

Montana State Parks and Recreation Board Policy



Classification and Prioritization of Park Resources

Chair Approval <i>Thomas E. Towns</i>	Effective Date 12/16/15	Review Date 12/16/18
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Board Policy

The allocation of resources to manage Montana State Parks and serve visitors will be done by using a systematic prioritization method aligned with statute, rule, and policy, consistent with the 2015-2020 Strategic Plan and considerate of the safety of park visitors and resources.

Purpose

This policy identifies the approach State Park Staff and the Montana State Parks and Recreation Board (Park Board) will use for resource allocation within the park system, with special consideration for staffing, operational funding and capital development.

Background

Since the establishment of the park system, Montana State Parks has consistently been challenged with adequately serving customers and protecting resources given the large number of park properties. Historically there has been a lack of appreciation and understanding for the park system and recreation programs. Funding and staffing levels have remained stagnant over time. The system also has a growing backlog of deferred maintenance needs and declining facilities. These challenges put Montana's state park system in the bottom 10 percent of systems in the country with respect to financial support and staffing.

The 2015 Strategic Plan directs staff to complete several analytical processes to ensure investment in state parks aligns with the most significant, relevant and accessible sites, while also improving visitor experiences and expectations of diverse site types and opportunities.

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Directives

This policy addresses each of the goals identified in the strategic plan through the following four directives:

1. **Prioritize resource allocation within the park system to improve visitor experiences, resource management/maintenance, and fiscal responsibilities based on the classification system.**
 - a. Manage sites based on the classification groupings. Allocate fiscal, staff, and capital resources first to sites that have the highest significance, relevance, and accessibility based on the classification analysis completed by staff in 2015.
 - b. Reallocate existing resources. Following consultation with local community leaders, the general public, and other affected stakeholders, redirect existing resources within the division to reach staffing and operating budget standards and meet facility needs.
 - c. Prioritize development in higher groupings. To ensure visitor expectations are met and experiences are high quality, development at more significant, relevant, and accessible sites may become a priority over reinvestment in lower ranking sites.
 - d. Maintain flexibility for lower groupings that may present public safety and health concerns. Resource allocation may allow for investment in discretionary and emergent issues to maintain safe experiences overall.
 - e. Reprioritize programs and services within individual parks. To ensure maintenance and safety are the priority customer needs, it may be appropriate to shift time and focus within an individual park.
 - f. Consider moving sites to new classification groupings if circumstances change significantly over time. Staff may re-evaluate the significance, relevance and accessibility of a site using the classification criteria when conditions significantly change or as policy is reviewed.

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- 2. Rename properties consistent with recreation experiences to align public expectations with site conditions.**
 - a. Sites that have the highest significance, relevance and accessibility (and thus meet the brand promise) will carry the title name "State Park." Customer expectations and experiences are weakened when all sites are referred to in the same manner.
 - b. Rename sites in lower groupings to be consistent with the visitor experience and expectations of that site.
 - c. Present a consistent naming approach to the Park Board. Before comprehensively changing site names across the system, staff will bring forth a proposal for the Board to approve.
 - d. Marketing and communication will align with the brand promise.
- 3. Clarify messages about division funding to build knowledge and support of the park system.**
 - a. Staff will communicate with affected stakeholders about decisions. Communicate with local citizens, stakeholders, friends groups and other agencies to enhance understanding and support for reallocation decisions.
 - b. Staff will seek out new partnerships and operating agreements and engage all types of affected user groups.
- 4. Align management and fees with services to improve the fiscal position of the State Park system while maintaining accessible and affordable experiences regardless of classification grouping.**
 - a. Public lands will stay public. The Strategic Plan directed that public lands will remain in the public trust, regardless of outcome. Staff may seek alternative management approaches to close gaps in funding or to better align sites with the brand promise and visitor expectations.
 - b. Regardless of site type or grouping, all fees must be consistent with levels of service and Board rules.

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- c. Plans will be developed for parks that meet the brand promise first, with other sites to follow as appropriate. Business plans will be developed to enhance revenues and expand opportunities for private sector investment.

Decisions made under this policy may be reviewed by the Board at any time. Staff is strongly encouraged to go beyond minimum guidance outlined here as part of their professional commitment to the safety, service, stewardship, and sustainability of lands and resources under the care and jurisdiction of the park system.

Authority/Reference

23-1-101, MCA, State Parks Purpose.

23-1-102, MCA, Powers and Duties of the Department

23-1-111, MCA, Powers and Duties of the Board

Attachment

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CLASSIFICATION GROUPINGS

An evaluation of site significance compared to site relevance and accessibility to prioritize management and investment.

Class 1 sites are most significant, relevant, and accessible.

CLASS 1

CLASS 1A

Bannack
Flathead Lake
Lewis & Clark Caverns
Makoshika

CLASS 1B

Chief Plenty Coups
Cooney
First Peoples Buffalo
Jump
Giant Springs
Missouri Headwaters
Pictograph Cave
Smith River
Thompson Chain of
Lakes/Logan
Tongue River Reservoir
Travelers' Rest

CLASS 2

Fish Creek
Madison Buffalo
Jump
Medicine Rocks
Milltown
Rosebud Battlefield
Sluice Boxes

CLASS 3

Beavertail Hill
Black Sandy
Brush Lake
Frenchtown Pond
Hell Creek
Lake Elmo
Lake Mary Ronan
Lone Pine
Placid Lake
Salmon Lake
Spring Meadow
Thompson Falls
Whitefish Lake/Les
Mason

CLASS 4

Ackley Lake
Anaconda Stack
Beaverhead Rock
Clarks Lookout
Council Grove
Elkhorn
Fort Owen
Granite
Lost Creek
*Marias River
Painted Rocks
Pirogue Island
Prairie Dog Town
Tower Rock
*Yellowstone River

*Sites not scored

