



The Long Road to Riches: The Development of Montana's State Park System

by David G. Conklin

FROM THE ROLLING, sage-covered plains and rocky buttes of Medicine Rocks State Park near Ekalaka to the sandy, shaded beach at Yellow Bay State Recreation Area on Flathead Lake, Montana residents and visitors alike enjoy a state park system largely unmatched in other states. This system, which contains nearly 250 separate areas, is as diverse as any in the nation and embodies some of the country's finest scenic and historic areas. A trip to the frontier ghost town at Bannack State Park lets the visitor relive a day in Montana's colorful history when gold was king and law and order were a function of vigilante committees and a hangman's noose. Also, a float trip past Citadel Rock State Monument on the Missouri River or a picnic at Flathead Lake's Finley Point State Recreation Area in sight of the picturesque Mission Mountains, offer some of the most striking and beautiful scenery available in the American West. Indeed, Montana's state park system is a treasure to behold.

Yet, to look at the size and quality of this system today, it would be hard to realize that as little as 30 years ago it was still in its infancy. Although proponents of a state park system had been trying to establish one since the 1920s, their attempts, for the most part, had been unsuccessful; and as late as the mid-1940s, the system was comprised of only a few parks, the administration of which was hampered by much disorganization and lack of funds.

It seems necessary, therefore, if we are to fully appreciate the impressive system we enjoy today, that we take a brief look at the history of the system's development and the difficulties which plagued it on its long road to riches.

As with most state park systems in the nation, Montana's park system was conceived in the early 1920s in response to an overall change in national parks and recreation philosophies. Whereas up until that time recreation was pursued almost exclusively within urban parks and within national forest areas, changing American lifestyles demanded an alternative approach to recreation management. The advent and proliferation of the automobile and an accompanying increase in American prosperity and leisure time made it evident to recreation managers, particularly those within federal agencies, that state parks and other state owned and operated recreation areas were urgently needed as intermediate links between established municipal and federal recreation areas. In addition, the developing conservation movement of that period, spearheaded by such people as President Theodore Roosevelt, was now a well-known cause and its followers had banded together to ensure that valuable natural and recreation areas would be set aside for the enjoyment of future generations. With this significant increase in the numbers of persons interested in outdoor areas and the recreation

Just as today, Yellow Bay (left) was a popular recreation area 70 years ago. photo: Morton J. Elrod, courtesy University of Montana Archives

potential to be found in them, neither national parks and forest preserves nor inner city parks could now be expected to fulfill all of the nation's recreation needs.

Stephen Mather, first director of the National Park Service, saw the need for a nationwide system of state parks and in January 1921, convinced Iowa Gov. W.L. Harding to summon over 200 conservationists from throughout the country to Des Moines for the First National Conference on State Parks, an assemblage which would become the lobbying agent for the nation's state park system proponents.

The consensus of the conference members was that state parks were becoming necessary for basically three reasons: (1) to preserve areas of beauty and character that did not, for lack of national significance or other reasons, qualify as national parks, (2) to provide uncommercialized places for public rest and recreation, and (3) to provide the vitalizing contact with nature which was once implicit in national life but from which a swiftly urbanizing population was becoming separated.

A movement toward the creation of systems of recreation areas within the states emerged from this meeting and, although the contents of state park systems were difficult to standardize, definitions were written, criteria established and classifications proposed. These systems, of course, were modeled on the national park system.

Though public support for state park systems generally increased throughout the country during the balance of the 1920s, there is no record of any legislative support for a state park system during that period in Montana. This is not surprising if we recall that preserving scenic wonders for the delight, inspiration and recreation of automobile tourists who wanted to escape the crowded conditions and noises of the cities was predominantly an urban-minded concept.

And Montana was anything but an "urban" state. In fact, in the 1920s not a single paved road crossed the state in its entirety and the total population of the state, the nation's third largest geographically, was less than 600,000. Also, at that time over a third of Montana was public land, including two national parks and more than 17 million acres of forest reserve land, both containing established camping and picnicking spots. Considering this vast resource base and the immense amount of land under public ownership, it is not hard to understand why the state and its residents relied heavily upon the federal government to provide recreation outside of cities and towns.

But the times were changing; income and leisure time were on the increase and the national call for more outdoor recreation areas was having its effect upon Montana as well.

Recognizing that the state's forest lands offered great recreational potential, Montana's state

foresters had long advocated recreational as well as commercial use of forest land and had begun leasing sites for permanent camps and cabins. In keeping with this trend, in 1925 Gov. John Erickson appointed a new state forester, Rutledge Parker, who not only advocated recreational use, but also actively lobbied for the creation of a state park system in Montana.

Parker, who was eventually to become the founder of Montana's state park system, was a catalyst for the park movement in the state, and shortly after his installation, legislative support for outdoor recreation began to appear.

In 1929, a bill supported by the Kiwanis clubs throughout the state which sought to establish and fund a separate state park department was introduced into the state House of Representatives. Unfortunately, although the bill won easy passage in the House, the Senate committee on public lands recommended that it not be passed.

Not to be deterred in their hopes, however, the Kiwanis clubs put pressure on the legislature and eventually a bill was passed which designated the state forester as state park director and authorized the state Board of Land Commissioners to establish state parks and set aside state lands for park purposes. The bill, however, was actually only a compromise because, although the legislature had conceded to some of the wishes of the state park promoters, it did not create a separate parks department and no appropriations for parks were made. In fact, it was to be another 10 years until the legislature actually passed a comprehensive state parks law.

As the newly designated state parks director, Parker immediately began gathering the public and legislative support needed to establish a few "model" parks. By the 1930s, however, the country was in the depths of the Great Depression and there was little likelihood of receiving any additional legislative appropriations for park purposes. Thus, the state parks movement in Montana, as well as in the rest of the nation, found itself in a predicament that was remedied only with the aid of the federal government.

While the Depression ate away at America's heart, Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected President. During his campaign he had pledged to put Americans back to work and in his first 100 days in office, in an attempt to live up to this promise, he created the New Deal and a host of "alphabet soup agencies" designed to bring the country back to life.

One of the most famous of these agencies was the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). The bill creating the CCC, passed by Congress and signed by Roosevelt on March 31, 1933, provided for emergency conservation work in the nation's forests and parks and was the opportunity the states had been hoping for to revitalize their state park efforts.

Under the supervision of the National Park Service, the CCC was a major impetus for state park development, and during the Depression it spent nearly \$300 million nationwide on state, county and metropolitan park improvement projects. With CCC



The ghost town of Bannack, Montana's first territorial capital, was recommended early for inclusion in the state park system. graphics: Dick Ellis

involvement, park development boomed and between 1930 and 1940, 22 states, including Montana, established agencies for acquiring and administering state parks.

In order to take full advantage of this federal support for parks, in 1934 Parker successfully lobbied for the creation of a State Recreation Committee which operated through the state Chamber of Commerce, then called Montanans Incorporated.

The fruits of the committee's efforts were encouraging. In February 1934, Gov. Frank Cooney asked the federal government to develop public facilities at Morrison Cave (then designated as Lewis and Clark National Monument) and by October 1935, a CCC company, previously stationed at Glacier National Park, had been transferred to the caverns. Consequently, with work on the caverns underway, and with the backing of the State Recreation Committee, the State Land Board met and passed a resolution naming the caverns as Montana's first state park.

While the CCC was busy developing the caverns, the federal government was encouraging the state to prepare for the active management of its own state park system. Arno Cammerer, director of the National Park Service at that time, had previously made it well known that the extent and character of National Park Service cooperation in park work with any state was dependent, in large part, upon the provisions made by the state for handling its own park problems.

The task of preparation again fell to Parker, who used a 1936 park study act to enlist the aid of the National Park Service in making a preliminary recreation inventory of the state. The report, which was included in an October 1937 report to Gov. Roy Ayers, outlined the need for funds to cooperate in a joint federal-state comprehensive study, a study which Parker hoped would help him express the need for state parks and state park legislation in an appeal to the 1939 legislative session.

Parker's request for funds was denied and it was now evident that his time for gaining the needed support for state parks before the 1939 legislature

met was quickly running out.

Thus, Parker conveniently devoted the "Eleventh Biennial Report of the State Forester" (December 1938) to state parks, using the opportunity to embellish upon his earlier proposals with photos of potential parks, cost-benefit estimates, comparison charts and the testimony of prominent citizens.

Luckily, Parker was able to keep the support of long-time state park system promoters such as the Kiwanis clubs, and he sought their influence in pushing for a bill, introduced into the state House in January 1939, which would establish a state parks central design office and provide funding for the purchase of needed materials and land acquisition. Another bill, requesting just over \$17,000 in appropriations for operating the system, was introduced as a separate measure. In this way, it was hoped that any reluctance of the legislature toward passing the operations appropriations bill would not endanger the passage of the state parks enabling bill itself.

Although, as predicted by Parker, the parks operations appropriations bill was defeated, the parks enabling bill passed early in the 1939 legislative session to become the first comprehensive state parks legislation in Montana.

Thus, for the first time in the history of the state, a separate state park commission was created with the state forester serving as both the secretary and state park director. In addition, the three-member commission, to be appointed by the governor, was given broad powers to conserve the scenic, historic, archaeological, scientific and recreational resources of the state. Planning was emphasized as a method of determining which lands to acquire. The commission also was given the power to collect fees, grant concessions, make and enforce rules, accept federal aid and establish a separate fund for state parks. It was, in turn, ordered to make biennial reports of its activities to the legislature. In conjunction, the state highway department was empowered to build connecting roads to all parks.

Fortunately, although the state park commission didn't receive any appropriated operating funds, it still had Morrison Cave State Park (now Lewis and

Clark Caverns) from which to draw revenue. Also of benefit to the commission was its relationship with the State Board of Land Commissioners, which had authorization to set aside state school trust lands for park purposes.

Thus, completion of construction at Morrison Cave State Park was of primary concern because only by keeping the caverns open could the commission ensure that it would have the revenue to keep the infant park system alive. Even though the caverns were not officially dedicated until the spring of 1941, visitors had been allowed inside since 1938, and in 1939 an admission price of 75 cents for adults and 25 cents for children was initiated.

During the year of its dedication, nearly 4,000 people toured the caverns, but wartime shortages and gasoline rationing in subsequent years greatly reduced revenues to the park and in October 1943, all park operations at the caverns were suspended.

As soon as World War II ended, however, plans to reopen the park and expand the system further to meet an anticipated post-war recreation boom came to life. Early in 1946, the State Park Commission met in Helena to lay plans for carrying out these objectives and later that year the caverns, newly named the Lewis and Clark Caverns State Park, were reopened.

In addition, the commission honored Parker's suggestion that he be allowed to hire a full-time state park director, and set aside the funds for doing so.

The man Parker picked for the job, Walter R. (Barney) Rankin, who was to develop and expand the park system for the next six years, was a logical and easy choice for Parker to make; the two had become acquainted during CCC project years at the caverns, at which time Rankin was the project's superintendent.

Despite pleas emphasizing that tourism was Montana's third largest industry and that, in its present condition, the park system could never become self-supporting, it was not until 1947 that the legislature made an appropriation for park purposes. By that time, the commission was in charge of five state parks in northwestern and southwestern Montana, all of which had been donated to the state. These were Lewis and Clark Caverns, Bitterroot Lake, which was transferred from the state forester's office, Lone Pine and Missouri Headwaters, both of which were donated with use restrictions, and Yellow Bay on Flathead Lake, which was set aside by the state legislature.

With legislative support, the park commission also began accepting additional responsibilities for park development and maintenance at Goose Bay and Big Arm on Flathead Lake, at Rock Creek and Hell Creek on Fort Peck Reservoir and at Beaver Creek near Havre, the Missouri Headwaters, Pictograph Cave and Bridger Mountain. A CCC project had already made some recreational improvements at Beaver Creek, but by 1947 they had all but disappeared. Pictograph Cave also had been developed by Works Progress Administration (WPA) workmen during the Depression, but vandals in the

ensuing years had completely destroyed the stone museum at the site and had removed all of the valuable Indian artifacts it housed.

Unfortunately, it appears that this great flurry of park system activity was a little too much for Rankin to handle. His bookkeeping procedures were far from adequate in keeping the widely scattered field work under wraps and the system quickly ran up a deficit of almost \$24,000.

Because of this deficit, the state legislature took steps which eventually led to the dissolution of the State Park Commission. First it continued a very cautious appropriation for state parks and refused a request for funds to develop interior park roads. Additionally, it established a legislative task force to investigate the feasibility of a proposed reorganization plan for state government. Composed of four senators and four members of the House, the "Little Hoover Commission," as it was called, was directed to study and make recommendations concerning a plan to consolidate over 100 commissions and boards into a few major departments. It was hoped this move would give the governor and legislature more fiscal control over state government.

Because of the large State Park Commission deficit, several parks had to be closed, development postponed at others and Rankin taken off the payroll. These circumstances led the Commission to Reorganization of State Government to meet with the State Park Commission in the spring of 1952. That being an election year, the governor had decided to withdraw his support for the program because of its financial problems and the commission decided to recommend following through with a consolidation proposal.

Such consolidation was achieved in March 1953 when the newly elected governor, J. Hugo Aronson, signed into law a bill abolishing the State Park Commission and transferring all state park functions from the State Forester's office to the State Highway Commission.

As one of its first moves, the Highway Commission met in August 1953, and named Ashley Roberts as chief of its new State Park Division. Well aware of the problems of the past, however, the legislature continued its cautious support of state parks and set the parks appropriation for 1953 at only about \$45,000 and provided for an average yearly increase during the next 12 years of less than \$10,000 to cover inflation, pay raises and basic maintenance of new park areas. Nevertheless, during this period the Highway Commission was able to make major road improvements in state parks adjacent to the primary highway system and accepted responsibility for 19 new state parks, several of which have become the most outstanding recreational attractions in the state. These included several Flathead Lake sites, the ghost town of Bannack, the badlands of Makoshika, Medicine Rocks and Canyon Ferry Reservoir, among others.

The 1960s are recognized as a turning point for Montana's state park system as well as recreation throughout the nation. First, in January 1962, the

presidentially appointed Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission (ORRRC) submitted its lengthy report to President John Kennedy foretelling of a coming nationwide outdoor recreation explosion and suggesting recommendations for handling the onslaught. This, plus the establishment of the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation (BOR) by Congress in April of that same year, served as forewarnings to the states that they had better prepare for increased recreational management responsibilities.

The Montana Dept. of Fish and Game, recognizing that there would be a similar increase in pressure on its own recreation resources, and being fully aware that federal funds would soon be available to the states for recreation development, took immediate steps to prepare for the rush. To this end, in October 1963 a Division of Recreation and Lands Development was established to plan for and carry out the long-range recreational development and management of department lands. In addition, because these anticipated federal funds were to be administered only by state recreation agencies, department Director Frank Dunkle requested that Gov. Tim Babcock designate the Fish and Game Commission as the agency responsible for recreation in the state, which he did on April 1, 1964.

Although a Recreation Advisory Committee had existed informally for over 10 years in the State Park Division, in August 1964 Gov. Babcock established a separate 20-member Outdoor Recreation Advisory and Planning Committee and named Robert Cooney, chief of Fish and Game's Recreation and Lands Development Division, as its chairman. The committee's purpose was to plan for the state's implementation of the soon-to-be-enacted federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Act. This included advising the Dept. of Fish and Game on how to develop a Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) to qualify for annual grants of nearly \$1 million and, perhaps more importantly, to develop state legislation which would put the department in charge of these annual grants for outdoor recreation.

Recognizing the opportunity now present to coordinate all park and recreation activities under a single, parent agency, the legislature was faced with the choice of leaving administration of the parks program with the state Highway Commission, which made no effort to increase its budget even though 12 parks were scheduled to be dropped from the system, or transferring it to the Fish and Game Commission, thereby giving it the legal authority it requested to complement its existing recreation responsibilities. The legislature opted for the latter alternative and administration of the state park system was delegated to the Fish and Game Commission.

The dramatic upswing in park program development is tied to a national resurgence of interest in protecting recreation resources which took place during the mid-1960s. This new awareness was reflected nationally with the appointment of the

ORRRC, the creation of the LWCF and the establishment of National Wilderness, Wild and Scenic River, and National Trail systems, as well as a number of new national parks and recreation areas.

A growing interest in recreation and natural resources was quite evident in Montana as well. For the first time in the history of the state, the legislature had established a state parks program within an agency that had not only the responsibility for several recreation programs of statewide importance and the field offices necessary to implement them, but also several sources of funding for their support.

The Fish and Game Commission gave formal recognition to these new responsibilities in June 1965 when it approved changing the name of the Recreation and Lands Development Division to the Recreation, Parks and Research Division. The name again was changed on January 1, 1966, when the division dropped the word "Research" from its title and became known as simply the Recreation and Parks Division. Although the division's responsibilities would not change, the name would be shortened even further to just the Parks Division on July 1, 1977, as part of an overall departmental reorganization plan.

The 1967 legislature was nearly as generous in allocating funds for state parks as the previous one had been. Not only was a motorboat fuel tax issued to generate more revenue for the system, but a 1963 law which removed the park system's earned revenue and placed it in the state's general fund also was revoked, once again allowing all park fees collected to be used exclusively by the Recreation and Parks Division. Also, by January 20, 1967, the 1965 SCORP had been updated, allowing the continued use of LWCF grants for acquisition and development of parks, recreation areas, historic sites and fishing access sites.

Early in 1967 Gov. Babcock, at the request of Dunkle, designated the Dept. of Fish and Game as the agency responsible for implementing the 1966



The automobile allowed Americans to travel farther in pursuit of recreation. These tourists are visiting the Bannack area. photo: courtesy Beaverhead County Museum

National Historic Preservation Act in Montana. Recreation and Parks Division Chief Wes Woodgerd was designated as the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) and Babcock appointed a five-member Historic Sites Advisory Council to work with Woodgerd in preserving historic sites. Thus, another federal grant program had become available to the Recreation and Parks Division for acquisition and development of state parks with historic values.

The inclusion of these various funding sources into the state park system allowed the division to begin hiring regional parks managers to oversee parks acquisition and development throughout the state. Richard Ellis, the first parks manager hired, helped Fish and Game's District 4 Supervisor Nels Thoreson oversee the acquisition of several key access areas along the Missouri River Breaks, an area which would later be designated as a State Recreational Waterway and is now included in the national Wild and Scenic River System. At the same time, many new fishing and boating access sites were acquired on Montana's famous fishing and floating waters and several park system historic and archaeological sites, including the Madison Buffalo Jump and the ghost town at Bannack, were developed.

For the first time, it seemed, the state park system was growing and developing in pace with the demand for recreation space and access. Sixty-two new sites or areas were added to the system from 1965 through 1975, and nearly \$3 million was spent to provide basic facilities such as roads, parking and toilets.

Yet, there was, at this time, still no comprehen-

sive department-wide plan to coordinate the fragmented recreation, wildlife and historic projects that had been undertaken. However, that soon was to change.

In 1973, Recreation and Parks Division Chief Woodgerd was appointed director of the Dept. of Fish and Game and he in turn appointed Ashley Roberts to head the park system once again. As one of his first actions, Woodgerd created a Planning Division which was charged with producing a comprehensive strategic plan for all divisions of the department. By definition, this plan was to include statements on division goals, objectives and, most important, specific strategies for meeting those objectives. It was hoped that eventually the integration of recreation, parks and fish and wildlife strategies into a single plan would identify areas where several goals and objectives could be realized at once.

In the mid-1970s it became obvious that acquisition and development of parks and recreation areas with specifically earmarked federal and state grant funds could not continue indefinitely without proper planning and sufficient maintenance funds. The problem became particularly acute when the 1973 legislature set aside additional funds from fishing license sales for fishing access site acquisition and the 1975 legislature set aside a portion of the tax on mined coal for park acquisition. In other words, the system was in danger of having adequate funds to purchase additional areas but not enough money to provide access, facilities or maintenance.

But by now, fortunately, Montanans had developed a great respect and devotion for their state parks



The Civilian Conservation Corps installed new stairways and an electrical lighting system in Lewis and Clark Caverns during the 1930s as part of a \$2 million improvement. photo: courtesy National Park Service

and during the next two years the state legislature not only responded to these park system projects, but even initiated its own park system projects and trust funds. The 1975 legislature, in fact, set aside \$250,000 for the development of a park to commemorate the bicentennial year of the American Revolution. Many sites were considered by a select committee before choosing to develop the Missouri Headwaters into the state park that had been dreamed of since the 1930s. Matched with LWCF funds, total expenditures of over \$500,000 have made the area one of the state's premier parks.

In October 1975, Ashley Roberts retired following 21 years of service to the state park system. He had developed the system, which had grown with the expanding needs of recreation in Montana, from 10 state parks in 1953 to nearly 200 parks, monuments, recreation areas, waterways, roads, trails and fishing access sites in 1975.

Roberts was succeeded by Ron Holliday as administrator of the Recreation and Parks Division. Educated in park management in Texas and Colorado, Holliday began applying modern methods of business management to the administration of state

parks when he joined the system in 1968 as recreation specialist in Billings. He continued this trend as assistant administrator under Roberts by instituting project priority budgeting and insisting on strict financial responsibility.

Holliday's first job as the new division administrator and state park director was to find sources of operation and maintenance funding to supplement what otherwise would have to be a large request for general tax fund money from the state legislature. Although Gov. Tom Judge had been a long-time supporter of the park system, Holliday knew that even the governor could not ask the legislature to emphasize parks over the many other social services which relied solely on general tax revenues. Somehow, parks had to help "pay their own way."

These efforts culminated in several pieces of legislation in 1977. The Montana Snowmobile Association sponsored a bill to collect 0.3% of the state distributors' gasoline tax to be used by the Parks Division for operation and maintenance of snowmobile facilities. Furthermore, the snowmobile registration fee law was amended to allow these fees to be used for maintenance as well as development of

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An artist's conception of how the campground at Placid Lake State Recreation Area will appear when development is complete. graphics: Len Visual Design

future. Over the past several years, new program responsibilities have come along with the acquisition of many new park and recreation lands—lands like Mt. Haggin, Wild Horse Island and the Rosebud Battlefield—which are important to this state in the present and for future generations. But, we must remember that as we take on new lands and programs, we also take on the responsibilities to care for them. This takes money and careful fiscal management to assure that the monetary where-withal needed to accomplish new work is balanced with the demands of the new responsibilities.

Beyond the question of “how much” for the park system is the question of “who should provide the ‘how much’.” We should be searching for alternatives to general tax revenues for the support of the park system. Our goal is to shift to park users an equitable share of the financial support for the program. While there is justification for continuing to support the park system from general tax revenues, at least in part, an equitable balance must be sought.

Preliminary studies have been undertaken by the Dept. of Fish and Game and my Office of Budget and Program Planning in search of alternative, reasonable and adequate sources of funding for the park system. These studies will be continued. I have asked the Parks Division to conduct several studies on the economic costs and benefits of parks and recreation activity in Montana as a portion of the planning required for our participation in the Land and Water Conservation Fund program. In addition, I have asked them to study the possibility of establishing a Parks Foundation which would draw upon private resources for the support of the state parks.

Finally, I will be asking the 46th Legislature to consider the possibility of establishing a perpetual trust fund for the support of parks acquisition, construction and operations. This would permit the development of a greater consistency in funding, a consistency which is now largely lacking. It would allow, consequently, the careful balancing of expansion of the state park system against ability to develop and care for the expansion. This is now difficult and awkward for some elements of the park system.

The Montana park system has come a long way since the first comprehensive park law was passed in Montana in 1939. It has given us many fine recreation areas and has conserved many of the finest moments of Montana’s past and many of the finest examples of our scientific and natural heritage. The extent to which this program is continued—the extent to which we commit ourselves to passing on to future generations a true legacy as opposed to an abused remnant—rests ultimately with Montana residents. Now, more than ever before, we must address the decision to conserve resources before they are compromised and lost forever. ■

The Long Road to Riches continued

facilities. The motorboat fuel tax also was amended so that 0.9%, rather than the previous 0.6%, of the gasoline tax would be apportioned to help pay for the increasing costs of operation and maintenance of areas where motorboating is allowed. And finally, the state legislature amended the coal tax trust fund and fishing licence fee use structures to allow portions of them to be used for operation and maintenance of state recreation areas as well as for land acquisition.

Since adequate funding for the existing state park system had been assured for the time being, Holliday and his staff began to look for innovative ways to expand and develop the system to meet increasing recreational demands without requiring an increase in general tax fund support. Several projects have been undertaken which have been requested and encouraged by local residents, and by working in cooperation with the Parks Division, they have become a reality. These projects include: working toward the establishment of the Blackfoot Recreation Corridor to ensure access for white-water boating and fishing on the scenic Blackfoot River near Missoula; creation of a “Heritage Park” adjacent to Giant Springs State Park in Great Falls (time, money, equipment and labor were donated for this cause); establishment of state recreation areas with provisions for camping and boating at Salmon and Placid lakes near Missoula on land donated by Champion International Corp.; the development of facilities for winter recreation programs near Kalispell and the creation and improvement of irrigation reservoirs in eastern Montana for recreational use.

Today, Montana’s state park system consists of nearly 250 areas of many classifications totaling over 94,000 acres. In addition, many other areas under short-term or multiple-use agreements provide Montanans with more state recreation areas and more acreage available for recreation usage than ever before. But, if the system as we know it is to survive, it is imperative that the Parks Division and the state legislature recognize the problems which have plagued the system in the past, and direct funding and management activities toward more beneficial ends. Considering the strength of the system now, however, the future of Montana’s state park system appears bright indeed. ■