



## MONTANA STATE PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

**Meeting Date:** December 16, 2017

**Agenda Item:** Hell Creek State Park – draft Master Site/Management Plan (MS/MP)

**Division:** Parks

**Action Needed:** Proposed

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 45 Minutes

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**Background:** The draft Hell Creek Master Site/Management Plan was presented to the board in October, 2015. The draft Plan identifies management issues such as maintenance needs, site capacity issues, concession operation, and other factors directly related to Montana State Park’s management of the site including whether the division continues to manage the area.

**Public Involvement Process & Results:** The plan was posted for a 32-day public comment period, closing on Friday, November 27, 2015. Email correspondence inviting public comment on the draft plan was sent to key stakeholders and visitors who made campsite reservations at the park over the last three years. Public notices were posted in the Billings Gazette and area newspapers in Jordan, Glendive, and Miles City. Media coverage about the draft plan was covered during the public comment period by the Billings Gazette. A total of 81 public comments were received with 66 taking a position on one of the alternatives. Comments were received from individuals and agency partners, and identified both support and opposition for the continued management of Hell Creek State Park and proposed priority improvements. Public comment is summarized by major themes discussed to understand and identify substantive comments for consideration in the final. The final outcomes for support on the proposed options are:

- **Support Option 1 – 41 comments:** Continue to manage site and concession with priority improvements
- **Support Option 2 – 2 comments:** Manage modified site boundary, relinquish concession to the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)
- **Support Option 3 – 23 comments:** Return site to the USACE in 2021 with minimal improvements for health and safety

### **Alternatives and Analysis:**

**Alt #1** – approve the “Hell Creek Master Site/Management Plan” with Option 1 as the preferred option.

**Alt #2** – do not approve the “Hell Creek Master Site/Management Plan” at this time

**Alt #3** - approve the “Hell Creek Master Site/Management Plan” with Option 3 as the preferred option while requiring a formal review in 2019 to evaluate if the division has met conditions to improve management, fiscal solvency, and fiscal partnerships based on concerns raised.

**Agency Recommendation and Rationale:** It is the agency recommendation that the “Hell Creek Master Site/Management Plan” be approved with Option 3 as the preferred option pending a formal review in 2019. Additionally, the division must implement a regulatory change to remove commercial use from the campground to comply with ASACE regulations.

Montana State Parks recognizes the importance of Hell Creek State Park in the region, the state, and within the state park system. While the division would prefer to maintain operation of the park, the facility condition, considerable management, and public health and safety challenges at the park cannot be adequately addressed with existing division

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resources. Similar challenges exist throughout the Montana State Park system and the division is faced with making hard decisions about how to best manage the entire system given competing priorities and limited resources.

To that end, the board is considering the “Classification and Prioritization of Parks Resources Policy.” Assuming that policy is approved, it will guide how the division prioritizes investment across the system. Investment in anything other than immediate public health and safety at Hell Creek State Park will be minimal until parks in higher classifications meet funding and staffing standards.

The division acknowledges that we do not currently have the ability to manage Hell Creek State Park to the standard identified in the 2015-2020 Strategic Plan. Therefore, we will actively work with the USACE and USFWS to improve partnerships and secure funding to support the park operationally and through capital investment. We will also work to align the end of the concession contract at the site with the end of the division contract at the site and to avoid any loss of service to the customer.

The division requests the board formally review this decision in 2019 and allow MSP to enter into negotiations at that time for a new lease if management conditions, fiscal solvency, and agency partnerships have improved to a level that allows management of Hell Creek State Park to Montana State Park standards. If that standard is not met, the division recommends allowing the current lease with USACE to expire on April 30, 2021.

**Proposed Motion** (Draft language the Board could use to adopt the agency recommendation):

I move to approve the draft “Hell Creek Master Site/Management Plan” with Option 3 as the preferred option while requiring a formal review in 2019 to evaluate if the division has met conditions to improve management, fiscal solvency, and fiscal partnerships.