



MONTANA STATE PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: December 14, 2016

Agenda Item: First Peoples Buffalo Jump Prairie Dog Management Plan/EA

Division: Parks

Action Needed: Approval

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 15 Minutes

Background; Montana State Parks submitted the draft Prairie Dog Management Plan/Environmental Assessment for First Peoples Buffalo Jump State Park to the Board in October for approval to open for a public comment period of twenty-one days. The plan/EA proposes alternatives to manage the prairie dog population in order to prevent further impacts to artifacts in the park and promote good relations with adjacent landowners. The protection of heritage resources is the highest priority for the park. Without management of the prairie dog population, we will continue to suffer negative impacts to these resources.

Public Involvement Process & Results; This Management Plan/EA was open for public review and comment for twenty-one days from November 1 through November 21. A press release was sent out on October 28th to notify the public and the media of the comment period. A total of thirty-four comments were received all via e-mail. Twenty-six of the comments were opposed to utilizing any sort of lethal control. Nine comments advocated for the live trapping and relocation of prairie dogs. Thirteen comments expressed the desire for the park to leave them alone and implement no controls. Six comments were in favor of the preferred option. Two comments suggested that we move the artifacts. One comment asked for an extension to the comment period and questioned how much tribal involvement was solicited. Most of the comments against the preferred alternative did not address the plan itself but were reactions and opposition to the use of any lethal controls. One comment recommended the need for an EIS before controls are implemented.

Alternatives and Analysis; The plan/EA proposes three alternatives-

Alternative A- No action

Alternative B- Adaptive Management –Remove prairie dogs where they have adverse impact on heritage resources.

Alternative C- Removal- Remove all prairie dogs from park

Agency Recommendation and Rationale; The Division recommends that the Board approves the Plan with Alternative B as the Preferred Alternative. This option protects heritage resources in the park and allows for various management tools to maintain populations in specific areas. This option would also allow prairie dogs to remain in the areas where impact to heritage resources and artifacts are expected to be minimal.

Proposed Motion; I move that the Montana State Parks and Recreation Board approves implementing Alternative B from the First Peoples Buffalo Jump Prairie Dog Management Plan/ EA.