

October 2026

MT Fish, Wildlife and Park Terry Fishing Access Site

Environmental Assessment

DOI-BLM-MT-C020-2026-0151-EA



Photo Courtesy of MT FWP

I have considered the factors mandated by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). This environmental assessment represents the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM's) good-faith effort to fulfill NEPA's requirements by prioritizing documentation of the most important relevant considerations within the statutorily mandated page limits and timeline. This prioritization reflects the BLM's expert judgment; and any considerations addressed briefly or left unaddressed are, in the BLM's judgment, comparatively non-substantive and would not meaningfully inform the BLM's consideration of environmental effects and the decision to be made. The EA is substantially complete, considers the factors mandated by NEPA, and, in my judgment, contains analysis adequate to inform the BLM's decision regarding the proposed action.

Responsible Official: _____

Date: _____

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

In November 2021, the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MT FWP) lead the Lower Yellowstone River Corridor Advisory Committee to examine various resource management needs for the Lower Yellowstone River. The planning efforts included a series of public meetings in 2021 and 2022. The committee completed a report titled “*Recommendations for Improving Public Access, Habitat Conservation, and Management of the Lower Yellowstone River Corridor*” and is available on the MT FWP website at: <https://fwp.mt.gov/binaries/content/assets/fwp/aboutfwp/councils--committees/lower-yellowstone-advisory-board/final-lyrc-committee-recommendations>. The report identified ranking criteria for potential new access sites and discussed limitations to current public access including, “...much of the river system is relatively inaccessible between Hysham, Montana and the North Dakota border, hampering recreation and stewardship along this uniquely remote lower corridor... access points between Miles City and Fallon are difficult to navigate and have site constraints.”

Therefore, in response to public input and Advisory Committee findings, MT FWP is seeking a right-of-way (ROW) for a fishing access site (FAS) to construct, operate, maintain, and terminate a road, parking area, and boat ramp to allow the public to access the Lower Yellowstone River in Prairie County east of Terry, Montana. The ROW would allow for additional recreational opportunities and provide a developed FAS along the Lower Yellowstone River on BLM land.

1.2. Purpose and Need

The purpose and need for the BLM is to respond to the SF-299 application submitted by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks to construct, operate, maintain, and terminate a FAS that would include an access road, parking area with a concrete latrine, and boat ramp. The FAS would be located 1.75 miles east of Terry, Montana in Prairie County.

1.3. Decision to be Made

The BLM would determine whether to approve the SF-299 application and associated POD for the proposed action in Prairie County, Montana. If approved, the BLM would issue a renewable 30-year ROW grant (MTMT-106842214) and a 3-year short-term permit (MTMT-1066843059) to MT FWP for the FAS and facilities. The ROW grant and permit would be subject to applicable stipulations.

1.4. Relationship to Statutes and Regulations

The project crosses federal land and is subject to federal, state, and local permit requirements. Montana FWP would comply with applicable federal, state, and local laws, plans, and permits required prior to construction and operation of the proposed action. This document was prepared in accordance with the following statutes and regulations:

- BLM ROW grants pursuant to 43 CFR Part 2800
- Migratory Bird Treaty Act (1918)
- Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act (1962)
- National Historic Preservation Act (1966) as amended, regulations [36 CFR Part 800]

- BLM Manual 6840- Special Status Species Management (1969) as amended
- National Environmental Policy Act (1969), as amended
- Clean Air Act (1970) [42 U.S.C. § 1857 et seq., as amended and recodified 42 U.S.C. §7401 et seq.]
- Clean Water Act (1972), as amended
- Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976, as amended (P. L. 94-579; 90 Stat. 2743; 43 U.S.C. 1701 et seq.)
- Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA), as amended (P.L. 93-205; 87 Stat. 884; 16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.)
- Protection of Historic Properties (2000) [36 CFR § 800]
- Paleontological Resources Preservation Act (2009) [16 U.S.C. §470aaa et seq.]

1.5. Conformance with the Land Use Plan

This proposed action is in conformance with BLM 2015 Miles City Field Office Approved Resource Management Plan (ARMP) and Record of Decision (ROD). It is consistent with the following LUP decision even though it is not specifically provided for:

Page 3-8 of the ARMP, Goal LR 2 states: *“Major and minor ROWs and other realty-related land use authorizations are excluded on approximately 83,659 surface acres of the planning area. Major ROWs are avoided on 2,222,701 surface acres and Minor ROWs and other realty-related land use authorizations avoided on 858,973 acres on the remaining surface acres in the planning area. Major ROWs are allowed on 445,170 surface acres and Minor ROWs are allowed on 1,809,798 surface acres.”*

1.6. Scoping and Issues

Site-specific resource concerns were identified by the BLM during its review of the POD and in consideration of substantive scoping comments. The BLM focuses its analysis on issues that are significant to the action. Issues have a cause-effect relationship with the proposed action or alternatives, are within the scope of analysis, and are amenable to scientific analysis. The resource issues considered and the rationales for continued analysis of the resources are discussed below.

Issue Identified for Analysis

Issue 1: How would construction and use of the road, parking area, and boat ramp affect public recreation along the Yellowstone River?

Issues Dismissed from Detailed Analysis

The following resources were determined to not be present within or adjacent to the proposed action area and were therefore excluded from further analysis: Areas of Critical Environmental Concern; source water protection areas, municipal water sources, sage grouse priority habitat management area and leks, bald and golden eagles, big game crucial winter range, forestry resources and woodland products; oil and gas wells and leases, mineral authorizations, mining claims, lands with wilderness characteristics; T&E plants and terrestrial wildlife; wild horses and burros; Wild and Scenic Rivers; Wilderness; and Wilderness Study Areas.

In addition, the BLM assessed potential impacts to several resources that are present within the proposed action area but determined that impacts would be avoided, minimized, or otherwise mitigated through the proposed design features and applicant-committed measures discussed in Chapter 2 and the POD. Therefore, these resources would not be affected to a degree that detailed analysis was warranted in Chapter 3 of this EA are summarized below and will not be discussed further in this document.

Issues not Analyzed in Detail in this Environmental Assessment

Public Access, Permitted Uses, and Public Safety

The proposed action would not result in changes to existing access to public lands and would have minimal disruptions to permitted uses in the area. The existing two-track currently provides public access in the area. The road would be upgraded and maintained to allow access for the public and permitted users. Construction and reclamation activities would be for a short duration (60 days), during which public access would be limited but maintained. Appropriate educational, warning, and directional signs would be installed for construction and operational use.

The proposed action would not interfere with existing land and realty authorizations. The project's short duration (60-days) and applicant committed measures outlined in the POD would not result in changes to the two existing grazing permits. In the Braggs Allotment, approximately 4.7 acres would be disturbed during construction with 1 acre remaining after reclamation for the access road. In the Eaton River AMP, approximately 12.4 acres would be disturbed during construction with 5.6 acres remaining after reclamation for the access road, parking area, and boat ramp. The short and long-term acres of disturbance do not warrant a modification of the permitted AUMs, season of use, or the terms and conditions of the grazing permit. Moreover, temporary removal of grazing infrastructure (gates and cattleguards) during construction activities would be maintained and replaced as described in the POD to not interrupt grazing operations. Upon completion of construction, grazing infrastructure that meets BLM standards would be replaced, and areas of temporary disturbance would be reclaimed. Appropriate signs would be installed identifying ROW areas to prevent trespassing on adjacent privately owned land or facilities. MT FWP would seed disturbed areas with a BLM recommended seed mix and would treat and monitor invasive/noxious weeds.

The proposed action would not result in substantial visual changes to the landscape. The Project is proposed in areas that have been rated as Class II and Class III visual resource management (VRM) areas. There are no VRM Class I areas within the Project area. The Class II objective is to retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be low. Management activities may be seen but should not attract the attention of the casual observer. Any changes must repeat the basic elements of form, line, color, and texture found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape. The Class III objective is to partially retain the existing landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be moderate. Management activities may attract attention but should not dominate the view of the casual observer. Changes should repeat the basic elements found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape. The Project would meet or exceed VRM requirements outlined in the 2015 MCFO RMP through the placement of infrastructure along existing disturbances (agricultural fields), using existing road that follows land contours, limiting size of parking area to 0.70 acres, and selection of paint and material colors that blend in with the surrounding landscape. The proposed project is near (within 1.5 miles) the Big Sky

Backcountry Byway (Highway 253 from Terry, MT to Wolf Point, MT). However, the proposed project would not modify the viewshed of the Byway.

There are no known sources of hazardous material areas within the Project area and there are none proposed for the Project. MT FWP would dispose of waste in accordance with regulatory requirements at the Custer County landfill.

No hazardous material would be used as part of the project. POD includes public access would be maintained in a safe manner with appropriate signs. Approach off the county road is proposed to be widened (fanned) to allow for appropriate view of incoming traffic and drive in space. The project area would be monitored weekly by law enforcement and maintained by FWP recreation staff. Emergency procedures would be addressed through FWP's existing emergency management plan.

Native American Religious Concerns

There are no known traditional cultural places (TCPs), sacred sites, traditional use areas, or other locations of Native American cultural or religious importance within the proposed project area. The proposed action would not restrict or limit access to or use of public lands by Native American tribes with historical or religious ties to the area.

Minerals, Paleontological, and Soil Resources

Gravel would be obtained from commercial sources in Glendive or Miles City, Montana.

A BLM-approved paleontologist would monitor all surface disturbing construction activities and coordinate with the MCFO.

Soil resources would be addressed through the implementation of design features and BMPs as well as reclamation and monitoring, which meets 2015 MCFO RMP requirements to reduce water/wind erosion and re-establish site stability. The Plan includes requirements to notify the BLM Authorized Officer prior to reclamation efforts to ensure they meet BLM standards. The POD includes project monitoring and oversight to ensure construction and reclamation measures are completed for the Project. Seed mixes are based on BLM grouped ecological site descriptions.

Air and Noise Resources

The existing uses are ongoing and are not expected to change. The proposed action includes applicant committed measures and design features for dust abatement during construction with limited number of vehicles and equipment during construction and reclamation. Contributions from regulated pollutants such as particulate matter (PM, PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5}), carbon monoxide (CO), and nitrogen oxides (NO_x) to ambient air by this proposed action would be minor, intermittent, and short-term (60 days), and localized in a rural area. Noise due to equipment operation and reclamation would be of short duration (60 days) and localized. Noise during public use would be minimal and sporadic with light traffic.

Water, Riparian, Wetlands

There would be negligible impacts to the 100-year floodplain of the Yellowstone River due to construction of the boat ramp during low flow and disturbance from approximately 1.52 acres short-term and less than 0.1 acres long-term. Culverts would be installed to maintain surface

water connections of streams; the crossings would be designed in accordance with the BLM requirements. Construction during low water flow and the POD committed measures would control erosion and reduce the potential for sediment to be transported offsite. Fueling and storage of lubricants would be on the proposed staging area at least 500 feet away from the water's edge. Temporary and permanent impacts to Waters of the United States would be subject to the federal and state permits. MT FWP would obtain all applicable permits including U.S. Army Corps of Engineers 404 Permit, MT DEQ 318 Authorization, MT SPA 124 Permit, and MT DNRC floodplain permit.

Vegetation and Noxious Invasive Species

Vegetation would be disturbed within the ROWs during construction and reclamation operations, resulting in approximately 17 acres of new surface disturbance; however, impacts to 12 acres are anticipated to be short-term (within 1-2 growing seasons for seeded areas) with approximately 5 acres remaining for the access road, parking area and boat ramp. This would allow for expedited reclamation and the co-location of facilities along existing disturbances. MT FWP would implement reclamation operations to restore and maintain vegetation community and diversity. The POD outlines procedures for re-establishing native vegetation to provide site stability following surface disturbing activities within the ROW areas during construction, reclamation, and post-reclamation activities. The plan includes topsoil management, application of a site-specific BLM-recommended seed mix, monitoring, and reporting to the BLM during reclamation efforts to ensure BLM standards are met.

The BLM seed mix used for reclamation would be based on BLM-grouped ecological sites and include a requirement for specific species to be planted (grasses, forbs, and shrubs). There are requirements to include western wheatgrass (*Pascopyrum smithii*) and Wyoming big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata* ssp. *Wyomingensis*) as well as nitrogen fixing forbs. This mix would facilitate reestablishment of native vegetation and provide critical habitat for wildlife. Noxious weed monitoring and treatment would further enhance habitat reclamation.

Leafy spurge (*Euphorbia esula*), a noxious weed, is present within the proposed ROW along the Yellowstone River. MT FWP would pre-treat and continue annual monitoring and treatment of invasive or noxious weed species within the proposed ROWs in accordance with a BLM Pesticide Use Permit or a county agreement prior to Project construction and throughout the life of the Project. These actions will reduce the spread and potential establishment of noxious invasive species.

Wildlife and Fisheries

The northern portion of the road is proposed in General Habitat Management Area (GHMA) for sage-grouse. In accordance with the Governor's Executive Order 12-2015, MT FWP coordinated with the MT Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program on the project proposed in the State's GHMA. MT FWP included the Program response letter as part of their POD, committing adherence to the additional stipulations completing compensatory mitigation in the same sage grouse service area in Prairie County to offset the total debits from the project.

MT FWP committed measures to complete construction and reclamation activities from July 16 to November 30 in any given year would mitigate disturbance to upland and migratory birds.

Construction and reclamation activities would be of short-duration (60 days), further avoiding disruptions in the project area.

The project area is located along the Yellowstone River, which is habitat for the pallid sturgeon, listed as endangered on September 6, 1990. With design features in place, the only activity described in the proposed action that has the potential to affect pallid sturgeon and their habitat is the construction of the concrete boat ramp. The MCFO ARMP (3-6 MD WF 29) allows for surface disturbing and disruptive activities within 0.25 miles of pallid sturgeon habitat with design features that maintain the functionality of the habitat. Pallid sturgeon of various age classes may occupy the habitat within the project area in low numbers year-round. Concentration is highest during migratory/spawning movements from April through July. The construction of the concrete boat ramp and any other in-water work would not begin until after July 31st, which avoids the migratory/spawning movements of adults and the drifting free embryo life stage. Therefore, there would be no effect to spawning adults and drifting free embryos from the proposed action. Outside of this time period, direct effects of construction of the proposed boat ramp to sturgeons themselves would be discountable due to low numbers and their ability to move up and downstream of the activity. Effects to altering spawning habitat would be insignificant as the majority of spawning has been documented in the Tongue and Powder Rivers. Effects to available prey and their habitat would be insignificant as well as this type of habitat is very common throughout the Yellowstone River. Therefore, we conclude effects from the proposed action “may affect, not likely to adversely affect” the pallid sturgeon with effects being insignificant and discountable.

Economics

The proposed action would not result in effects to the local or regional economy of a magnitude, duration, or geographic extent that would warrant detailed analysis. Construction activities are limited to a single 60-day period involving a small crew and minor construction material purchasing. The FAS itself is a small-scale public recreation facility that would improve a river access point and any increase in angler and floater visitation, and associated spending in local communities, would be incremental and consistent with existing recreational use patterns along the Lower Yellowstone River.

Cultural Resources

Class III cultural resources inventory has been completed for the undertaking. One historic property was identified; however, the proposed action would not result in physical, visible, audible, or atmospheric effects that would alter its condition or ability to convey significance. On September 29, 2026, the SHPO concurred with the BLM’s finding of no adverse effect to historic properties as a result of the proposed action (SHPO Log No. 20260831002, MCFO Cultural Resources Project No. MT-020-26-209).

CHAPTER 2. ALTERNATIVES

2.1. No Action Alternative

Under the no action alternative, the BLM would not issue the proposed ROW grant and short-term use permit for the access road, parking area, and boat ramp. Without the ROW grant and short-term use permit across federal lands, the proposed action would not be constructed and maintained for public recreational use. Current land use across the area and permitted uses would be expected to continue.

2.2. Proposed Action Alternative

MT FWP submitted an SF-299 application for 30-year renewable ROW grant and short-term use permit to construct, operate, maintain, and terminate a FAS that would include an access road, parking area, and boat ramp in Prairie County, Montana (see Figure 1). Table 1 provides the ROW elements, and the approximate acreages and dimensions for each element on BLM-administered lands.

Access Road

The public would access the site off Coal Creek County Road and an existing 1.9 miles of two-track on BLM land. The existing two-track would be upgraded to a 20-ft wide graveled road following the existing land contours to blend into surrounding area. Culverts and riprap would be installed in drainages to BLM standards. The new road would have a flared approach along Coal Creek County Road. One 24-foot wide cattle guard would be installed on the allotment fence.

Staging Area

The staging area would be used during construction and reclamation to park equipment, supplies, and materials needed for construction and reclamation.

Parking Area

The parking area would be 70 feet by 200 feet with an ADA accessible concrete latrine painted an earth tone to blend into surroundings. The parking area would be graveled and fenced to BLM standards. Two 24-foot wide cattle guards would be installed to prevent cattle from accessing the parked vehicles and the latrine.

Boat Ramp

The boat ramp would be a concrete ramp measuring 16 feet by 200 feet. It would be designed to allow 50 feet of the boat ramp to be located below the ordinary high-water mark. It would have riprap approximately 2 feet wide, 2 feet deep, and 50 feet in length on each side of the ramp to prevent erosion.

Table 1. Proposed Project Element Dimensions and Acres on BLM lands

ROW Element	ROW Dimensions/Acres	Long-term Disturbance/Acres
Road ROW	8,900 feet x 40 feet 8.17 acres 800 feet x 100 feet 1.83 acres	9,700 feet x 20 feet 4.45 acres
Road Short-Term Use Permit	8,900 feet x 20 feet 4.45 acres	0
Staging Area Short-Term Use Permit	100 feet x 200 feet 0.46 acres	0
Parking Area ROW	175 feet x 175 feet 0.70 acres	75 feet x 120 feet 0.70 acres
Boat Ramp ROW	220 feet x 300 feet 1.52 acres	16 feet x 200 feet 0.07 acres
TOTAL	17.13 acres	5.22 acres

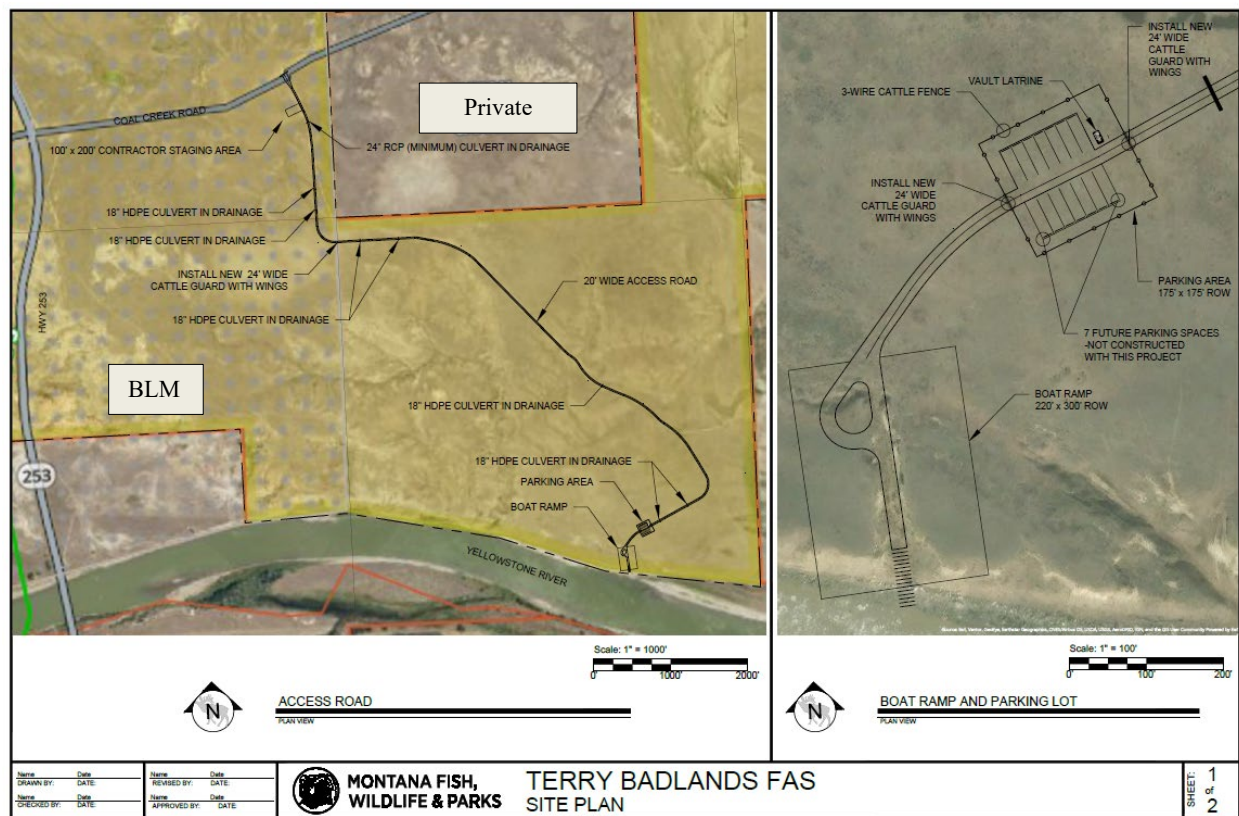


Figure 1. MT FWP Proposed ROW Elements

Proposed Design Features/Committed Measures

The POD contains design features and applicant-committed resource protection measures for proposed elements of the Project, which were incorporated and analyzed as part of the proposed action. This EA lists design features and applicant-committed measures in multiple sections to address specific components in the section. To limit repetition, key measures are summarized below. All the committed measures and design features in the POD would be enforceable by BLM through the ROW grant, if approved.

MT FWP would conduct construction and reclamation activities, including vegetation clearing, between July 16 and November 30 in any given year, during a 60-day period, to minimize disturbance to nesting and habitats associated with migratory birds, bald eagles, sage-grouse, and big-game. Construction of the boat ramp and any other in-water work would occur after July 31st and during months of low water flow, to protect spawning pallid sturgeon and developing and drifting larvae. In addition, for water resources, storage of fuel and lubricants and maintenance activities such as refueling and lubrication of equipment would take place at a minimum of 500 feet from the outer edge of riparian areas, wet areas, and drainages. The proposed concrete latrine would be located in an area that will not be flooded during flood stage flows. The access road would be built above existing ground elevations wherever possible to promote fast drainage and limit vegetation removal. Additional 18" HDPE culverts may be installed under the new access road to pass flows where existing drainage patterns intersect with the road.

Appropriate educational, warning, and directional signage would be installed along the improved access road, parking area, and boat ramp. FWP would coordinate with Prairie County Road Department and Montana Department of Transportation to place directional signage along public roads to the site. Educational signs would include noxious weed control, pallid sturgeon, fire safety, and standard FAS requirements. Appropriate signs would also be installed to identify ROW areas to prevent trespassing on adjacent privately owned land or facilities.

The project was reviewed by the Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program. The MTFWP would be completing credit projects in Prairie County to offset the debits for the project proposed in the State's General Habitat Management Area. With the committed measures for timing restrictions and reclamation, no additional requirements were identified by the Program.

Topsoil would be removed for all areas of construction and stockpiled along the road for reclamation. All disturbed areas would be seeded with a BLM approved seed mix. Erosion control measures, such as straw wattles or coir blankets, would be applied to reclaimed areas to reduce the potential for erosion and sedimentation. Additional erosion control measures would be applied, as necessary, during reclamation. Vegetation debris removed during construction would be disposed of at the Custer County landfill in Miles City, Montana.

Additional resource protection measures include fugitive dust control and invasive and noxious weed control. A comprehensive noxious weed management plan would be implemented to prevent expansion or eliminate the occurrence of invasive, non-native, or noxious weed species within the proposed ROWs. This would include pre-treatment of ROW areas prior to

construction activities. Treatment and monitoring would be conducted by Prairie County through a contract agreement with MT FWP. Any equipment entering the water will be clean and free of aquatic invasive species.

A BLM-approved paleontologist would monitor construction activities during ground disturbance activities and notify BLM if any paleontological resources are encountered.

At the time of abandonment, MT FWP would obtain any required authorization from the BLM Authorized Officer to abandon the road, parking area, and boat ramp. All infrastructure and facilities would be removed and disposed of or recycled in approved locations. Re-grading and revegetation of disturbed areas would be completed according to BLM standards and requirements, the procedures described in the POD.

2.3. Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Analysis

Two alternatives for the proposed action were considered but not analyzed. One alternative considered locating the road, parking area, and boat ramp on State of Montana owned land approximately 1 mile downstream of the proposed location. However, because the land is developed for agricultural use, with the access road crossing spreader dikes or agricultural irrigated field, it was not pursued. The second alternative considered purchasing private land upstream along the HWY 253 bridge. FWP was unable to purchase the property at fair market value and therefore not pursued.

CHAPTER 3. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

This chapter defines the scope of analysis contained in this EA, describes the existing conditions relevant to the issues presented in Table 1 in Section 3.1, and discloses the potential impacts of the proposed action and alternatives.

3.1. Reasonably Foreseeable Environmental Trends and Planned Actions Common to all Issues

There are ongoing activities in and around the area which include livestock grazing, dispersed recreation/hunting, existing ROWs, and agriculture on private and state-owned lands. These existing uses are expected to continue on BLM-administered lands.

Based on the 2021 Lower Yellowstone River Corridor Advisory Committee report, MT FWP is anticipated to continue to pursue and establish additional river access locations along the Lower Yellowstone River to provide sustainable public access and recreational opportunities. This includes a potential FAS adjacent to the Milwaukee Bridge approximately ten miles upstream of Terry, Montana on BLM administered land. This location is currently used by limited public due to its unmaintained two-track road, lack of facilities, and the ongoing US Department of Transportation Milwaukee Bridge rehabilitation work. This potential FAS may be pursued and established subsequent to this proposed action upon completion of the bridge rehabilitation work, estimated for Fall 2028.

3.2. Issue 1: How would construction and use of the road, parking area, and boat ramp affect public recreation along the Yellowstone River?

3.2.1. Methodology and Assumptions

The BLM analyzed potential effects to recreation based on the existing recreation setting; types, levels, and existing recreation use; opportunities for dispersed and developed recreation; public access to the Yellowstone River; and the potential for the proposed action to change the quality, quantity, or availability of recreation opportunities. The analysis also considers the relationship of the proposed action to the broader Yellowstone River recreation availability, including Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MT FWP) fishing access sites, existing public access points, the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail, and nearby BLM-managed lands.

For purpose of the analysis, recreation includes both developed and dispersed recreation activities occurring on or adjacent to BLM-administered lands. Existing activities in the area include fishing, rafting, boating, floating, hunting, wildlife viewing, birding, camping, and other forms of dispersed recreation activities. The analysis considers both recreation opportunities available from the proposed project area and the larger recreation setting along the lower Yellowstone River.

The BLM considers access to public lands an important component of recreation and visitor services. BLM recreation management is generally intended to provide sustainable opportunities for public use while maintaining the quality of recreation settings and accommodating other multiple uses. The Miles City Field Office (MCFO) provides a variety of recreation opportunities. The analysis assumes that public use of the proposed fishing access site would be

primarily day-use recreation associated with fishing, boating, floating, and other river-oriented activities. Use levels would vary seasonally and would be expected to be greatest during suitable weather such as summer and better river conditions. The analysis also assumes that the proposed access would complement, rather than replace, existing public access opportunities along the lower Yellowstone River.

3.2.2. Affected Environment

Approximately 300 miles of the Lower Yellowstone River flows within the MCFO, of which 40 miles are in Prairie County. The Yellowstone River provides opportunities for water-based and land-based recreation, including fishing, boating, floating, wildlife viewing, birding, hunting, hiking, and dispersed recreation. Public access to the lower Yellowstone River is somewhat limited compared with more developed river recreation systems in western Montana, FWP does manage 18 fishing access sites along the lower Yellowstone River and these additional access sites do allow for some form of public river access, but many are not developed for floaters or anglers to access the river safely with floating gear or with a watercraft/boat. Consequently, river users on the lower Yellowstone may need to travel substantial distances between developed access locations based on available launch and take-out locations.

River access in Prairie County is limited to one FWP developed site, the Fallon Bridge FAS, which is also located on a small amount of BLM administered land. This FAS has received positive public feedback since its completion. A river access point upstream of the project area is located near the Milwaukee Bridge, approximately ten miles upstream of Terry, Montana on BLM administered land called the Calypso Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA). This location experiences limited public and watercraft use due to its unmaintained two-track road, lack of facilities and boat ramp, and the ongoing US Department of Transportation Milwaukee Bridge rehabilitation work to be completed in fall 2028. Due to the large distances between MT FWP sites, floaters and anglers often face long stretches of private land without developed public facilities or emergency services.

The project area is also within the broader landscape associated with the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail (NHT). The Yellowstone River was an important component of the route followed by the Lewis and Clark Expedition during its return journey in 1806. BLM recognizes the Lewis and Clark NHT as a National Conservation Lands designation and manages portions of the trail and associated landscapes in Montana.

The proposed site is within a landscape managed for multiple uses and is characterized by a combination of agricultural lands, BLM-administered lands, livestock grazing, existing transportation routes, dispersed recreation, and the Yellowstone River corridor. The recreation setting is generally rural and dispersed, with relatively limited developed infrastructure. Existing recreation users may experience a relatively low-density setting, opportunities for solitude or privacy, and a predominantly undeveloped visual character away from existing roads and developed access sites.

3.2.3. Environmental Effects

3.2.3.1. *Effects of the No Action Alternative*

Under the No Action Alternative, the BLM would not issue the proposed right-of-way grant or short-term use permit, and the proposed access road, parking area, latrine, and boat ramp would not be constructed. Existing recreation opportunities and the existing recreation setting would continue as is.

The existing two-track would continue to provide limited public access to the area. The existing road would not be improved, and the site would not provide a developed boat-launching facility or associated parking facility or latrine.

Opportunities for fishing, boating, floating, wildlife viewing, and other river-oriented recreation would remain constrained by the limited availability and distribution of developed access along this portion of the lower Yellowstone River and within Prairie County.

Under the No Action Alternative, the existing dispersed recreation setting would generally be maintained. There would be no new developed recreation infrastructure, and no additional traffic associated with a developed fishing access site. The No Action Alternative would not, however, address the existing limitation of river access identified by the MT FWP and the Lower Yellowstone River Corridor Advisory Committee. The existing pattern of relatively widespread spaced access sites would continue, and users would continue to have fewer opportunities for shorter distance fishing and floating trips along with safe launching and take-out spots.

3.2.3.2. *Effects of the Proposed Action Alternative*

The proposed action would result in a long-term increase in the availability and accessibility of river-oriented recreation opportunities along the lower Yellowstone River. If the FAS is developed, it would provide a developed public access point with amenities where existing access is limited. The project would allow recreationists to safely and reliably access the Yellowstone River while improving the continuity of the existing recreation access network by providing an additional developed access point between existing river access locations. The proposed action would also improve access to public lands and waters for a broader range of visitors. The ADA-accessible latrine would improve visitor facilities for individuals with disabilities; however, the overall accessibility of the site would continue to be influenced by site topography, river conditions, and the design and surface of the boat ramp. During construction, recreation use in the project area would be temporarily affected by construction traffic, equipment, noise, and limited restrictions associated with construction safety. Public access would be maintained to the extent practicable.

The proposed action would introduce a limited amount of developed infrastructure into an otherwise relatively dispersed recreation setting. The parking area, latrine, access area, and boat ramp would be visible to folks using the site and potentially to visitors traveling or floating the Yellowstone River. The change would be most apparent immediately adjacent to the developed access area.

The potential change in recreation setting would be moderated by locating the improvements along existing disturbances, utilizing the road alignment which is being done, and using earth tone colors which is also being implemented. This is consistent with Class II VRM objectives.

This project is associated with the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail; the change in recreation setting would also be considered in the context of the historic landscape through which the trail passes. The proposed action would provide an additional opportunity for visitors to access and experience the Yellowstone River, which was an important component of the route traveled by the Lewis and Clark Expedition. BLM guidance for National Historic Trails emphasizes avoiding, minimizing, or mitigating adverse effects to historic landscapes associated with NHTs. The proposed design, including use of existing disturbance, limited facility footprint, earth-tone materials, and retention of the surrounding landscape, would minimize the potential for the proposed project to adversely affect the visual character of the trail-associated landscape.

The proposed action would not be expected to substantially alter the overall recreation setting of the lower Yellowstone River. Rather, it would introduce a localized developed recreation opportunity into an existing dispersed recreation setting. The primary effect would be an increase in the quantity and reliability of public access and an associated increase in visitor use. FWP estimates during peak season 2 to 5 vehicles per day on weekdays and 6 to 12 vehicles per day on weekends and holidays. The change would be concentrated at the developed access site and would not be expected to substantially diminish other recreational opportunities on adjacent public lands.

CHAPTER 4. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

4.1. Public Involvement

As part of the 2021 Lower Yellowstone River committee efforts, five public meetings were held in 2021 and 2022 to examine the various resource management needs along the Yellowstone River. This proposed location was identified during the meetings. As part of the BLM review process, this EA was posted on the BLM ePlanning website for a 15-day public comment period on October 26, 2026. Letters were mailed to stakeholders on October 21, 2026, to notify them of the comment period and to seek comments on the EA.

4.2. Consultation and Coordination

This section summarizes coordination that the BLM MCFO conducted with federal, state, and local government agencies, and Native American Tribes.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Under the provisions of Section 7(a)(2) of the Endangered Species Act of 1973 ([ESA], 16 U.S.C. §§ 1531-1544), federal agencies that carry out, permits, licenses, funds, or otherwise authorizes an activity must ensure their activities are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of federally listed species or destroy or adversely modify designated critical habit. On August 26, 2026, the MCFO engaged coordination with the FWS on the project. The MCFO completed a biological assessment on the potential effects to pallid sturgeon from the proposed project and submitted it to FWS on September 8, 2026, for review. On October 13, 2026, FWS concurred with the BLM's determination that this project *may affect, not likely to adversely affect* the endangered pallid sturgeon.

State Historic Preservation Office

The proposed action is a federal undertaking, as defined in Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) and its implementing regulations found in 36 CFR Part 800. The BLM's cultural resources program in Montana operates under a national programmatic agreement with an implementing protocol with the Montana SHPO. In accordance with Sections VII(C) and VII(D) of the state protocol, the BLM submitted identification results, determinations eligibility, and the agency's finding of effect to the SHPO on August 31, 2026. On September 29, 2026, the SHPO concurred that there would be no adverse effect to historic properties as a result of the proposed action (SHPO Log No. 20260831002).

Tribes

There are no known traditional cultural places (TCPs), sacred sites, traditional use areas, or other locations of Native American cultural or religious importance within the proposed project area. No cultural resources identified during Section 106 efforts indicate that Native American TCPs, sacred sites, traditional use areas, or other locations of Native American cultural or religious importance might be present. Therefore, no additional coordination was completed for the proposed action.

Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program

The Montana Greater Sage Grouse Stewardship Act (87-5-901 – 97-5-918, MCA) and Montana EO 12- 2015 together comprise the Montana Sage Grouse Conservation Strategy, which is implemented through the Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program. The MT FWP coordinated with the Program to ensure compliance with the State’s EO 12-2015. The Program response letter dated August 18, 2026, is included as part of the POD and would be adhered to by MT FWP to ensure the project is consistent with the Montana Sage Grouse Conservation Strategy.

Prairie County

The BLM and MT FWP met with Prairie County officials regarding the proposed action during the initial planning stage on July 22, 2026. County concerns were associated with public safety on increased County road use and public involvement in MT FWP review process. The MT FWP POD includes design features and committed measures to address County concerns. MT FWP would continue to coordinate with the County during construction and operations to establish the proposed weed treatment agreement.

REFERENCES

- Bureau of Land Management. 1984. Manual 8400 - Visual Resource Management
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