

# Classification and Investment Strategy

## Public Comments

Comment period: March 18 - April 18, 2019



### Comment Summary

Total comments received – 13

For – 6

Against – 0

Out of policy scope – 7

#### **COMMENT #1**

**Sent: Thursday, March 21, 2019 8:02 AM**

As a volunteer for State Parks, I applaud your new, proposed reclassification standards. Much improved! Now let's get moving. I hope Parks can implement this strategic plan sooner than later. We've been waiting and waiting. Park's inability to make a commitment to its "signature sites" has stymied staff and the lessened the visitor experience. We've been in a holding pattern since the former Director was excused. We could be so much more. This new roadmap might just help us get there. Ready, set, go!

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#### **COMMENT #2**

**Sent: Thursday, March 21, 2019 12:21 PM**

Hello.

We strongly agree with the proposed Park Classification system. As described, seemingly, the proposal aligns park resources to match outdoor recreational experiential levels, such as primitive through rural and urban settings, and in such a way that folks can relate to and enjoy.

Protection, development and maintenance of natural and cultural resources is so important to us.

Thank you for your work at FWP; it is highly appreciated.

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#### **COMMENT #3**

**Sent: Saturday, March 23, 2019 7:32 AM**

I agree that you should increase the chg. on license applications, but also leave space for an EXTRA donation to the state park system! We are 40 year campers in our state and long time repairs to rest rooms and showers are needed! We also could use more primitive campsite for bikers, tenters and those with small campers who do not want or need sewer and water hook ups! One sewer dump station for larger parks is enough. Some people are just too lazy and we cannot afford full hook ups in our major parks. Lewis and Clark Caverns is one park that needs more spaces. Clark Canyon needs a shower facility and more shade trees. There is plenty of water there for this. The area from Seeley to Glacier is always full, there is a crying need for more spaces in western Montana, for the family type camper, biker, and tenter. Thanks for your service.

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#### **COMMENT #4**

**Sent: Saturday, April 6, 2019 8:20 AM**

Ackley Lake in Central Montana is heavily used by many. Folks from Great Falls, Stanford, Hobson and Lewistown use the lake. People drive from Billings for a day trip to fish in Ackley lake. To have a Park and

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Lake that is used as much as Ackley Lake is a real asset to Central Montana. It need to be upgraded and maintained forever.

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### **COMMENT #5**

**Sent: Sunday, April 7, 2019 1:19 PM**

From the standpoint of a business owner, keeping Ackley Lake open to visitors, campers and fisherman is important to our local economy. Ackley Lake is the only State Park within miles and invites people from 150 miles or more year round. I think the classification of Rustic/Recreation is appropriate which should include minimum allowed fees and maximum upkeep. Campsites and amenities should be maintained and upgraded to keep the experience level positive at maximum capacity.

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### **COMMENT #6**

**Sent: Sunday, April 7, 2019 8:14 PM**

Your new classification of state parks is much better. We live in Lewistown, a long way from western Montana and state parks located there. We love Ackley Lake and it's close location to town. We joined the Ackley lake club tonight help keep it open to camping and fishing.

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### **COMMENT #7**

**Sent: Sunday, April 7, 2019 8:58 PM**

I have have lived in Hobson and area for 77 years. Our family has spent many days s enjoying Ackley, boating , fishing, camping and water activities. I am a strong advocate of keeping the lake a viable recreation location. A long term plan would certainly benefit users of the lake.

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### **COMMENT #8**

**Sent: Thursday, April 11, 2019 5:38 AM**

Ackley lake is very important to we fisherman in central Mt.

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### **COMMENT #9**

**Sent: Tuesday, April 16, 2019 3:52 PM**

I just want to comment about Ackley Lake. Ackley is a place that I have gone since I was little and then took my children there while they were growing up. The trees were a great addition to the lake to improve the experience of staying at the park and playing in the water. As I have gotten older I have been lucky to upgrade my camping facilities and finding a level spot to park has become more important. This last year at Ackley the leveling of the camp spots made a huge improvement to my camping experience. I appreciate being able to enjoy a quality park so close to my home. Enjoying nature is something that people are doing less of which increases stress levels and ultimately leads to increased health concerns. I believe the values of Montana are built on the outdoors. It is extremely important for the state to reinvest in ALL our state parks, not just some. The basis which brings people

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to Montana is because of our beautiful outdoors. Please invest in continuing to make ALL our parks continued upgrades which make everyone's experiences even better... not just some. Thank you.

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### **COMMENT #10**

**Sent: Tuesday, April 16, 2019 4:15 PM**

Our rural community has rallied together to provide campers and fishers the quality fishing/camping access to Ackley Lake. Volunteers have provided numerous hours of volunteer time to improve this quality location. This location provides an avenue for our community to enjoy the land, the outdoors, and encourages family unity. T

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### **COMMENT #11**

**Sent: Tuesday, April 16, 2019 4:17 PM**

The local club has provided countless hours of volunteer time improving the fishing and camping facilities at Ackley Lake. This location is critical in providing opportunity for all ages to enjoy the quality location.

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### **COMMENT #12**

**Sent: Thursday, April 18, 2019 11:07 AM**

**Montana State Parks Classification Policy  
P.O. Box 200701  
Helena, MT 59620**

To Whom it May Concern,

The Region 3 Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) has reviewed the proposed park classification and investment strategy policy prepared by the Montana State Parks and the Montana State Parks and Recreation Board. The new policy would provide a guide for strategic investment of resources into the Montana state park system. The policy establishes a new system of classification by categorizing the types of amenities visitors can expect including Rustic, Core, and Enhanced as well as the service level for a park that includes Natural, Heritage, and Recreation. A matrix will be established that classifies each Montana state park in each of these categories. This will better assist the parks division on how to investment future parks dollars. The Region 3 CAC provides the following comments on the proposed park classification and investment strategy policy.

1) The Region 3 CAC supports the proposed policy and believes the new classification will provide out-of-state visitors with a better understanding of the amenities and service level they can expect from each park. The proposed classification will also significantly improve management of the parks and aid in more efficiently directing the agency's limited resources

2) Having a methodical way to classify parks can help create understandable communication for policy makers, managers, and visitors to these state parks. In addition, when it comes to renovations to state

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parks the public would be able to know exactly how the park division plans to change the classification of a specific park. An example being that FWP could make the simple and concise statement of "upgrade from rustic to core." and everyone would know what that means. Clarity is always necessary in time of growth and change, both of which are happening across Montana.

3) The Region 3 CAC strongly supports the two-year review of the classification designation. Conditions and needs can change rapidly and providing a required review period will help to identify needed changes. The feedback provision is very important and a systematic approach to this is very important. Regular monitoring and follow-up regarding the policy is essential to long-term success.

4) Can a statement be added to Appendix A regarding ongoing research will be undertaken to identify opportunities to build on/expand the Montana State Park System if a suitable situation presents itself. This would only be pursued if it made sense financially and met the criteria of what a Montana State Park should be. We feel it is very important that we not only address what we have now, but also look toward the future regarding the Montana State Park system.

5) A concern is that visitors understand that just because a park is designated as Natural, Heritage, or Recreational, it may contain more than just the single designation. Lewis and Clark Caverns may be designated as "Natural" but there are Heritage and Recreational opportunities also. A concern is that funding isn't limited to the park's designation. For example, a Heritage park with recreational opportunities receives adequate funding to keep the recreational opportunities viable.

6) The designations of Rustic, Core, and Enhanced should be more clearly defined in the policy. It appears that Natural, Heritage, and Recreation are pretty clearly defined, but Rustic, Core, and Enhanced are not defined very well and would be open to interpretation depending on the user. These three designations should be more clearly defined in the policy. This would better assist users and understand the level of services that is provided with each of these designations. The matrix provides a good description for each of these. The policy should include the same language, so they are consistent.

The Region 3 CAC appreciates the work that Montana State Parks and the Montana State Parks Board has put in to develop the policy and prepare the matrix classification for each park. We also appreciate the opportunity to review and provide comment on the proposed policy. We support the efforts of the Montana State Parks and the Montana State Parks Board to better serve the citizens of Montana and all park users.

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### **COMMENT #13**

**Sent: Thursday, April 18, 2019 7:26 PM**

**To: Montana State Parks and Recreation Board**  
**Re: 2019 –Proposed Classification and Investment Policy**  
**From: Friends of Fort Owen, Stevensville, MT**

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We wish to commend you on tackling the difficult and important issue of developing policy that guides the allocation of insufficient resources across our State Parks. This proposed policy goes a long way toward addressing what we believed were major deficiencies in the prior 2015 Classification Policy. The following comments are suggestions for refining this new proposed policy:

### 1. A Good Foundation That Addresses the Difference Between Type of Parks

We agree with the approach to inventory sites according to Experience Groups: Natural, Heritage, and Recreation. We also think it is very useful to categorize sites within each Experience Group according to Service Levels. In other words: 1) What kind of site is it; and 2) How intensively developed is it?

Although this is just an internal policy (and it probably sounds nitpicking), it would be helpful to the public for this policy to be consistent in the use of the labels or words: “levels”, “classes”, “groups”, “types”, and “category”. You are defining “Experience Groups” and “Service Levels”. Being consistent in the language will help its implementation.

In the 4<sup>th</sup> paragraph, second sentence you use “experience and service class groupings” which should read “experience groups and service levels”. And in first sentence in item number 1, the word “types” is used in the sentence where it would be clearer if it read: “...be used to categorize the ~~types~~-level of service...”

### 2. Different Decision Criteria Needed for Different Decisions

In the 4<sup>th</sup> paragraph, second sentence, it says this is a policy to be used to develop “...an investment strategy...”, but in the 5<sup>th</sup> paragraph under Directives, the 3<sup>rd</sup> paragraph says the policy will be used “...to guide management and investment strategies...”.

“Management” and “Investment” can mean many things and usually requires a different set of criteria. “Management” is a catch all word that can include: setting operation and maintenance standards, implementing fee policies, and developing criteria to help make capital improvement decisions. It can also serve planning purposes to identify gaps in current services, and future development needs. (Does the Parks Division have those words defined in policy?)

In Directive Number 3: Defining “Experience Groups” and “Service Levels” is a sound foundation to categorize the existing inventory of facilities and assets under the care of the Parks Division. If this proposed policy is meant to be for all management purposes, then more work on establishing decision criteria may prove useful to guide what type of decision is being made. For example, decision criteria for making annual operations and maintenance budget decisions across Service Levels would be different than criteria needed to decide on priority allocation of Capital Improvement Funding.

Because each Experience Group has different types of services and facilities needed that vary in complexity, staffing needs, cost, and opportunity to charge fees it would be helpful to further define (and/or direct) Service Levels within each Experience Group. For example, sites within the “Heritage Group” can range from one where a staffed visitor center has been built---to a site with no facilities but where a significant event took place. Yet the site with no facilities may represent a one and only historic

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or cultural resource that warrants a higher priority for resource protection than the site that has already been developed with a visitor center.

### 5. Site Name Changes

This classification system lays a good foundation to now change the name of these experience groups to better meet the public's expectations without jeopardizing the future management of the site making a Heritage Site compete for priority funding with a highly developed Recreation Site. It allows competition within its Experience group.

### 6. Specific Appendix A Comments

Number 1: "...within a particular Experience Group will be prioritized over new developments within the group" (Another example of inconsistent use of labels or words)

Number 3: Service Level definitions within each Experience Group should be developed to help guide investment decisions.

Number 4: "...new revenue streams within each Experience Group or Service Levels are encouraged.....over other projects within the same group or level." (another example of using inconsistent labels or words.)

Nowhere in this Classification Policy is a distinction made as to whether or not the facility has been developed for overnight use. Whether it is a Day Use Site or an Overnight Facility is a major cost factor that drives resource allocation decisions. Heritage Sites tend not to have overnight facilities and prove harder to charge an on-site fee. Overnight camping demands more resources, but it can also present opportunity to generate income.

Opportunity to generate revenue may not be a higher priority than a resource protection need within an Experience Group. Further work is needed to integrate this classification system into a fee policy.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this policy. While we recognize that it is a general policy, it will influence a broad array of management decisions that affect the on the ground realities. Because resources are scarce, it is important to have a policy that lays out specific criteria for the decisions that are being made. Not only does it lead to better decisions but the public can better understand how our scarce resources are allocated between the individual state parks.

Margaret Gorski  
President, Friends of Fort Owen