



MONTANA STATE PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: February 20, 2018

Agenda Item: Landowner Relationship/Public Access Opportunities at Fort Owen State Park

Action Needed: Endorsement

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 15 Minutes

Background: Fort Owen State Park is the site of many "firsts" in Montana history and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Despite this historical importance, successful management of the site has been challenged by the small size of the park itself (~1 acre), an access road that is shared by the surrounding ranch, and existing parking capacity that can serve only 1-2 vehicles. In recent years, the previous landowner and the public have faced increasing frustration regarding the balance of appropriate public access and respectful public use of the park in relation to the adjoining private property. Near the end of 2017, the ranch property surrounding the park was purchased by a new owner who promptly approached Fish, Wildlife & Parks with a keen interest in finding solutions to management of the state park that balance both public and private interests. Preliminary conversations with the new owner have indicated a willingness to explore an array of potential long-term and short-term options for improved management of the park, up to and including the potential for acquisition of additional property for inclusion as part of Fort Owen State Park.

Public Involvement Process & Results: Public involvement would include communication with the public and stakeholders, the community of Stevensville and continued engagement with the newly formed Friends of Fort Owen group. Public involvement required as part of Departmental efforts to explore opportunities with the new landowner would be completed as applicable and results reported back to the Board for consideration in final decision making.

Alternatives and Analysis: Exploring options for improved management of Fort Owen State Park has been considered for decades. The existing scenario presents an opportunity to address long-standing concerns while enhancing both private and public benefit. Alternatives explored as part of this opportunity (up to and including potential acquisition of additional property for inclusion in the state park) would be evaluated and reported to the Board for final review.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: The agency recommends moving forward to explore improved park management opportunities that might resolve public and private landowner concerns.

Proposed Motion: I move that Fish, Wildlife and Parks work with the new landowner to explore opportunities, up to and including acquisition of additional state park property, to enhance public access and address private landowner concerns for improved management of Fort Owen State Park.