete dock (installed in 1994) to a point where public safety hazards required its removal. This took place in January with the concrete deck being removed while the lake was frozen. Piers from the concrete dock will be removed in Spring of 2014. The proposed seasonal roll-in dock would provide for continued use of a courtesy dock at the day-use area. In addition, upgrades to the parking adjacent to the latrine would provide for public access that meets current ADA compliance standards.

Alternative A: No Action

If no action is taken, there would be continued demand for additional parking both inside and outside of the park. Given the continued increase in park visitation, alleviating

parking congestion and ensuring safe public and emergency vehicle access would continue to present challenges for park management. In the interest of public safety the existing concrete dock was removed in January 2014. As a result, a dock at the day-use area would not exist and the potential for future replacement would be unknown.

Alternative B (Preferred): Expansion of the Campground Boat Trailer Parking Area, Replacement of the Existing Day-use Area Boat Dock, and Installation of ADA Parking Pad and Trail

Under this alternative, parking capacity at the existing boat trailer parking area would be increased through the addition of 25 paved and delineated parking spaces. The additional spaces would be created adjacent to the existing boat trailer parking area and accommodate single vehicles as well as vehicle-trailer combinations. The size of the expanded area would be approximately 36,000 square feet, which would increase the existing parking lot by 30%. The design of the proposed parking area would integrate vegetated islands and natural parking barriers to fit with the park's natural aesthetic values. This alternative would provide the needed park infrastructure to better manage parking and alleviate congestion on roadways both inside and outside of the park. In addition, the existing stationary concrete courtesy dock at the day-use area would be removed and replaced with a seasonal roll-in dock. This would allow park staff to remove the dock from the lake during winter ice conditions, likely reducing annual maintenance costs and increasing the overall life of the dock. A parking pad would be constructed adjacent to the existing latrine, along with trail access to the new dock, both of which would be built to meet ADA accessibility standards.

PUBLIC PROCESS AND COMMENT

A draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for the proposed project was made available for public review and comment from January 27, 2014 through 5:00 pm February 24, 2014. Legal notices for the Placid Lake State Park Boating Facility Improvements were published twice each in the *Missoulian*, *Helena Independent Record* and *Seeley Swan Pathfinder*. The EA was posted on the Montana State Parks website and a statewide press release issued.

Montana State Parks (MSP) received 8 comments on the proposal. Two (2) of the comments supported the proposed parking improvements, 2 were not in support of the parking improvements and 1 had concerns about parking expansion and suggested a reduction in the number of spaces from 25 to 5-7. Four (4) comments supported the proposed improvements at the day-use area, and no comments were received in opposition of day use-area improvements. Two (2) comments were received that discussed topics that were not part of the proposed action. The following is a summary of themes contained in the comments received and a response where applicable:

1. Comments that did not support the proposed parking improvements expressed a concern with increasing the number of boats on Placid Lake and associated safety and resource concerns. The following are representative:
 - “Adding parking for an additional 25 boat trailers at the main campground would in all likelihood add another 25 boats to the lake during peak days/hours.”

- “We are however, concerned with any improvements that have the potential to add to the boat traffic on the lake, which in some areas on the lake can already become crowded and potentially dangerous on nice summer days.”
- “The suggested addition of 25 parking spaces for vehicles and boat trailers is of serious concern. Our preference would be to have only 5-7 additional spaces for vehicle-trailer combinations... With more boat accessibility to the lake and therefore more traffic, the shoreline will further deteriorate.”

MSP Response: Parking patterns at Placid Lake State Park during peak use times have included parking off of designated roadways, parking along roadways where parking is not designated and parking in designated camping spots. This has led to congestion, hindered ingress and egress, damaged park vegetation and resource values, increased potential for vehicle collisions and could impede passage by emergency response vehicles. The proposed expansion is not intended to increase boat activity on Placid Lake but rather, intended to accommodate the existing use at Placid Lake State Park in a manner that addresses current parking needs. Along with parking aimed at accommodating existing use would come improved traffic/parking management, and more active control of parking outside of designated areas. It is not anticipated that the project will result in a noticeable or measureable change in boating use on Placid Lake.

2. Some comments discussed topics that were not part of the proposed project, provided suggestions for implementing the proposed project, or provided input for management at Placid Lake State Park. The following are representative:
 - “My wife and I are in favor of expanding the size of the boat ramp at Placid.”
 - “Why not pave the existing Placid Day Use road way and parking?”
 - “Please make sure to allow space for larger boats. Right now there are only a few spaces long enough to park our truck and trailer for our 24’ pontoon.”
 - “Painted arrows on the driveway would help people know which direction they should be driving.”

MSP Response: To the extent possible, suggestions that could be accommodated within the scope of the proposed project will be considered as the project moves forward. Those suggestions outside the scope of the proposed project and EA are appreciated and could be considered as part of future proposals.

DECISION

Based on the analysis in the Draft Environmental Assessment and the applicable laws, regulations and policies, I have determined that the proposed action will not have significant effects on the human or physical environment. Therefore an Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared. It is my decision to implement Alternative B and expand the existing boat trailer parking area at Placid Lake State Park through the addition of 25 paved and delineated parking spaces, along with replacement of the previous concrete courtesy boat dock at the Placid Lake State Park day-use area with a seasonal “roll-in” type dock, and installation of an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) parking pad and accessible trail adjacent to the existing latrine. By notification of this

Decision Notice, the Draft EA is hereby made the Final EA. The EA and this Decision Notice may be obtained from Montana State Parks at the above address.

This action is subject to appeal, which must be submitted to the Parks Division Administrator in writing and postmarked within 30 days of 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 how FWP might address the concerns of the appeal.



3/24/2004

Chet Crowser
Regional Park Manager

Date